

CERS Working Paper, 2012

Racialisation in Japan

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The concept of race cannot be defined as one universal term. Weiner (2004: 251) suggests that 'racial boundaries are so blurred that no meaningful taxonomy of race is possible'. This is because race is socially constructed and therefore ambiguous between cultures. However, race remains an important issue in everyday life because it is the basis of many cultural contexts. For example, Japan is a nation that has used race as the foundation on which they built their nationality, identity and culture. They are also the perfect example of why race continues to be a confusing and widely misinterpreted ideal. For centuries Japan has stated that they do not have a 'race problem' and are a country consisting of a homogenous population and national identity. However, their discourse suggests that they are superior over all other colored races. They view themselves as 'racially distinct'. Discourse of minority populations within Japan also suggests that this is not true and that ethnic tensions between Japanese and other minority groups, like *Zainichi* Koreans have been a consistent problem in Japanese history. This paper will examine the origins of race within Japan while taking a look at the largest minority population within the country, Koreans, and how Japan's notions on race and nationalism affect them.

Ideals on Homogenous Population and National Identity

The theory of a homogenous population in Japan comes from narratives in historical Japanese texts. They support this myth of homogeneity by implying that the various minority groups within the country contain national roots that 'have always been Japanese' (Howell, 1996: 104). This myth helps to form conceptions of their national identity and the nation-state. Howell gives an example of this through analyzing Japanese literature on the origins of Korean people. He states that Japanese suggest during the annexation of Korea in 1910 the Korean peninsula had been ruled by the Japanese emperor making Koreans imperial subjects and 'forever Japanese' (Howell, 1996: 104). Altering the history of Koreans into one of Japanese ancestry results in the 'marginalization of ethnic minorities' and is Japan's way of maintaining control over different minority groups as well as enforcing their narrative as the superior race (Morris- Sukuzi, 1998: 356). This myth protects Japanese society from ethnic conflict by forcing minority organizations to choose ethnic self-denial and the status of institutionalized otherness (Howell, 1996:103).

Part of what helped the Japanese keep this false impression of homogeneity was their ability to create boundaries of 'homogenous national grouping' (Weiner, 1995: 221). Through discourses of inclusion and exclusion, the Japanese would use terms to recognize whether a person was seen as part of the national community. Weiner states 'in the early years of Meiji a multiplicity of terms- [such as] *okucho*, *banmin*, and *jinmin*- (all of which were rendered into English as subject)' were applied and viewed as a term of membership (Weiner, 1995: 221). This was a more modern way for the Japanese to distinguish themselves because it 'implied that the nation was construed as a people sharing a common language, customs and discrete historical origin' (Weiner, 1995: 221).

Notions on Race: Western Influences

Japanese philosophy on race stems from two areas of literature. The first is a combination of western theories and concepts and the second comes from discourse on Japanese nationalism, purity and uniqueness. The presence of western influences in Japanese literature can be seen through three main points: Scientific racism, Social Darwinism and notions of 'whiteness' (as it relates to skin color). Scientific racism can be defined as '...the belief that races can be ranked within a hierarchy of superior and inferior. It is also often associated with that branch of eugenic thought that regards racial mixing as unnatural and as producing inferior human beings' (Morris- Suzuki, 1998: 356). Discourse on scientific racism was introduced in the nineteenth century during the Japanese imperial

expansion into Asia. The literature of scientific racism, which suggests notions of a superior race, complimented the Japanese ideal of racial purity and homogeneity. Morris-Suzuki states 'the uni-racial ideology of the Japanese was closely associated with the notion held before and during the Second World War of Japan as the family-nation (or family-state) of divine origin.... Members of the family-nation were perceived to be related 'by blood' to one another and ultimately to the emperor' (Morris- Sukui, 1998: 355). The Japanese viewed bloodlines as an ultimate tie to national identity and being uniquely Japanese. In discussing Japanese uniqueness, Kosaku Yoshino states 'A Japanese expresses the 'immutable' or 'natural' aspect of Japanese identity through the imagined concept of 'Japanese blood' (Yoshino, 1992: 253). Koreans in Japan did not show many physical characteristics that differed from Japanese peoples. This concept of a pure bloodline was useful because it allowed the Japanese to distinguish and elevate themselves. Although they were viewed as Japanese imperial subjects having been once ruled by the Japanese emperor, Koreans could still be considered a minority since they did not have Japanese blood and therefore no real tie to Japanese nationality.

Along with discourse on scientific racism came exposure to social Darwinism. Japanese intellectuals drew on Darwin's concept of natural selection and its relation to human species. Weiner states 'Darwin applied the laws of natural selection to human populations, ascribing the steady decline in native populations around the world to competitive forces and increased contact between civilized nations and barbarians' (Weiner, 1995: 225). Influences of Darwin helped shaped Japanese attitudes of the urban poor and minorities during the modernization of Japan. Minorities such as the native Ainu and Koreans who made up the majority of the poor to lower classes were seen as unfit to survive in a modern industrial society. Therefore their exclusion was viewed as 'natural and inevitable' due to the fact that their customs according to the Japanese were ancient and primal (Weiner, 1997: 12). The Japanese considered themselves the superior race since they were able to adapt and grow into a more modern and technological society.

The Japanese view of themselves as a superior race stems not only from western influences but also ancient narratives on whiteness and purity. Japanese refer to themselves as the 'Yamato' race. This term came about during World War II discourse. In an effort to rally support behind the imperial army, wartime propaganda came about to remind Japanese nationals of their long standing history and duty to protect the country. Dower states that the philosophy of 'Yamato' race 'traced back to the founding of the Japanese state by the emperor Jimmu 2,600 years previously' (1986: 43). Yamato was the place where Jimmu had established his court and the Japanese used this in discourses on their origin.

Along with the ideal of an ascribed superior status came other philosophies of purity and whiteness. In Japanese culture white signifies purity. For example, Dower states that 'the Shinto priest who performs the rights of purification wears white robes' (1986: 46). The Japanese often thought of themselves as being purer than other ethnic groups and used the color white as a symbol of their supremacy. Despite the similarities between Japan and the West, one major difference was their views on supremacy. Western narratives were filled with racist white supremacy discourse. The Japanese did sometimes refer to themselves as 'yellow' however, they saw all colored races as inferior, while at the same time suggesting that 'they themselves had esteemed "whiteness" since ancient times' (Dower, 1986: 45). As a result there was no platform for literature dealing with 'yellow supremacism' or 'colored supremacism' (Dower, 1986: 45).

Japanese attitudes and negative connotations of skin color are very similar to most other worldviews. During colonial context pale skin was desirable because it represented high social status as well as personal beauty. Dower suggests a person with lighter skin was seen as better than a dark-skinned person because darker skin meant that you were a laborer whose skin had darkened from working out in the sun (1986: 46). Skin pigmentation was an easy way of distinguishing whether a person was apart of dominant society. The Japanese used other racial markers such as dress as a way to try and detach themselves from darker Asians. Dower gives an example of this when describing woodblock prints from the first Sino-Japanese war. He suggests:

'...officers and enlisted men alike were portrayed as essentially Caucasian figures: tall and fair complexioned, with long, almost rectangular faces, and invariably dressed in Western garb. By contrast, the Chinese usually appeared as short, round faced, yellow-skinned figures- bearing considerable resemblance, in fact, to the stereotyped caricature of the Oriental that Westerners loved to draw' (Dower, 1986: 46).

White or pale skin is just as desirable in modern Japan as it was during Japanese imperialism. Li et al (2008: 448) state that 'whitening and lightening skin products have recorded a dramatic growth in Asian markets over the past two decades and are the best-selling product categories in the Asian beauty industry'. The cosmetic industry has been successful in their ability in finding a 'solution' to unwanted dark skin. The reason skin lighteners have become so popular in Asian countries is because there is still a socially constructed stigma of beauty and high social status attached to white skin.

Korean Minority in Japan

Koreans are the largest minority population in Japan. They began traveling to Japan during the colonial period after the annexation of Korea in 1910. Korean peasants migrated to Japan and were used as 'cheap labor in the textile mills and mines' (Kim, 2008: 875). During the First World War Japanese economy had expanded rapidly and many Koreans migrated into Japan in search of jobs. Since Koreans were viewed as imperial subjects they were able to travel into Japan with 'relative ease' and Japanese nationality was granted to them (Bennett and Ishimatsu- Prime, n.d: 225). Even though Koreans were awarded nationality it did not change the Japanese view of inferiority towards them. 'They were expected to assume their proper place within the empire, and that was one of subservience' (Bennett and Ishimatsu-Prime, n.d: 225). Koreans were able to make more money than they would back home, but their economic situation was still lower than other citizens. They tended to live in hand built slums and were paid lower wages for more dangerous jobs (Bennett and Ishimatsu-Prime, n.d: 224-225). In response to the independence protests of 1919 Japan promised equality to the Koreans but this was never fulfilled because the Japanese did not trust the Koreans and viewed them as 'disloyal' and 'dangerous' (Bennett and Ishimatsu-Prime, n.d: 224). This distrust sparked racial violence against Koreans after the Great Kanto earthquake. Bennett and Ishimatsu (n.d.) suggests that 'rumors were started that gangs of Koreans were setting fire to buildings, looting and even poisoning wells. These rumors spread quickly... and led to the massacre of 6,000 Koreans by vigilante groups and the police even though they were later proved to have no credibility'.

In spite of the threat of racial violence and discrimination Koreans continued to migrate into Japan. By the time the Second World War hit, Japan found themselves in need of even more workers. This is when the Japanese created the National Mobilization Plan. Hsu (1993: 97-98) states that this law 'essentially placed all material and human resources of Korea under the control of Japanese government and authorized the compulsory transfer of Korean people to Japan'. The Japanese began to voluntarily and forcibly draft Koreans from the Peninsula over to Japan. Korean men were taken and used as 'general laborers' while Korean women were used as sex slaves for men in the Japanese army. Hsu (1993: 98) states, the women who were forced into prostitution were called 'ianfu' in Japanese, a term meaning 'comfort women'. 'During its occupation of Korea, Japan forcibly transferred more than one million Korean nationals to Japan.' (Hsu, 1993: 98).

It is estimated that '2.4 million Koreans' resided in Japan after the end of World War II (Howell, 1996: 110). 'By 1947' most returned to Korea eventually leaving a reduced number of '508,905 Koreans' who chose to stay after having already settled into the country, either through work, families or better opportunities (Bennett and Ishimatsu, n.d: 221). The Japanese now had to decide what they were going to do with the large number of Koreans who stayed in the country. In response to this, Japanese government built a policy based on assimilation. They saw it as their duty to help Koreans into a capitalist society, much like their own. This policy of assimilation into Japanese culture required Koreans to change every aspect of their life, from 'choosing names that sounded more Japanese, practicing Japanese religion and also speaking Japanese' (Bennett and Ishimatsu, n.d: 222). This process was later understood as naturalization. It left Koreans with a hard decision of either

dismissing their Korean identity and adopting a Japanese one or remaining a North or South resident of Korea living in Japan. Naturalization was very undesirable to many Koreans because it completely cut ties with their Korean origin. Howell states that 'Many resident Koreans eschew naturalization because it cuts them off from the Korean community- which sees it as a type of betrayal' (Howell, 1996: 111). This is one reason why Koreans residing in Japan are often classified as 'stateless people'. The Japanese government does not ensure them acceptance after they naturalize and the Korean government refuse to recognize them as Korean after having resided in Japan. Howell continues on to state that 'South Korea has largely ignored Koreans resident in Japan; when they 'return' to South Korea...they are dismissed as Japanese, and thus find it difficult to gain acceptance in Korean society' (1996: 11). However, those who decided to keep their Korean identity while living in Japan were also faced with 'legal and social discrimination in employment, marriage and their attempts to participate in civil society' (Howell, 1996: 111). In order to avoid different types of discrimination Koreans would often disguise their identities and pass as being Japanese while not actually having to betray their Korean identity through naturalization.

A few years later during the Post World War II era, the attitudes among Korean minorities began to change. This was mostly due to the younger generations of Koreans who felt less and less connected with Korea as their 'homeland'. Having been born and raised in Japan and taught to speak solely Japanese they were not as concerned as generations before them had been on north and south politics and reunification of Korea. However, Korean youth still valued their identities and have tried to create a new sense of 'self- affirming identity as resident Koreans, re-creating and re-imagining their Koreanness' (Howell, 1996: 112). One organization that tried to instill these ideals through a sense of 'long- distance nationalism' is called the Chongryun (Shipper, n.d: 61). They are a general association of first generation *Zainichi* Korean residents, the majority of which are descendents of South Koreans, however the North Korean government supports them. After the war, Koreans lost many of the rights they had been granted during migration in the First World War. The Japanese government took back their right to vote or be elected as well as Korean residents rights to 'membership in district welfare commissions, boards of education or human rights commissions' (Shipper, n.d: 61). The Chongryun has tried to improve the conditions of Korean residents and promote ethnic attachment to North Korea by: (1) administration of Korean ethnic schools; (2) repatriated family members in North Korea; (3) official exchange of gifts, letters, and financial assistance with the North Korean government; and (4) political participation of elite association members in North Korea's politics. (Shipper, n.d: 61).

The Chongryun's strongest tactic in trying to form an ethnic attachment was through their use of education. They built schools for resident Korean youth to attend and encouraged their members to send their children to them. Here Korean children were encouraged to learn about their language, history and loyalty. Male students wore uniforms that 'distinguished them from Japanese and Mindan- sponsored Korean students, while female students wore traditional Korean clothing called *chima jeogori* (a white shirt with an ankle-length black or blue dress)' (Shipper, n.d: 62).

At first the Japanese government did not have much of an reaction to the spread of Korean nationalism in their country because they believed that after the war all the Koreans would return back to their country. They were also 'distracted by their economic success of the 1950's and 1960's' (Shipper, n.d: 64). Eventually after some of the Chongryun's political activities were seen as 'threatening', for example the spread of textbooks from North Korea into schools in Japan that shared narratives downplaying Japanese involvement in World War II (Shipper, n.d: 65), the Japanese government felt it was time to interfere. They used the actions of the Chongryun as a way to push an agenda of Japanese neo-nationalism. It was 'reactive' because it had 'given nationalists and right-wing groups new grounds for reviving nationalism under the pretext of protecting Japan's national security' (Shipper, n.d: 65). This was the beginning of a change in attitudes towards the Chongryun. Over the years hostility grew and incidents of racial violence began to occur in some of the schools and other public areas. The victims that were targeted stood out in apparent ways usually in the way they were dressed. Shipper (n.d.) states girls who attended school in their traditional Korean uniforms were now the targets for harassment, often having their clothing cut by

Japanese students. The Chongryun's ties to North Korea were becoming an increasing problem for the organization's Korean residents. The Japanese public perceived 'acts conducted by agents of the North Korean government that threaten Japan's national security with [the] Chongryun, because the group maintains strong ties and loyalty to North Korea' (Shipper, n.d: 70). As a result of Japanese perceptions, the Chongryun organization began to deteriorate. Korean residents started enrolling their children in Japanese schools, the Chongryun schools began to lose funding and several North Koreans spoke out against the group in an effort to denounce any affiliation. Second generation *Zainichi* Koreans 'increasingly embrace a distinctive identity and an ideology of independent existence from the homeland and the host society' (Shipper, n.d: 71). They reject the idea of ethnic minority in Japan and do not wish to naturalize, instead they want to find a new identity.

Comparative Analysis on the Korean Minority in Japan versus China

Having already looked at the Korean minority in Japan, it is worth pointing out that the treatment of and attitudes towards Koreans in Japan varies greatly compared to the treatment they receive in Chinese culture. This is interesting since both share a common ancestry as well as Western and European influences. Despite of this Koreans in China 'promote a high level of ethnic identity... and consider themselves Korean, rather than Korean Chinese' (Min, 1992: 9). China has a larger population of Koreans in their country, the total is estimated to be around '1.8 million' (Min, 1992: 6). This is more than twice the amount of Koreans that Japan has however Koreans in China have 'maintained high levels of Korean cultural autonomy and Korean ethnic identity' (Min, 1992: 6). In the Yanbian area where many Koreans reside, they 'control the local government... approximately 70 percent and 300 deputies to the Yanbian Peoples Congress are Korean' (Min, 1992: 7-8). The Yanbian area also consists of Korean schools that teach both Korean and Chinese languages. How is it that the ethnic identities of Koreans between China and Japan can be so different when all three share physical and cultural similarities?

The first difference can be seen in 'minority policy' between the countries. While Japan has a policy of assimilation causing minority groups to lose their identities as a means of maintaining a 'homogenous' population, China has 'generally taken the policy of recognizing the functional value of ethnic diversity and encouraging maintenance of minority languages and customs' (Min, 1992: 14). The area that allows Chinese beliefs on ethnic diversity to flourish the most is education. Min (1992: 15) states 'the Chinese government's pluralistic minority policy in general and ethnic education program in particular is the most important factor for the Korean minority's success in maintaining ethnic subculture and ethnic identity'. Educating minorities about their own ethnic identity is one major reason that Koreans are able to maintain their own cultural origins in China. In Japan they lose their sense of ethnic identity because the Japanese Government imposes language and customs on them and leaves them no option in learning about themselves in public schools.

Min also uses Blauner's theory (1972) of immigrants versus colonized minorities to explain the differences in treatment between Koreans living in China and Japan. The theory simply states that 'Colonized minorities were conquered or entered unwillingly, whereas immigrant minorities came to the United States voluntarily' (Min, 1992: 16). The term 'colonized minority' applied to Koreans living in Japan since they are suggested to have once been under imperial rule. Even though Koreans during the First World War were able to freely migrate to Japan they were still denied some of the basic institutions given to Japanese people. Imperial rule had left its mark of Japanese perception of Koreans as inferior servants.

On the other hand Koreans in China differed immensely from those in Japan. Koreans were pushed to migrate into China just as they had been into Japan due to 'internal poverty' within Korea (Min, 1992: 17). However, in China they were seen as immigrants and the Chinese 'accepted them as equals'. (Min, 1992: 17). Min (1992: 17) states that during the Russo-Japanese War when Manchuria was occupied by Japan, both Korean and Chinese leaders fought against Japanese colonization. The common experience of resistance between the Han people as well as The Chinese government towards Japanese imperialism taught them how to be more friendly towards the Korean minority and other minority groups' (Min, 1992:

17).

The process of racialization in Japan is contradictory because it denies any notions of racism while also stating clear discrimination towards minorities through historical literature and discourse. Discrimination in the form of institutionalized racism is more apparent than forms of racial violence. Lack of ethnic conflict can be used as a reason why the Japanese insist that they do not have a 'race problem'. However, notions of race do exist in other forms that affect minority populations. Denying Koreans access to the same human rights that are given to Japanese peoples is only one of many examples of racism towards the Korean minority. It is clear that there are forms of racism in Japan and they do affect the everyday lives of the Korean minority living within the country.

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