Both Charleston, South Carolina, and Kyoto, Japan, are internationally popular tourist destinations rich in history and culture, which share an obsession with bloodlines, a heightened sense of decorum, and a pervasive nostalgia. Both cities are also home to an elite core of society, and both present formidable barriers to outsiders, reflective of deeply ingrained racial prejudices. In comparing the novels *A Southern Girl* by John Warley, the story of an international adoption in upper-crust Charleston, South Carolina, and *Ichigensan*, by Swiss writer David Zoppetti, about a foreign student of Japanese who falls in love with a young blind woman in Kyoto, these traits come to the fore. In this paper, I will illustrate these similarities in culture as portrayed in these two works of fiction, and also show that both novels cross borders and break with established literary tradition.

**Background**

From 794–1868, Kyoto was the imperial capital of Japan, an enduring source of local pride verging upon snobbery. Japan’s literary tradition harkens back to the courts of Old Japan, where Lady Murasaki penned *Tale of Hikaru Genji*, widely considered to be the world’s first novel. Courtiers such as Onono Komachi communicated via poetry or kept diaries, such as *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagan*, while beyond the castle walls, illiterate peasants laboured in the fields. The city has also inspired many modern poets and writers such as Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata, who chose Kyoto as the backdrop for his novel *The Old Capital* and other works.

Many foreign writers have also employed Kyoto as a setting in their novels, including Arthur Golden, whose best-selling novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, was written after the author interviewed a veteran of the rarefied world of Kyoto teahouses. Liza Dalby also managed to penetrate Kyoto’s inner sanctum by conducting anthropological studies as a geisha-in-training. She utilised this experience in the writing of the nonfiction tomes *Geisha, Kimono: Fashioning Culture*, and her novel *The Tale of Murasaki*, in which she re-imagines the life of the twelfth-century scribe, which are all composed in English and directed at a Western audience. David Zoppetti’s novel, *Ichigensan*, discussed later in this essay, is unique in that it is a novel of Kyoto written in Japanese by an ‘outsider’ for a Japanese audience.

As for Charleston, the history of its literature is intertwined with figures representative of an American aristocracy. The Antebellum South came to life in the works of plantation owners such as Mary Boykin Chestnut and Eliza Lucas Pinckney, avid correspondents and diarists. In 1920, Pinckney’s descendant Josephine Pinckney would help found the Poetry Society of South Carolina along with Dubose Heyward, another descendant of a seventeenth-century founding family of South Carolina, and other elites with the goal of building a ‘constituency for literature.’¹ The hallmarks of Southern literature, as outlined by Heyward, were a love for land and family. He declared that Southern writers ‘have nature, history, folklore, legend, tradition;

they will express their old homeland about them with its long roots reaching into the past. ²

Even after the Civil War, Reconstruction, and various financial disasters, the former planters still held sway in Charleston. Many blacks still lived in servants’ quarters, and were denied education and opportunity. While the rest of the South was in the midst of a progressive movement, the defeated but proud Charlestonians resisted change for as long as they could.³

Charleston writer Dubose Heyward gained national fame with the publication of Porgy, the story of a black man which was later made into a musical by George Gershwin. Fellow Poetry Society member Josephine Pinckney’s comedy of manners Three O’Clock Dinner was a national bestseller and optioned for film. The book provided Americans with a glimpse of the last of Carolina aristocrats.

Pinckney was also a founding member of the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, an exclusive all-white group consisting of members who were ‘plantation bred, or plantation broken’⁴ intent on preserving the Gullah dialect which developed among coastal South Carolina slaves and their owners. Pinckney, Heyward, and others, such as Julia Peterkin, and Gamel Woolsey, incorporated Gullah songs, poems, and phrases into their novels, giving evidence of both their liberal-mindedness regarding race relations and their blue-blooded beginnings.

More recent novels set in Charleston, such as those by Dorothea Frank, Mary Alice Monroe, Pat Conroy, Sue Monk Kidd, and Margaret Bradham Thornton also focus upon families of means and pedigree and often concern their involvements with slaves or family servants who are descendants of slaves. Even in the realm of young adult literature, two contemporary series – Beautiful Creatures by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl and Compulsion by Martina Boone -- are set on South Carolina plantations. Regional literature has flourished over the past century but has remained mostly impervious to the influence of new immigrants to the South.

In particular, Asians and Asian Americans are largely absent from literature set in the American South, in spite of their historical presence. As Jigna Desai and Khyati Y. Joshi write:

The figure of the Asian American is perceived to be discrepant in and antithetical to the U.S. South. Within the American imaginary, the Asian American as perpetual foreigner and alien is always seen as a recent immigrant, and therefore associated with contemporary times, while the South is perceived as an anachronistic and isolated region.⁵

Meanwhile, American literature in general has been reinvigorated by immigrants writing in English as a second language. Major writing awards have gone to Junot Diaz, who was born in the Dominican Republic and wrote his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel in a mix of English and Spanish; Chinese-born writer Yuyin Li, who was named a MacArthur Fellow, and Ha Jin, whose novel A Free Life, about Chinese immigrants struggling in Atlanta, Georgia, is one of few examples of transnational literature out of the South, and one of few novels representing Asians or Asian Americans in the South.

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² Bellows 46.
⁴ Bellows 69.
Ichigensan’s Kyoto

Geneva-born David Zoppetti won the Subaru Prize for Literature in 1997 for Ichigensan, his first novel, written in Japanese. The novel was also nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, Japan’s most prestigious literary award, and was praised by the Japan Times as ‘a beautiful love story’ and by Kyoto Shinbun for being ‘refined and sensual.’

According to his biographical notes, Zoppetti studied at Doshisha University in the 1980s, then went on to work in broadcasting as the first full-time foreign employee of a Japanese television network. He also became the first employee of the company to claim paternity leave. He later decided to devote himself to writing, and thus produced Ichigensan (The Newcomer), his first of four books so far. The title refers to the policy of refusing first time customers who attempt to enter an establishment without a proper introduction, which is still intact at some of Kyoto’s more exclusive geisha teahouses and restaurants.

The book was made into a film, and translated into English by Takuma Sminkey, who has also lived as a foreigner in Japan. As Sminkey writes in his afterword to the book, Ichigensan ‘has sometimes been categorized as ekkyo bungaku (border-crossing literature), a genre that includes other non-Japanese writers of Japanese literature, such as Hideo Levy, Arthur Binard, Kaneshiro Kazuki, and more recently Yang Yi and Shirin Nezamafi.6 These writers have been singled out for their seemingly extraordinary ability to write in Japanese, a notoriously difficult language for speakers of English, and for their insights into a country often deemed impenetrable and unknowable to outsiders. According to Sminkey, ‘Ichigensan questions the validity of the kokusaika (internationalisation) paradigm, in which international exchange is always seen in terms of national identity, and the difference between insiders and outsiders is assumed to be obvious.7

In writing about the novels of Zoppetti and other recent foreign-born writers of Japanese, Chinese scholar Li Jiang points out that ‘border-crossing’ suggests an illegal act:

There is probably no denying that the word ekkyo [border-crossing] has a negative overtone. The word implies that the action is illegitimate. No one speaks of the foreigners who are staying in Japan legally as border-crossing aliens. The word only refers to people who cross borders without the documents required by law. The term indicates a sense of possession: a certain language belongs to a certain group of people, and if a member of another community uses the language, he/she is perceived as committing an illegitimate act. And the same holds true, it seems, for cultural borders.8

It is especially significant, then, that Zoppetti’s novel begins in ‘Dejima’, a lounge for foreign students at a university, nicknamed for the artificial island constructed for foreign traders off the coast of Nagasaki in the seventeenth century. For many years this was the only site where cultural exchange was legally permitted in Japan.

The narrator is idling in this oasis for foreigners when a Japanese woman wearing a kimono, and her blind daughter, appear. They are entering this foreign space in search of someone to read literature to the daughter. After overhearing their exchange in Japanese, the narrator learns that

7 Sminkey 102.
they are willing to employ a foreign student, ‘even if he makes a few mistakes or has an accent’ and offers himself up for the job.

The relationship between the student and Kyoko unfolds through literature. The first book that the narrator reads to Kyoko is *The Dancing Girl*, Mori Ogai’s novel about a Japanese medical student abroad who falls in love with a young German woman. For Japanese readers, this is clearly an unsuitable and ill-fated union. Next, the student reads Mori Tatsuo’s *Kaze Tachinu* (which has not been translated into English, thus cluing Japanese readers in to Zoppetti’s literary sophistication), about a designer of planes who falls in love with an invalid. Gradually, they proceed to Henry Miller’s erotic *Henry and June* – Kyoko’s choice, and an obvious attempt at seduction-by-literature. And she succeeds.

As a European in Kyoto, the student’s appearance makes him a constant source of curiosity. However, when he attempts to behave normally, he is rebuffed, as in this exchange while using public transportation:

> a businessman might sit down beside me and, after the train started moving, begin asking all sorts of questions in English. I felt as if I were being interrogated by the police.
>
> If I answered his questions in Japanese, he’d stand up while I was in the midst of my explanation and change his seat – as if to say, ‘I don’t have time for foreigners who speak Japanese.’ Flabbergasted, I’d be left there with my mouth hanging open, looking like a complete idiot. I thought communication was a two-way street. Besides, we were in Japan, so shouldn’t we have been speaking in Japanese? (I 19)

With Kyoko, the young blind woman, looks don’t matter. She is more interested in having access to Japanese literature than in marveling over the oddity of a foreigner in Japan. In her presence, he can relax and observe, without being observed himself.

Kyoko was born in Kyoto, but as a person with a disability with limited financial means (her father died when she was a child) she is on the fringes of mainstream society. She attended a school for the blind and a college in Tokyo. Although she is considering a job offer in Tokyo, she is currently unemployed and thus not part of any group. Therefore, the access to inner Kyoto that she can provide to the student is limited.

Kyoko’s lifestyle represents yet another culture – that of the blind. She navigates her world via sounds, scents, and touch. Although the disabled are often seen as innocent and asexual, Kyoko is most certainly not. The student, meanwhile, is unabashedly intrigued by her habits – ‘Hey, don’t you use one of those white canes when you go out?’ (I 19), he asks as they set out for dinner in town – and often surprised by her interests and capabilities: ‘Needless to say, I was rather surprised the first time Kyoko suggested we go see a movie’ (I 20). Oddly, the student seems unaware of the parallels between his amazement at Kyoko’s abilities as a non-sighted person in a sighted world, and the amazement of Kyoto denizens over his Japanese linguistic ability and cultural fluency. To the reader, however, this is apparent.

On one of their outings, they go to a karaoke bar with a song list heavy on the Beatles. Although patrons regularly listen to Japanese singing in English while drinking American whiskey, they express surprise when the student sings ‘Tombo’ in Japanese:

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9 David Zoppetti, *Ichigensan (The Newcomer)* trans Takuma Swinkey (Birchington, UK: Ozaru Books, 2011) 4. Subsequent references to this novel will be included in parentheses in the text.

**Sister Cities: Border Crossings and Barriers in David Zoppetti’s *Ichigensan* and John Warley’s *A Southern Girl* Suzan Kamata.**


When the song was over, the bar erupted in applause that bordered on overkill. The man sitting nearby leaned from his stool and slapped me on the back. ‘You’re absolutely incredible! Truly amazing! Out of this world!’

‘It’s thanks to Uehara-san,’ I explained. ‘He lets me practice here whenever I want.’ But the man wasn’t listening. He had already turned away to harangue someone else with his monologue.

‘Truly incredible! Never in my life have I heard a foreigner sing like that! Unbelievable! Japan has really changed!’ (I 43)

As the evening proceeds and alcohol is consumed, Kyoko’s and the student’s fingers become entwined – a visible demonstration of their cross-cultural romantic relationship seen by some as a transgression. The student is aware of the potential reaction of the others in the bar and feels uncomfortable, but Kyoko, who cannot see, is oblivious until ‘the fat middle-aged man who had sung enka glanced over at [them] and then sarcastically muttered, ‘You really gotta wonder where our country’s heading’ (I 45).

Eventually, the student’s inability to integrate wears him down and he decides to leave Kyoto ‘in search of sceneries that would quell the yearning in my heart.’ As he explains to Kyoko:

Last autumn, when I saw the fall of the Berlin Wall on TV, something changed in me that can never be reversed … On that evening, I realized I was facing two walls. One was the wall that the people were knocking down … The other wall was more abstract. It was this haunting wall that I kept running into in my everyday life here in Kyoto. It also occurred to me that Kyoto is a city of walls. Earthen walls. Bamboo fences. Bamboo blinds. Lattices. All these things I’d once considered beautiful began to look like symbols of the walls in the hearts of the people here. (I 97)

Kyoko departs alone for Tokyo where she has accepted a job in an office. The narrator watches her walk away from him, tapping her cane as she goes and remarks, ‘I strongly felt that beyond those gates, a bright and tangible future was awaiting her’ (I 99). Thus, both are seemingly exiled from impenetrable Kyoto.

**A Southern Girl in Charleston**

Like Zoppetti, John Warley, author of *A Southern Girl*, has transnational bona fides. He was born in South Carolina, attended The Citadel in Charleston, the crucial main setting of this novel, and has also lived in Mexico. Furthermore, he and his wife adopted a daughter from Korea. Though his novel mostly concerns the exclusivity of Charleston society, it also falls into the category of *ekkyo bungaku*, or border crossing literature, as the author enters the minds and landscapes of his Korean characters.

*A Southern Girl* is told from several points of view, including those of the Korean birth mother, the Korean orphanage worker who first takes charge of the baby, Soo Yun, and the baby’s adoptive parents, Coleman and Elizabeth Carter.

In the first chapter, Jong Sim, a young Korean woman, abandons her newborn daughter, Soo Yun, in a conspicuous place where she is likely to be found. Although she is filled with love for her infant, she is unmarried and her elders have forbidden her to keep the baby.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Carter is longing to adopt a Korean girl. She and her husband already have three sons, and they are capable of having more children, however she wants to do something good. As she explains in the letter to the adoption agency, which makes up the prologue of this novel:
My own upbringing came with a liberal dose of alienation, and I know firsthand how painful that can be. A child adopted into a strange culture in a land foreign to her birth may feel that same alienation, particularly here in the South. I can relate. I can ease that pain. I can make the difference. I know I can. Somewhere out there is or will be a girl who with my help will grow up safe and secure and with the same sense of belonging our sons feel.

Reading between the lines, one suspects that Elizabeth, who was born in the Midwest and is not a part of her husband’s Old South, is lonely and hoping for an ally.

Her husband, Coleman, on the other hand, may have married outside his tribe, but he is not much of a rebel. At the beginning of the novel he is a lawyer at a prestigious firm in Virginia, a guy with a Country Club membership who enjoys his golf. During a round, when he announces the adoption to his partner, he makes little effort to challenge his companion’s ethnic slur. In fact, he concedes that he’s not entirely on board with the adoption:

‘Frankly, I think it’s dumb.’
‘Then why –’
‘Don’t ask. Anyway, we’re doing it and I hope it makes Elizabeth happy, because I know two senior citizens in Charleston, South Carolina who are going to go ballistic.’ (ASG 40)

As Coleman predicts, his parents are virulently opposed to the adoption. His mother tries to talk Elizabeth out of her folly by taking her on a walk around the Battery, a seaside park in the most historic, upscale part of Charleston. Like the drunken enka singer who can’t stand to see a white guy with a Japanese woman, Sarah is invested in maintaining the status quo. She tells Elizabeth:

Some of the finest families in the world live here. People think they’re snobbish, and I suppose they are. But their clannishness is an effort to protect what so many people in this country seem to want to tear down or dilute. I admire them for it. Coles grew up here, and he can walk into any house on the South Battery and be the equal of anyone inside. That’s a valuable heritage that Coleman enjoys and your sons will too. But this child will never be a part of that world. (ASG 61-2)

Neither will Elizabeth be part of the world, but she has accepted her position. She tells Coleman that she will go through with the adoption alone, if she has to. Even after her father-in-law has a stroke, presumably brought on by the shock of his son’s announcement, Elizabeth insists on her desire to adopt a Korean baby girl. Finally, Coleman gives in, if only to keep a promise to his wife. They fly to Korea, adopt Soo Yun, and rename her Allie. Later, they move to Charleston, bringing up their daughter with all of the attendant privileges of their class, while ignoring her Asian heritage. Although ‘culture-keeping’, or the practice of bringing up internationally adopted children with an awareness of their birth countries’ cultures, is common now, in the 1970s, when this novel takes place, immediate immersion into the adoptive culture was the norm. According to literary critic Leslie Bow’s theory of ‘racial interstitiality’, Allie’s parents attempt to negotiate a white identity for her in a region which has yet to move beyond the black-white binary. However, not everyone agrees that Allie is white, which results in the conflict at the heart of the novel. The characters are forced to confront their previously unexamined prejudices concerning race and bloodlines. As Bow writes, ‘Asian racial difference … becomes a

10 John Warley, A Southern Girl (Columbia, South Carolina: Story River Press, 2014) 3. Subsequent references to this novel will be included in parentheses in the text.
Elizabeth, too, struggles to belong. She is relieved to have discovered that her adopted daughter has no ‘signs of impairment, mental or physical’ and is, in fact, a gifted scholar; Allie is on her way to Princeton. Meanwhile, she details her efforts to conform to Charleston’s codes of conduct:

Coleman had warned me that folks here believed ‘nothing should ever be done for the first time,’ and how true that proved. I gave and attended teas. I took my turn on the garden tour and the open houses. I resisted the urge to crash after-dinner drinks in wood-paneled libraries thick with cigar smoke and men. I fussed over debutantes … To feed my inner rebel I relished tiny acts of defiance, venial as they seemed, which kept something within me alive. (ASG 151)

Like the unnamed student in Zoppetti’s novel, Elizabeth is an ichigensan – a newcomer pounding on a door that will be forever closed to her in spite of her best efforts. Her marriage to a Charlestonian permits her to hover on the fringes, like Kyoko, who although born in Kyoto, is only partially involved in Kyoto society due to her blindness. However, whereas the student eventually becomes exhausted and disillusioned by Kyoto and leaves for a more welcoming place, and Kyoko departs for Tokyo to take up a job, Elizabeth escapes through cancer.

The final section of the book is told entirely from Coleman’s point of view. Gone are the birthmother, the compassionate orphanage employee, and the devoted, liberal mother. Now a widower, Coleman is eighteen-year-old Allie’s sole ally. But he also remains loyal to the city of his birth.

Allie has been raised as a Charlestonian. As such, she expects to attend a ball held by the St. Simeon Society, which Coleman describes as ‘one of a diminishing number of anachronisms deliciously southern’ (ASG 186). Coleman’s great-great-great-great grandfather was a founding member of this exclusive society which confers membership only through bloodlines. Coleman assumes that his daughter will be invited to the ball. When she is not, due to the society’s long-standing exclusion of adopted children, Coleman does not share in the reader’s moral outrage, and neither does his mother, Allie’s grandmother, who maintains that Allie ‘has a great respect for tradition, even when that tradition excludes her’ (ASG 167).

Although fictional, the St. Simeon Society is reflective of the many social clubs that have existed in Charleston since the 1700s, such as the St. Andrew’s Society, founded in 1729 by Scottish residents of what was then called Charles Town, as an organisation to ‘assist all people in Distress of Whatsoever Nation or Profession.’ The St. Cecilia Society was formed by Charleston’s elite in 1762 as America’s first musical organisation, and evolved into a social cotillion with an exclusive membership and “a passion for anonymity,” much like the St. Simeon Society.

The remaining chapters of the book involve Coleman’s attempts to garner an invitation for his daughter to the ball without upsetting the status quo. For an outsider, the Charlestonians in this novel may seem infuriatingly loyal to the traditions passed down by their slave-holding ancestors. Those born outside South Carolina’s Republican stronghold would most likely be

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Notes:
12 Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City. (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) 56.
13 Fraser 456.

Sister Cities: Border Crossings and Barriers in David Zoppetti's Ichigensan and John Warley's A Southern Girl. Suzanne Kamata.
more inclined to side with the ACLU lawyer who volunteers herself for Allie’s defence. One suspects that at least some Charlestonian readers would, however, be satisfied with Coleman’s refusal to sue the St. Simeon Society for racism, and his attention to decorum.

In the end, Coleman finds a loophole allowing occasional invitations to be granted to guests of ‘royal descent or distinguished birth’ (ASG 280), and with some lawyerly persuasion, finagles an invitation to the ball. The society’s bylaws remain unchanged, however. The reader assumes that once Allie has entered the less constrictive world of Princeton, her return to live in Charleston is unlikely.

**Asian Americans in South Carolina**

Until very recently, ‘multicultural’ literature out of South Carolina has referred almost exclusively to novels depicting relations between African Americans (often the descendants of slaves), and Americans of European descent. Although Asian immigrants have lived in the South since before the Civil War, albeit in small numbers, few Asian American characters appear in literature out of the state. Even fewer Asian Americans from South Carolina have put pen to paper themselves. When Asians or Asian Americans do appear in fiction, they are often portrayed as the inscrutable ‘other’. For instance, Josephine Pinckney’s 1945 novel *Three O’Clock Dinner*, set in Charleston, features a refreshingly diverse cast of characters including a German immigrant family, the bourgeois Hessenwinkles, and the African Americans who live in close proximity to the pedigreed Redcliff family. At one point, Lucian Redcliff muses about the various cultures represented in his neighborhood:

> For life was richest when it was dappled, paradoxical, in flavorsome layers running counter to each other. August Hessenwinkle had pleased Lucian’s palate mightily today. Take the old German families … they had managed to preserve their viewpoint, their taste in food, their *Schuetzenfests*, and he cherished them for it. He even liked the O’Dells for their gaiety and impudence (and the hard materialism underneath) and for the high fluted columns of the Hibernian Hall … And take the Negroes, the earth-color, the ochre and ochre in the canvas; the high unbridled laughter and the cutting scrapes, the art with which they elevated the commonplace, translating shrimp and mullet into food for Neptune’s table as they cried it through the rivery streets. 14

Thus, from Lucian Redcliff’s perspective, at least, the novel celebrates the diversity of the city and the backgrounds of its inhabitants. The only mention of Asians comes during a talk about the possibility of war, during dinner. Speaking of her daughter who lives on the West Coast, Etta Redcliff declares, ‘Marianna says they think out in California that we are going to have to fight Japan … I’ve always hated those nasty little yellow men.’15 There is no authorial comment upon her blatantly racist remark, and the conversation drifts breezily to the possibility of a vacation in California. Although Etta is a fictional character, it does not seem a stretch to assume that she is representative of Pinckney’s social peers and of the attitudes of Charleston denizens in general.

Etta Redcliff’s views closely resemble those of Coleman’s mother, Sarah, in *A Southern Girl*, who says, ‘The Oriental mind is all the same. They come from a common genetic cesspool. They are vicious and merciless and heathen’ (ASG 59).

South Carolina statesman Strom Thurmond also expressed reservations about Asians. He attempted to delay the passage of Hawaiian statehood with the argument that Hawaii’s ‘Eastern

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15 Pinckney 104.
heritage – one that was “not necessarily inferior, but different” – would forever prevent a true fusion of Hawaii and the United States.\textsuperscript{16} As voters kept Thurmond in office until he died in 2003 at the age of 100, it’s safe to assume that his views were reflective of those of his constituency.

While large communities of Asian Americans have long existed on the West Coast and in some Northern cities such as New York’s Chinatown, Asian Americans in South Carolina have typically lived in isolation. Also, unlike many blacks, whose ancestors were brought forcibly to South Carolina to be enslaved, Asian Americans in the state may have originally come in order to escape anti-immigration laws in effect in the West, or in search of economic opportunity or adventure, much like Westerners who go to live in Japan. More recently, white families in South Carolina have adopted children from Asian countries and brought them up as ‘white’, as in the case of Coleman’s family and his daughter Allie.

As one who was adopted as a baby from an orphanage in Korea, Allie shares Zoppetti’s narrator’s ‘lack of nostalgia about “home” and the partially self-chosen escape from various forms of “we”’ which distinguish these writings ‘from the large body of diaspora, minority or immigrant literature elsewhere, which is also born out of transnational experiences but for which “home” or a “community” remain more central.’\textsuperscript{17}

In contrast to descendants of slaves or refugees, the student can return to his country whenever he likes, and Allie has no memory of her country of origin, thus no nostalgia for a lost Korea. When she grows up, she is allowed to leave to live in a more progressive area and she decides to go to Princeton. The stories of Asians in South Carolina (and Westerners in Japan) thus become more about individual identity than immigrant subjectivity.

One previous novel set in Charleston features an Asian protagonist. Joe Porcelli, who was adopted from Korea by Caucasian parents and brought up in Charleston, produced the 1995 novel \textit{The Photograph}, about a young Korean boy who is adopted by an American Army officer after his family is killed in the war between North and South Korea. Although the book received mixed reviews, the sheer novelty of an Asian protagonist in Charleston is noteworthy.

The overall lack of Asian or Asian American representation in the literature of South Carolina (and in Charleston, in particular) is no doubt due to the small Asian American population. According to the 2010 U.S. census, the Asian population of Charleston was 1.6% (compared to 1.3% in South Carolina, overall). More recent data indicates that the state’s foreign-born population is steadily rising (from 1.4% in 1990 to 4.7% in 2011) and that Asian-owned businesses in South Carolina had sales receipts of $2.7 billion and employed 19,977 people in 2011.\textsuperscript{18} The presence of Asians and Asian Americans in South Carolina is increasingly significant.

\textbf{Crossing Borders in Literary Japan}

During the period known as \textit{Sakoku} (1633-1853), which translates as ‘chained country,’ Japanese nationals were not allowed to go abroad, and foreigners were not allowed to enter the country under penalty of death. Needless to say, this isolation did not encourage mutual understanding. Additionally, in postwar Japan, scholars have perpetuated the concept of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Rumi Sakamoto, ‘Writing as out/insiders’, \textit{Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan} (New York: Routledge, 2006)149.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Sister Cities: Border Crossings and Barriers in David Zoppetti’s \textit{Ichigensan} and John Warley’s \textit{A Southern Girl}. Suzanne Kamata.}

\textit{Transnational Literature} Vol. 7 no. 2, May 2015.
Japanese uniqueness through a body of writing known as *nihonjinron* which presupposes that the Japanese are radically different from other races and cultures not only due to linguistic, sociological, and philosophical, but also physical differences. Due to their supposed uniqueness, some Japanese think themselves unknowable to those of other races and cultures.

In Japan, especially, language is linked to national identity. While Americans tend to expect new immigrants to master English in order to participate effectively in society, many Japanese believe that their language is so unique and so difficult as to be impossible for foreigners to master. In fact, there are separate terms for Japanese as a mother tongue (*kokugo*) and Japanese which is taught to foreigners (*Nihongo*). A foreigner writing well in Japanese would seem to be a threat to national identity. This does not seem to apply to other Asians. Previously, during Japan’s colonisation of neighbouring Asian countries, Manchurians, Koreans, and Taiwanese were expected to forsake their native languages and speak only Japanese. Likewise, ethnic Ainu and Okinawans were forced to speak Japanese. While there have been ‘literary transgressions by Korean, Taiwanese and Manchurian writers writing in Japanese, it was only during the 1990s that the practice of writing cross-culturally came to be widely recognized in Japan as a fundamental challenge to the myth of the national literature.¹⁹

Since colonised Asians were ordered to learn Japanese and adopt Japanese names, their literacy could be seen as a Japanese success – so thoroughly had they been dominated, they became Japanese. The same relationship does not exist, however, between Japan and the West.

As Rumi Sakamoto writes in her discussion of *Ichigensan* and other works:

> Partly because of Japan’s historical position as a late-nineteenth-century colonizer which attempted to both resist and to emulate Western imperialism, and partly because of the multi-directional movements that characterize today’s globalization, the relations of domination and subordination that inform *ekkyo* writings are multiple and complex. It is not clear who the ‘master’ is when a white male author writes in Japanese about being ‘racially’ excluded from mainstream Japanese society while gaining literary prominence by critiquing Japanese homogeneity from the position of the ‘authentic in-between’. (140)

Western culture has long served as a reference point in the development of Japanese society. In the post-Meiji era, the Japanese were eager to imitate Western innovations. More recently, during the economic bubble of the late 1980s and early 1990s, during which Zoppetti’s novel is set, Japan had the means to buy up expensive and culturally significant properties in Hawaii and New York. The West became obtainable and conquerable.

While Japanese is often a challenge for Westerners, it is possible for non-native speakers to learn the language as Swiss-American writer David Zoppetti has proven. Zoppetti is the second Western novelist to have won a major Japanese literary award for a work in Japanese, following American Hideo Levy whose *A Room Where the Star Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard* won the Noma Literary Award for New Writers in 1992. Levy’s novel is the story of an American boy caught between cultures as he lives in Yokohama with his American diplomat father, Chinese step-mother, and Chinese-American half-brother. In contrast, the unnamed main character of Zoppetti’s *Ichigensan* is in Japan by choice. Additionally, as a European adult, he was not forced to become Japanese or adopt a Japanese name or to learn the language as in the case of colonized Asians or ethnic populations within Japan. The student is secure in his identity; he does not necessarily want to become Japanese, but he has studied the language, is possibly more familiar

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¹⁹ Sakamoto 138.
with Japanese literature than the average Japanese person, and is familiar with Japanese culture. Throughout the book, Zoppetti uses Japanese, and his novel is clearly written for a native audience familiar with unexplained references to works of Japanese literature that have not been translated into Western languages. However, as a gaijin (literally ‘outsider’) he is ‘a marginalized “Other” of the cultural construction called Japan’.  

While Zoppetti’s novels are not yet classified as ‘Japanese novels’, his success has helped to pave the way for other foreign-born writers who may wish to write literature from inside Japanese culture. His novels, starting with Ichigensan, have also helped to introduce the concept of Japanese multiculturalism in a county where there is ‘no general recognition for the existence of ethnic minorities.’

**Conclusion**

Warley’s *A Southern Girl* is unique in that it introduces and realistically portrays Asian and Asian American characters in a novel set in Charleston society. In writing about a prominent white Charlestonian family and their daughter who is adopted from Korea, Warley goes beyond the black and white paradigm which has been the primary focus of discourse and literature on race in Charleston until now. Furthermore, in choosing to write from the point of view of a Korean woman, he crosses racial, gender, and national lines. By setting parts of this story in the Korea of Allie’s birth and in Vietnam, where Coleman served in the military, Warley illustrates Charleston’s connection with the wider world. While his themes – love for land and family and a deep respect for tradition – are typical of Southern literature, *A Southern Girl* expands the boundaries of regional literature, and even moves beyond them to be a novel which could be considered ‘transnational’.

Zoppetti, too, transcends cultural expectations by writing from within Kyoto as a Swiss-American. His novel *Ichigensan* demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the supposedly impenetrable city, while his writing skill is evidence of his mastery of the Japanese language. Though the Japanese literary establishment has yet to claim him as one of its own, Zoppetti has successfully bridged both linguistic and national borders.

Both Charleston and Kyoto, as evinced in these novels, have a great reverence for history and tradition. Both cities value their culture heritages. However, literary traditions in both places have tended to ignore the presence of minority populations. However, if imagination is the first step toward realisation, then the creation of minority characters as significant members of society is a step toward acceptance and integration. *A Southern Girl* and *Ichigensan* push the boundaries of their respective literary traditions, creating an important precedent for future border-crossing novelists from these regions.

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