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# *Introduction*

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‘Race does not have a biological reality, but is a mere social construction.’ This important statement, now widely accepted in natural science and social science of race studies, has helped to correct essentialist understandings of race both in lay and professional circles. However, critical issues still remain. The statement alone that race does not have a biological reality does little to help us understand the ways we experience or ‘feel’ race as ‘real’ in our everyday lives.

On the other hand, the idea of race as a social construct or a fiction is often utilized by the advocates of a color-blind society within which, they claim, we should no longer take race into consideration. Though there is no biological validity to race, one is still unable to ignore its social reality: race continues to play a central role in various aspects of our daily lives, including marriage, employment, education, housing, sports, music, and medicine. Why, then, do we continue to perceive this nonexistent something to be real? In other words, what generates and reinforces the reality of race, and in what ways? In order to explore these questions, this book examines racial representations from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Abundant literature already exists on racial representation in such fields as media studies and other studies of visual culture. Instead of restricting our scope to visual representations, however, this volume also examines non-visual and scientific representations. We do so through presenting a small number of key case studies primarily focusing on Japan and Asia, as most of them have so far rarely been studied from the perspective of racial representation. Such focus, I believe, will allow us to pay more attention to what will be described, in this volume, as ‘invisible races’ that can be more prominently found in East Asia, including burakumin and Koreans in Japan.

It is not our intention to propose a dichotomous comparative study with Asia on one side and Euro-America on the other. Rather, research on non-visual representations in the Asian context can illuminate ‘invisible races’ outside of Asia, such as the Jewish diaspora in Europe and light-skinned ‘blacks’ as defined by the ‘one-drop rule’ in the US. We are hoping to make it possible to launch a bidirectional and mutually complementary interpretation of racial representation across continental regions.

## Invisible racism in the ‘post-race’ era

When we recollect the twentieth century with all its light and shade, we can agree that there has been significant progress in redressing racism in the century’s latter half, as a result of the struggles of civil and human rights movements. Today, in most democratic societies, explicitly racist legal systems have almost been eradicated. We were supposed to have gained the most powerful weapon against racism through eliminating discriminatory laws and introducing anti-racist social policies. In the US, for instance, the advent of President Barack Obama and the rapid increase of so-called ‘mixed-race’ children are seen as evidence of a new era, i.e., one which is ‘post-race.’ Nevertheless, racism does not operate in the legal arena alone, and it often disguises itself, making it difficult for us to pinpoint and loudly claim: ‘this is racism.’ In reality, we are still facing insidious forms of discrimination beyond the legal realm.

At the same time, social policies such as affirmative action and multiculturalism, introduced in various parts of the world by the end of the twentieth century, have increasingly enabled members of minority groups to attain middle class status and social advancement. This is exactly why we need to reexamine the issue now: Are we really beyond ‘race’ and heading towards a future of ‘integration’?

In democratic nations, oppressed groups are gradually advancing in a number of different directions in society. Yet, in public spheres such as the workplace, the school, the university, or the neighborhood, they clearly remain minorities subject to restructured forms of marginalization. What we see in this context is a modified structure of racism, in which the interests of ‘haves’ are well protected, or enhanced even, while ‘have-nots’ remain disadvantaged. Even if not openly, those with minority backgrounds are excluded from various networking and decision-making domains that lead to the protection of gains of the privileged. In each sphere, the majority created discourses about minorities, and through these discourses, the economic or social consequences of the oppression and isolation of minorities are reduced to matters of ‘personal responsibility.’ To put it another way, certain discourses are generated and regenerated, not so much in conscious but rather unconscious manners, to exclude the other while favoring the self’s pseudo-kin. Hence the hierarchy of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ is maintained with the latter being further marginalized.

The problem is the absence of open violations of the principle of legal equality. As numbers count in a democratic society, ‘democratic’ decisions (as seen in the election) generally work in favor of the majority, while keeping the privileged unaware of the ways in which the social system reproduces racism and inequality.

Neoliberalism is another crucial factor that has been affecting contemporary forms of racism. At present, the world is still struggling to recover from a financial crisis with seemingly no end in sight. Capitalism, the winner of the battle for global dominance with the end of the Cold War, has spread neoliberalism on a global scale. Neoclassical economists once predicted that the free distribution of capital and labor beyond the nation-state would contribute to the decrease of economic disparities in wealth between nations. Such optimistic views, as we all know by now, have been betrayed. In the current situation that goes beyond the simple ‘north/south’ divide, or the split between developed and developing nations, the world is facing an ever-increasing gap in wealth *within* each nation.

In times of severe recession such as ours, what forms does racism take? The reduction of monthly income through wage cuts and loss of work creates a definitive gap in material prosperity, but this gap also depends on the presence or absence of family assets. This is because assets (housing, savings, stocks, furniture, cars, etc) can become cushions during times of economic depression. In fact, it is asset gaps rather than income gaps that have become a serious issue in the research on the economic differential between races (e.g. Shapiro and Oliver 1995; Conley 1999). According to the Federal Reserve Board’s Survey of Consumer Finances for 2007, African American families in the United States have one tenth of the median net worth of that of non-Hispanic white families (\$17,100 vs. \$170,400) (Bucks et al. 2009). Wealth disparities between whites and people of color have been exacerbated by the subprime loan meltdown; the structural inequality and isolation served as a powerful cause of foreclosures and also of the enhanced effects among black and Latino borrowers, who showed a significantly higher ratio of receiving subprime loans than their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that blacks will lose between \$71 and \$92 billion in wealth due to the subprime financial crisis. Latinos will lose between \$75 and \$98 billion (Muhammad 2008; Rugh and Massey 2010).

This is not merely an ‘American problem.’ In Japan, during the labor shortage of the ‘bubble’ years, immigration law was changed to add a special category to promote the immigration of large numbers of South Americans of Japanese ancestry. These laborers were the first to be fired once the economy turned sour, and many continue to lose their jobs along with their company-owned residences. The number of children attending Brazilian schools is also nose-diving due to their parents’ unemployment. Such increases in the gap between dominant and minority groups during an economic downturn have also been reported in many other countries, including Sweden, Vietnam, and Malaysia.<sup>2</sup>

Stephen Castles, a leading scholar on international migration, claims that contemporary racism is closely connected with the process of globalization:

‘Rejection and exploitation based on racism have merely changed their shape: they are just as widespread, chronic, and deep as they always have been’ (Castles 2000: 18). Unlike racism, conventionally and narrowly defined by a focus on open segregation and exclusion, here is a multifaceted new form that poses a danger to national economies and social relations, culture and identity. As Castles warns us, this transformation of racism implies that anti-racism movements have not kept up with these changes and that they are now at risk of becoming irrelevant. Globalization can be thought of as a process that isolates the marginalized in the nation-state and reassembles them in new ways. Paradoxically then, the social advancement of members of minority groups who have so far occupied peripheral positions could hinder the formation of alliances in the fight against racism while promoting the segmentation and fragmentation of the marginalized.

Looking at these phenomena, we realize that racism has become more invisible and harder to identify and articulate. This is why we believe in the importance of examining racial representations from both science and the humanities, both historical and contemporary perspectives.

## Overview

I examine, in Chapter One, the characteristics inherent to the idea of race, followed by outlining my own argument regarding the existence of three dimensions of race. Then, by paying attention to representations of ‘invisible races’ in Asia and ‘invisible racism’ on a global scale at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I attempt to identify different types and features of racial representations, such as visual, non-visual sensorial, scientific, and self representations for resistance.

Ella Shohat, from a cinema studies perspective, poses fundamental methodological questions regarding the study of stereotypes and representations. In particular, she problematizes a naïve faith in ‘realism’ as a reflection of ‘truth’ in the stereotype approach, which was challenged by poststructuralist theory. Alternatively, Shohat illuminates racialized representation in terms of ‘effects of the real’ and the negotiation of spectatorship, identity, and identification.

In her chapter, Kurokawa takes up the problem of representation with regard to the burakumin in Japan, by analyzing two films based on the same novel, *Hashi no nai kawa* (*The River with no Bridge*). With plentiful non-visual representations of impurity, poverty, smell, and crime, the film directed by Tadashi Imai has long been criticized and tabooed as a discriminatory work. From historical perspectives, Kurokawa revisits this debate by asking whether the introduction

of representational markers into films reinforces discrimination or rather conveys its reality to the audience.

Under Japanese colonial domination in Korea, the colonizers produced discourses distinguishing Koreans from Japanese despite their shared physical features. Lee's chapter traces the transformation of the racial representation in which non-visual representations, linguistic and cultural, in their daily lives are transferred to visible differences as if individual faces change according to shifting situations.

Caroline Hau offers a discourse analysis of Jose Angliongo's novel, *The Sultanate* in the post-Independence Philippines. Because of the centuries-old representations of Chinese as 'aliens' despite the significant presence of *mestizos* (mixed-blood), citizenship was regarded as a critical marker of one's loyalty and 'conversion.' And yet, the external invisibility of conversion fuels the obsessive search for the 'true meaning' of their acquisition of citizenship.

By focusing on young Asian American artists, Chapter Six offers a consideration of the phenomenon of 'post-race' and its vivid manifestation in the art world. What did these Asian American artists find in their resistance to both racist representations of mainstream society and 'Representation as Resistance' as a strategic essentialism deployed by the older generation? The chapter explores a new way of expressing resistance based on interviews with artists and curators.

Since a minstrel show was first performed in 1854 by the white crewmembers who accompanied Commodore M. Perry, blackface has served as a mode of popular entertainment in Japan. Defining blackface as a pandemic and a transnational phenomenon, John G. Russell investigates how blackface performance in Japan, whose roots can be traced to nineteenth-century America, has changed its appearance in various forms over the years, and yet has continued to serve to reinforce the racial hierarchies and the illusion that racial differences are 'real' and 'meaningful.'

In today's world, blackness is disseminated globally through popular culture. Based on his ethnographic studies of Jamaican popular culture in Japan, Marvin D. Sterling discusses the circulation of discourses of blackness in three key terms: the colonial modern, the postcolonial, and the global postmodern. Japan, a society that has had little personal engagement with black peoples, offers productive insights, argues Marvin, for analyses of representations of blackness in a broader global context.

Numerous scientific representations continue to emphasize differences between 'East Asians,' 'Europeans,' and 'Africans.' Nonetheless, recent developments in population genetic theory demonstrate genomic diversity in

the geographic region called 'Asia.' The chapter by Oota and Stoneking reveals the impact of cultural factors of maternal and paternal systems on the patterns of genetic diversity, based on their findings on the genetic distance between matrilineal and patrilineal groups.

This book concludes with Troy Duster's chapter, which elucidates the problems associated with the categorization of 'populations' in molecular genetic research from a sociological standpoint. Duster unpacks how the boundaries of 'populations' frequently taken for granted by geneticists have been in fact constructed on the basis of social, cultural, and political distinctions. His elaborate discussion suggests that there is much more to be done through collaborative works between social scientists and geneticists by integrating genes and environment, nature and nurture.

This anthology is the product of an interdisciplinary and international collaborative engagement among scholars whose backgrounds vary from Japan, to Korea, Singapore, Germany, Israel/Iraq, and the US. The discussion consists of studies in history, literature, sociology, cultural anthropology, and genetics, while the primary focus is on racial representations in Asia. It is hoped that this collection will shed light on some issues and phenomena that have been neglected or marginalized in the literature of racial representation, and serve to widen our perspective both in theoretical and empirical realms.