Transcending the Western Paradigm of the Idea of Race

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I INTRODUCTION

Did the idea of race originate in the United States, or is it a universal idea? There is a long-standing debate on the origin of the idea of race, particularly in regard to the question of whether the idea has been constructed in the modern West, or whether it has been found from ancient times across different regions of the world. One dominant view is that the idea of race spread from the United States to the rest of the world.

This paper argues that the idea of race is not of American origin. It also claims that it is neither a modern Western product, nor universal. Due to the limited space, I will not review the literature nor discuss the pitfalls of previous studies in this paper. However, I propose an alternative understanding of race by taking into account non-Western experiences, including, among others, the Asian and the Pacific experiences. One of its ultimate goals is to promote dialogue among scholars specializing in race studies in different regions of the world, particularly, between those working in the United States and in Japan.

There is a huge accumulation of research on race. Nevertheless, in the course of proceeding with my research by going through the literature on race and exchanging views with researchers inside and outside Japan,
I have come to feel uneasy about the gap between academic disciplines and the rather narrow range of the idea of race as it has been developed mostly in the U.S. and Europe, an idea which tends to emphasize modernity and the Euro-American experience. With these realities in mind, this paper puts forward a hypothesis for an encompassing understanding of this issue, ‘race,’ that has hitherto been discussed in the different terminologies of various specialized fields and geographical regions for research. By purposely bringing together into the same framework phenomena which appear to be different and incommensurable, the paper attempts to identify fundamental features that they have in common. Since problems regarding race are very complicated, an academic endeavor should be vigilant in taking up each problem in its spatial and temporal contexts. Even the meaning of a single phenomenon changes according to the time, the situation and its relationship with other phenomena. Likewise, discrimination is determined in multiple ways according to historical and social conditions, including the involvement of gender and class. However, as Kenan Malik warns us in *The Meaning of Race*, if everybody clamors for its difference without trying to find a common language with which to talk about race (and numerous such studies exist, though they leave much to be desired), we may lose our sensitivity to assess whether or not present and future phenomena are indications of racism, judging from a historical perspective. Unless we face this problem, we will end up merely observing the continued reproduction of the same racial discourses as those of the past. In this paper, I attempt to explain ‘race’ (or what I refer to here as ‘race’), in terms of three dimensions of the idea of race, namely ‘race in the lower case’ (race), ‘race with a capital letter’ (Race), and ‘Race as resistance’ (RR).

II TOWARD A REINTERPRETATION OF THE IDEA OF RACE

The biological reality of ‘race’ has been denied in recent years and the prevailing view now is that it is merely a social construction. The general view is that a race (even though it may be imagined) is a group identified by what are perceived to be physical differences. However, as long as aspects considered as visible physical features are the criteria for identifying race, only minorities discriminated against on the basis of the European and American idea of race (namely the idea of race created by the traditional Western world view and modern Western scientific racism) are likely to have social recognition as the victims of ‘racial discrimi-
Thus the need arises for a way to understand the idea of race that actively takes into account the experience of regions other than Europe and the U.S., including Asia and the Pacific. We can point out the following as the characteristics inherent in the idea of race.

Firstly, racial characteristics (visible and invisible physical features, nature, ability, and so on) are believed to be “inherited” from generation to generation, genealogically mediated by bodies, and determined by the lineage of a group, and they “cannot be (easily) changed” by environment or external factors.

Secondly, there is a strong tendency for subjects who draw the boundary between the self and other to exclude the other, and a clear hierarchy is assumed between groups, especially between “races” in the classical nineteenth century idea of race.

Thirdly, since exclusion and hierarchy manifest themselves in collusion with politico-economic or social institutions and resources, they are not limited to a consciousness of differences based on simple prejudice and ethnocentrism. That is to say, they are easily related to interests through institutional differentiation.

Some previous researches have also presented definitions that are not restricted to physical differences and include descent and aspects seen as genetic differences. Blood and descent were the primary definitions in the old usage of the English term ‘race’. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that these theories are constructed in terms of relationships such as those between whites and blacks according to the ‘one drop rule’ in the U.S., or between whites and Jews in Europe. The characteristics of the idea of race I suggest have a wider significance. As I will go on to argue in this paper, I include ideas of race from the past to the present, as they relate to discriminated groups in Asia and to the commercialization of the genome, in order to investigate the possibility of a holistic and cross cultural understanding of the idea of race.

III THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE IDEA OF RACE

In this section, I would like to propose a hypothesis that when we abstract the highest common factors from the various phenomena constituting the idea of race, we can identify three dimensions which I call race, Race and RR (Race as Resistance) respectively.

The names of these three dimensions are adopted only because of the difference in the meanings of small and capital letters and convenience
of abbreviations. Although each dimension is constructed through a process of its own, all the dimensions have the same foundation and are connected as one dimension transforms into another. The dimensions of ‘race’, ‘Race’ and RR do not exist monolithically. Each dimension includes plurality, multiplicity and variability. The three dimensions are interconnected in a single sphere constituting the idea of race.

race in the lower case

First of all, the cases that I refer to by using the term ‘race’ in the lower case are, for the sake of convenience, cases where differences observed in a particular society between socially differentiated groups are understood as those that are inherited over generations and cannot be changed (or easily changed) by the environment. These differences are represented in political, economic and social institutions accompanied by a clear hierarchy, and manifest an exclusive nature. Let me emphasize lest there be any misunderstanding that this is not race as advocated by the theory that race is a universal concept. ‘race’ in the lower case does not exist in human society across time and space and can only occur in contexts where social stratification has developed to a certain extent. Moreover, ‘race’ is not a concept reducible to an ‘ethnic group’ or an ‘other’ defined by prejudice. Institutional changes in economics, religion, and politics come to mind as the main causes which transform prejudice into race accompanied by institutionalized discrimination. However, it is particularly difficult to specify the time of emergence and the constituting factors, particularly in the case of ‘race’. ‘race’ is often distributed unevenly across regions at the beginning of the group’s formation, and thus we rarely find signs of its generation in society as a whole.

Race in the upper case

‘Race’ in the upper case refers to race which circulates as a scientific concept constructed through the mapping and classification of the people of the world. By Race in the upper case, I do not intend to indicate the universality of this idea but to emphasize the following two facts. One is that it has been believed to be possible to classify people of the world and make “specimens” in terms of universal language and universal principles under the name of science. Another is that for this reason the proposed theories circulate and are accepted in many regions of the world. Herein lies the power of Race in the upper case. Although its delineation as a ‘science’, ‘pseudo-science’ or a part of social discourse
is in some cases clear and in others unclear according to variations in methodology or logic, the relevant point is the power of what is believed to be ‘science’ (including scientific determinism) over discourses on race.

Even if the objects of classification are unique to a particular society or named at different levels, such as ‘ethnic group’, ‘species’ and ‘tribe’, they are considered as minor racial classifications of the world under Race. Importance is given to the universality of the law of classification. Another significant feature is that classifications do not spread to various regions of the world merely as imported concepts from the West. They have their own unique development in a particular society in the context of nation building or colonialism. They are not just copies and there is therefore what is called ‘originality of copy’. The power of Race displays a centripetal force, making people of various regions in the world accept it. It also has as a centrifugal force making politico-economic leaders apply it in each society. In this sense, Race displays both historical coevolution in different locations because of its great influence at the global level and at the same time localized uniqueness of transformation as it unfolds in particular social contexts.

I would like to emphasize that although the object of research greatly overlaps, the way the questions are posed here is different to the way they are posed in the discussions of ‘race as a biological concept’ and ‘race as socially defined, based on physical characteristics’ in the modern period which circulate among existing researches on race.

Race as Resistance (RR)

The third dimension of the idea of race is Race as Resistance, or RR. In the context of resistance against hegemony and domination, and of independence and minority movements, racial hierarchies socially recognized by ‘Race’ (or ‘race’) awakened the proactive resistance of races which were considered inferior in their respective societies. Not infrequently, the subjectivity of the minorities themselves is realigned through solidarity. ‘Race as resistance,’ a concept with newly positive meanings, is constructed as a result. There are many forms of RR. Some appear as a reverse of Race and others emphasize the politics of difference. RR indicates the use of race as a discursive strategy to expose existing (or contemporary) racial discrimination, to refuse assimilation promoted by mainstream society, and to put identity politics into operation. In such contexts, racial identity is consciously employed in spite
of the fact that in reality this identity is complicated by the existence of several multilayered and plural identities.

IV RACE IN THE LOWER CASE

The case of the burakumin in Japan is an illustrative example of ‘race’ in the lower case. It has long been a taboo to consider the burakumin in terms of race whether in terms of ‘race’ or ‘Race.’ This is understandable when we find that race as a biological concept used to circulate as an intellectual discourse in Japan. However, just as there is no biological reality in the idea of race, the discourse of an alien racial origin for the burakumin is no more than a social construction. Having made this clear, I would like to suggest a re-reading of the burakumin as racialized race/Race/RR without fearing misunderstanding and go a step beyond the analogy of buraku discrimination and racial discrimination. The reason why I focus on the taboo discourse of alien racial origin now is because I would like to present an example for analyzing the fundamental problem of the idea of race by paying attention to this important aspect which has long remained untouched.

Regarding the historical genealogy of the burakumin, there have been a vast number of discussions made from many angles, such as the political origin theory, occupational origin theory, and pollution concept origin theory. Here I will not go into details of these origin theories. What I want to pay attention to is the following two facts, which are almost unanimously agreed upon by researchers of buraku history. Both fulfill what I have pointed out as the characteristics of the idea of race. First is that the theory of the alien racial origin of the burakumin can be found in pre-modern (medieval and early modern) literature. Second is that there are historical sources indicating the subsequent institutionalization of discrimination in statutory form by the sixteenth century. In other words, it is a very important fact in the literature of race that alien racial origin theory and institutionalized discrimination already existed in the pre-modern period in a society outside the west, namely Japan, though they were later greatly transformed in the modern period.

Concerning the first point, some scholars have noted that the word ‘eta’ (lit. much pollution, the name used to refer to the group in pre-modern period) first appeared in *Chiribukuro* just after the mid-thirteenth century. *Joganseiyokyakushikimoku* (around 1405) and *Inryokennichiroku* (paragraph of 1488) have also been identified as the sources of discrimi-
In the Seidan (Political Discussion) of Ogyu Sorai circa 1726, it says, ‘Yujo (courtesans) and kawaramono (eta) are considered polluted and of low status both in Japan and China, in the past and the present. They (‘Eta’) are polluted due to the difference in racial origin and are ruled by Dan (head of eta, Dan) zaemon’. Here the reason for low birth is sought in special racial names (emphasis mine).9

Regarding the second point, it should be noted that discrimination against these people was not just prejudice but legally enforced. Historical sources dated from the mid-sixteenth century indicate that there were laws which censured any permission of joint eating and drinking and also censured the absence of discrimination against them. For instance, Kagetaka Nakajo, a chief retainer of the house of Uesugi, put forward the following law in 1553 (22nd year of Tenbun) in the ‘law of divided countries’ of the feudal lords in the Age of Civil Wars: ‘Both thieves and men and women who associate with Eta will be punished by stones being piled on top of them’.10 As Tetsuichi Niunoya explains, this kind of ‘law of non-interaction’ forbidding social interaction with the burakumin accurately expresses the status characteristics of the hinin (lit. non-human). He points out that they have signified exclusion of “Eta” from marginal, peripheral and public spaces such as hills, riverbanks, markets and roads and have cut off ‘interaction with people’.11

Of course, there are many unknown factors regarding how many regions possessed or enforced this kind of written law. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many researchers point out the existence of institutionalized discrimination in the medieval period, though the fixing of the status system was a phenomenon of the early modern period. It is often understood that ‘eta’ is a ‘status’ and thus not a matter of alien racial origin theory. But, from another perspective, it can be said that the discourse of alien racial origin in the case of the burakumin was concealed in the form of the status system in the early modern period, and that it emerged in different forms in the medieval and modern periods. In other words, the status of these people should be seen not as a ‘status outside status,’ completely excluded from the social system, but as connected to the lower parts of the power hierarchy and supporting the rulers. Such a view is important when considering pre-modern race in the lower case.

It has been pointed out that a legal system was established in the Age of Civil Wars in medieval Japan in order to break away from the system of previous times. This was thought necessary due to the increase in contact between ‘eta’ and the outside society arising from an increase in
the demand for leather, the raw material for the samurai panoply. In the Edo period, ‘eta’ was further fixed as a status and the first discriminatory law against ‘eta’ status in the Edo period was promulgated in 1683: ‘The clothes of the eta should be lined kimono, padded garment, cotton both top and bottom in accordance with the occasion. Unlined kimono should be of hemp cloth. Absolutely no other cotton garments should be worn’.12 This example from Japan shows how visible differentiation by clothing was enforced due to the absence of physically distinguishable signs.

Next, let us consider some examples of race in the lower case from other regions in Asia. Common factors have been pointed out between the burakumin and the pekuchon of Korea,13 as well as the untouchables of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bali of Indonesia (though they have disappeared in Bali). However, these similarities have been discussed in previous studies not in terms of race but ‘discrimination based on occupation and descent’.14

In China, there is a group who call themselves the Nosu among the Yi (the name of an ethnic group recognized by the state) living in Liangshan in Sichuan province. Inter-marriage between the high caste nuoho (black) and the low caste quoho (white), who are considered to be polluted, is avoided even today. The quoho, who were domestic labor slaves until the beginning of the twentieth century, are considered to be of different descent and it is also considered possible to identify them from their outward appearance. Ann Maxwell Hill has pointed out that “their exploitation was linked more directly to their alien, non-kin status, rather than to the material greed and production goals of their masters”. This suggests that it is not merely a matter of politico-economic ‘status’ (emphasis mine).15

Other examples of race in the lower case include the slavery system of the Toba Batak of Southeast Asia,16 the Micronesian low caste who engage in ‘polluted’ work and cannot own land,17 and the socially low status Milingai of Yap island who are ‘impure’ and also cannot own land.18 It is interesting that all these groups have certain features in common. They are considered impure by society, are recognized by both themselves and others as having different descent, and the discrimination against them is institutionalized, involving land or other kinds of resources. What these affinities, observed over a wide region, signify is a subject for further inquiry in the future.

‘race’ in the lower case can also be found in Europe. ‘race,’ established as a secular concept, existed at least in medieval Europe. Examples
include the Irish looked at from the English (the earliest example in which the term ‘race’ was used in today’s sense referred to the Irish) and the Jews in various parts in Europe. The Jews and the Moors in medieval Spain were even forced by law to wear clothes that marked their difference visibly as in the case of the burakumin in early modern Japan. The racialization of blacks and whites in order to split the labor in the U.S. at the end of seventeenth century, as Audrey Smedley shows, can also be understood as ‘race’ before the emergence of ‘Race’.

Today, the immigrants from South Asia and the black diaspora, the targets of new racism in Europe, can be understood as one form of race in the lower case. ‘race’ may be applied to cases of migrant workers in many regions of the world, including Japan and Korea, discrimination against whom has become a social problem. However, in contrast to the pre-modern period, it is today certainly mixed with the already established aspect of Race, that is to say, with the idea of modern hierarchical ranking.

The examples above show that there is a dimension of “race” that cannot be explained by the modern Western origin theory or the universal theory. As discussed earlier, this dimension cannot be reduced to ethnicity or mere prejudice. Many of these cases of race in the lower case became transformed into Race with a capital letter, which will be discussed next.

V RACE IN THE UPPER CASE

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, Race has twin aspects—with historical coevolution having a global impact—and unique transformation in each social context after the impact: so-called ‘originality of the copy’. Let me begin by discussing the aspect of historical coevolution.

Historical coevolution

The first significant point is the great number of writings regarding racial classification that were published from the 1880s to the first half of the twentieth century, covering almost every region of the world. Those at my hand include *Races of Britain* (1885) by John Beddoe (British), *Anthropologie* (1888) by Paul Topinard (French), *Races and Peoples* (1890) by Daniel Brinton (American), *Races of Europe* (1899) by William Z. Ripley (American), *The Races of Man* (1900) by J.

Let us look at the global impact of Race by taking the example of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s five-fold classification. The idea of race in general usage today was introduced to Japan by scholars of Dutch learning and missionaries at some point before the end of the Tokugawa period in the nineteenth century. A representative example is Uchida Masao’s *Outline of World Geography* (published from 1870) including a five-fold classification of Mongolian, Caucasian, Ethiopian, Malay and American in line with Blumenbach. Blumenbach’s five-fold classification was also presented in detail in the translation of one of the British encyclopedias published by the Ministry of Education in 1874, *Encyclopedia: Race* (translated by Kotaro Akiyama). This came to symbolize the beginning of race studies in Japan.

The knowledge of this kind of mapping of various human groups in the world played an important role in forming the worldview of the people at the time. This can be seen from the geography textbooks used in ordinary primary and secondary schools from the beginning of the Meiji period to the beginning of the Showa period, a limited number of which I was able to obtain. The textbooks paid a great deal of attention to racial classification, as if in response to questions emerging in the process of constructing a worldview, such as how many people lived in which areas of the world, what kind of physical appearance and features they had, how they were classified in terms of race and what kind of characters and dispositions they shared. Representative proponents of racial classification of the Enlightenment period such as Blumenbach and Cuvier were repeatedly introduced in these school textbooks.

In China, too, Blumenbach had a tremendous influence on the construction of racial classifications and idea of race. Blumenbach’s theory of the five-fold classification of race was introduced as the ‘theory of five classifications of mankind’ in the illustrated scientific magazine, *The Chinese Scientific Magazine* (1892) edited by a missionary, John Fryer. Missionaries were not the only media for introducing these western con-
cepts and philosophies. Chinese students studying in Japan, for instance, Liang Qichao, also served as media.

In the case of the U.S., we can find Blumenbach listed as the source of the terms under the headings ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Mongolian’ in several different editions of *Webster’s Dictionary* around the turn of the century. Blumenbach’s five-fold classification is also employed in the discussion of racial classification based on physical features in the *Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, one of the reports compiled by the Immigration Commission (1907-1910) which had a direct influence on immigration policies. The report states, “the author deemed it reasonable to follow the classification employed by Blumenbach, which school geographies have made *most familiar to Americans*” (emphasis mine). From these examples, we can infer how widely Blumenbach’s five-fold classification permeated American society as well.

The above examples only deal with the global impact of one German scientist of the Enlightenment period, Blumenbach. The influence of others, including French researchers such as Cuvier, Broca and Topinard, and American researchers such as Morton, Knot and Glinton, was also enormous.

From the mid-nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, race studies, which developed rapidly at this time mainly in the U.S., France, Britain and Germany, were spread to various regions of the world not only by missionaries but also as a result of the development of printing technology, the movement of intellectuals, and exhibits of ‘primitive peoples’ in world’s fairs.

Race constructed in these contexts interacted with the awareness of the existence of a variety of human groups in the world and rode on the wave of the great popularity of social Darwinism at the time. For the hegemonic mainstream whites, these “scientific” racial classification theories enabled them to confirm ‘scientifically’ where their own group (‘whites’) was in the mapping, or more accurately which category of ‘whites’ they belonged to and how high they were ranked in the hierarchy, and supported the construction of their own subjectivity.

‘Originality of copy’: Transformation of Race in various societies

Now, although this Race in the upper case had an impact at the global level, what we must pay more attention to is the fact that Race did more than just spread to various regions of the world as a modern scientific concept. When considering the idea of race, we must not underestimate
the fact that intellectuals and leaders of each local society which accepted Race did not just import and copy but created ‘originality of copy’, transforming and incorporating it in their social thought and employing it in internal and external policies while merging it with nationalism or colonialism. This point will become clear if we consider Race in the upper case in light of the rich studies on societies of Latin America, Southeast and South Asia, Oceania and Africa. Just as race in the lower case is plastic in society, classifications and concepts of Race in the upper case cannot be maintained beyond time. This is so even in the case of Blumenbach’s five-fold classification and Georges Cuvier’s three-fold classification. Race was greatly transformed in each society while mutually reinforcing itself with social Darwinism (or eugenics in some periods and places).

In the late-nineteenth century to early-twentieth century, American society was in the middle of heated debates over the abolition of slavery and massive migration of people from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Asia who were considered ‘impossible to assimilate’. The internal colonialism in the U.S., along with the colonialism of the British Empire in the Victorian era, provided the greatest receptacle for Race. Let us consider the following two cases of transformation in the U.S.

Samuel George Morton, known for the extensive collection and measurement of skulls in the mid-nineteenth century, disseminated the idea of Blumenbach’s five-fold classification in the U.S. with his first book *Crania Americana* before the publication of the English translation of Blumenbach. In the text of *Crania Americana*, where various characteristics based on Blumenbach’s five-fold classification are described, the following notes are added which draw our attention. Morton casually writes, “It will be observed, however, that the word *race* is substituted for *variety*” (emphasis original). In spite of the fact that Blumenbach himself emphasized that the human race is one and that clear boundaries cannot be drawn within it, Morton changed the wording from ‘variety’ to ‘race’ which implies fixity and definite difference. Stephen Jay Gould reveals that the differences between races, with whites positioned at the top of a hierarchical system and blacks at the bottom, supposedly proved by Morton through indications of differences in cranial size, were created and exaggerated by intentional and unintentional ‘mismeasurement’. Morton’s study on the skull was consumed by defenders of slavery and racial segregation policies as scientific proof of the inferiority of the body, ability and character of blacks in the context of the period in which he lived.
Another example concerns the dynamics of ‘whiteness’. Here let us take up three works which had great social influence. *Races and Peoples* by Daniel Brinton, who had an outstanding influence in the formative period of anthropology, mainly discusses the hierarchy between the white race and black race. In the detailed classification of the white race, he classifies the English in the ‘Teuton type’ which “features blonde hair, high stature, and blue or gray eyes” and the Irish in the ‘Celt type’. After this, *Races of Europe* by William Ripley, which classified Europeans into three races, attracted attention when immigrants from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe became a social problem. It is interesting that while Ripley placed Southern European immigrants such as Italians in the lowest ranking, ‘Mediterranean race’, he classified the Irish, who had been clearly differentiated from the English in Brinton’s influential work, in the same high ranking ‘Teuton race’. However, since he was anti-Semitic, his main interest was to classify the Jews into the Mediterranean race and from the description it does not seem that he attached much meaning to the classification of the Irish. *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant, which almost reproduced Ripley’s book, had a great social impact. Grant did not merely classify the Irish in the same “race” category as the English, but further emphasized the hierarchy presented by Ripley, changing the name from ‘Teuton race’, the name widely recognized within anthropology, to ‘Nordic race’, a term more familiar and appealing to the sense of historical honor. There was in fact a political intention hidden behind this manipulation. Grant and his eugenicist colleagues established the Galton Society (1918) in the midst of the rise of nativism. As George W. Stocking, Jr. has shown, this Galton Society successfully used political pressure to get the infamous immigration law aimed at the exclusion of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Asia passed in 1924. The Irish could not be ignored in terms of numbers and were already established in society and ‘assimilated’ compared with the immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. Including them in the highest rank among whites as the Nordic race was a strategy to gain widespread support for the exclusion of immigrants. In this way, in the U.S., Race as a universal scientific principle strongly supported the construction of whiteness in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Let us again take a look at the transformation of racial classification in Japan in textbooks of the Meiji period. I have already mentioned that Blumenbach’s name appeared frequently at least until the late 1930s.
The references below clearly follow Blumenbach’s five-fold classification and its terms.

‘Amongst the five races, the two races European and Asian are developed in intellect, enlightened or partly enlightened, but the other three races are mostly ignorant and many are primitive and uncivilized.’ (‘Introduction’ by Hisashi Terao, Seijiro Shin, Secondary Education: World Geography, 1891)

‘Amongst the five races, only the two races, Europeans and Asians, are intellectually developed and advanced to the stage of enlightenment or half enlightenment. The others are mostly barbarian primitives.’ (Tamotsu Shibue, Higher Elementary Education: World Geography, 1893)

‘We the Japanese, and the Chinese’ are... ‘the most developed’... among the yellow race.’ (Yonekichi Miyake, Secondary School Foreign Geography, 1896)

‘The European race... are the most advanced culturally and have the most power’. ‘The Asian race... apart from our Yamato race are in general becoming weaker’, ‘many of the African race... are still now unable to get out of their ignorance and uncivilized state.’ (Society for the Study of Geography, New Geography: An Outline for Secondary Schools, 1913)

(All emphases are mine)

As can be seen at a glance, ‘intellect’, ‘progress’ and ‘power’ are attributed to the ‘Asian race’, the ‘Japanese’ and ‘we the Yamato race’, none of which were in Blumenbach’s original descriptions. It can be seen that nationalism and the consciousness of foreign countries, which arose from around the time of the Sino-Japanese War, permeated even into secondary and higher primary school textbooks. As Shin’ichi Yamamuro argues, ‘race’ was one of the axes of Japan’s understanding of Asia and a concept critical for supporting her imperialism and colonialism.

On the other hand, race was also a force which determined how to exclude or encompass domestic minorities and those on the national borders in relation to ‘Japanese’ subjects. As Ichiro Tomiyama argues, Race was used as an instrument of investigation into ‘the problem of how to represent people within the territory which had just been established’. People on the northern borders were named ‘Ainu’ or ‘Aino’ and those on the southern borders ‘Ryukyu’ or ‘Okinawan’ by anthropologists. ‘Signs’ were ‘discovered’ to distinguish them from others through measurements of the human body.

Race was also employed against the burakumin who were supposed
to have been guaranteed equality of status in the modern period by the
promulgation of the Law of Liberation in 1871. The old discourse of
alien racial origin reappears in the guise of new racism due to the equal-
ization of status. As the title of Kansuke Fujii’s article, ‘Eta must be
aliens’ that appeared in The Tokyo Journal of Anthropology in 1886 plain-
ly shows, some Japanese anthropologists measured the skulls and
cheek bones of the burakumin just as some American anthropologists
had measured the skulls and the bodies of blacks and native Americans.
Race, established by race studies, was used to look for new ‘signs’ dis-
tinguishing the burakumin as the old visible signs were erased with the
abolishing of the status system.

Brazil is often credited with the myth of being a country with little
racial prejudice. However, during the period between the two world
wars, it used the idea of Race in the upper case and social Darwinism as
pretexts for the formation and development of the nation state. The lead-
ers of Brazil sought the answer to the question of how to become like
the civilized countries of Europe in making its people ‘whiter’. That is
to say, they sought to make the people’s blood closer to that of ‘whites’
by welcoming immigrants from Europe and restricting or excluding
those from Asia and other regions. Also in colonial Southeast Asia and
India, Race, which had not existed in traditional local societies, was
introduced when the census began around the 1870s. In spite of the fact
that previously language, religion and custom had played the role of
signs for recognizing others, various groups, including people living in
the hinterlands who came to be called “tribes”, were reorganized in a
hierarchy with the introduction of Race. Not only was the ranking with
the Europeans at the top institutionalized but the various groups in local
society came to be ranked in connection with access to economic re-
sources and political ruling.

From the above examples, we can understand how Race was trans-
formed in each social context while swaying between science and poli-
tics. In this way, modern Race spread to many regions of the world,
especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century to the first half
of the twentieth century, and showed coevolution at the global level. Fur-
thermore, it was accepted in various societies around the world, trans-
formed and developed until it displayed the ‘originality of a copy’. Race
was used as a ‘scientific’ stamp which could legitimize exploitation and
oppression and practiced in various policies regarding minorities.
Race in the age of the genome

The examples above are all from the modern period, but Race is also a contemporary issue in the age of the genome. In autumn 2003, a major health equipment company in Japan announced the development of software that recognizes the characteristics of the bone structure, eyes and nose of a face entered into a software program and ‘automatically detects race (Asian, European, African)’. Although the term ‘race’ is rarely used so casually in this sense in the U.S., the reality is that in this case terms indicating regions such as ‘African’, ‘European’ and ‘Asian’ are used in place of race. In fact, Race pervades everywhere even today.

The most conspicuous phenomenon related to genome information is its alarming commercialization. According to Deborah A. Bolnick, there are at least 17 companies which conduct genetic tests for the general public in the U.S., Britain and other European countries. In the U.S., over 30 million Americans set up websites tracing their family histories, and genealogy has become the second most popular hobby. For example, the American company DNAPrint™ genomics sells a service which calculates the constitutive ratio of ‘European’, ‘native American’, ‘East Asian’ and ‘South/Middle East Asian’ in the DNA of the ancestors for $200 or so. A British company, Oxford Ancestors, advertises that they can identify whether a person’s ancestors are Celts, Anglo-Saxons or Vikings by a special test of Y chromosomes (termed the ‘tribes of Britain’). These are all criticized as scientifically ungrounded.

Furthermore, the police and the FBI in the U.S. have gathered DNA racial profiling data of suspects. The targets are African and Latino/a Americans, and there are many cases in which the racial profiling data are accumulated without being disposed of after the cases are closed. Studies have begun in an attempt to find genomes relating to crimes, drugs, violence and other so-called criminal behavior. It is said to be a matter of time before these are linked to racial profiling.

All these examples show how Race remains deeply rooted in society and in people’s minds while changing appearance in today’s age of the genome.

VI RACE AS RESISTANCE = RR

Transnational cases

When W.E.B. DuBois organized the first Pan African Congress in 1900 at London, he was already aware that the construction of what is
today called transnational African solidarity was a key to progress in rectifying discrimination against people of African descent. There, he made a famous speech calling for whites to give up the rule which had led to European expansionism. Pan Africanism, with DuBois at the head, became a major movement after World War I, aimed at a kind of transnational RR.39

Negritude and Afrocentrism can also be understood in terms of RR. Senghor’s Negritude pointed out the unique innate racial characteristics of the black race that differed from those of the white race. Cesaire, on the other hand, after accepting the ‘old Negritude’ which had lost the strength to resist after the days of whipping, tried to establish the freedom and pride of the black race on the basis of the great civilization of Africa with the renewed idea of Negritude. If Senghor’s Negritude was a reversal of Race, Cesaire’s was a concept entrusted with the reconstruction of black subjectivity and hope without ‘hatred towards other races.’40

Transnational black solidarity has a new aim in today’s world politics. At the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001, the question of official apologies and compensation for slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the past was one of the two major items on the agenda, together with the issue of Zionism of Israel. It is interesting that the term ‘African descendants’ appeared publicly for the first time at this world conference, the term which was generated in the preceding conferences to prepare their demand for reparations for the past slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Without the framework of resistance against ‘whites’, it would be difficult to explain what this term symbolizes conceptually and the solidarity which the agent of the movement constructed in reality. Moreover, this is not opposed only to the slave trade and the colonialism of the past. It indicts the Western exploitation of cheap African labor and material resources under today’s globalization (which is intimately related to colonialism). It is noteworthy that a discourse emerged in these discussions among non-whites that emphasized the common experience of oppression by referring to Asians along with Africans and reconstituting their relationship with Europeans in terms of a dichotomous framework of the victims versus the guilty.

A unique philosophy on race as resistance to white hegemony also developed in East Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century. In
Japan, extreme nationalism and ethnocentrism turned into colonialism under the slogan of the construction of transnational solidarity and unity against White rule. Nation-building was the urgent agenda for Japan at that time and it was planning to expand its territory. In this context, it required a basis for a single racial identity to integrate various races and peoples under its internal and external colonial rule. On the other hand, the theory of ‘Yellow Peril’ had spread sensationaly throughout the West coast region of the U.S. and the exclusion of Japanese immigrants was intensified after the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War. Japan took seriously the establishment one after another of racist laws mainly targeting Japanese immigrants on the west coast and tried to denounce racism in the U.S. by putting the problem of the exclusion of Japanese immigrants on to the international agenda. However, Japan’s hope to include the ‘article for abolishment of racial discrimination’ at the peace conference at Versailles after World War I (1919) did not materialize due to strong opposition from the U.S. and its allies. This was a most important turning point for Japan. Having experienced a great setback, it abandoned the ideology of leaving Asia and joining Europe. Later, as is well known, it moved instead towards the plan of the Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere on the pretext of securing the natural resources of the southern seas.

This process involved a convoluted psychology, such as racial reform of Japanese people through intermarriages with Euro-Americans living in Japan, the idea proposed by some intellectuals such as Yoshio Takahashi in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and can be understood as a reorganization in the form of RR made against the great powers. However, it included the self contradiction that, placing themselves at the top, the Japanese internalized the Race hierarchy constructed by the west, and encompassed and ruled over other races of Asia which they placed lower in the hierarchy. This point resonates with the argument put forward by Horne in the recently published Race War! According to Horne, one factor which led to the British fighting against Japan in World War II was white supremacism. As a result, this provided the basis for Japan to proclaim the solidarity of the colored races and facilitated Japan’s invasion into China and other parts of Asia.41 Yamamuro focuses on the racial concept of the ‘Turan race’ invented by Japan and points out its supra-state tendency. That is to say, Japan tried to advance into central Asia by considering people from Hungarian Eurasia all the way to Japan as part of one ‘Turan race’. This was an idea of race that ex-
panded from the nation to the supra-state, and was a kind of ‘race as resistance’ that twisted what I call ‘Race with a capital letter’.42

Chinese intellectuals also expressed a similar reaction in philosophical terms. According to Sakamoto, for a China forced to become aware of the threat and domination of the ‘white race’ by the advancement of the great powers and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants in America, the idea that ‘Four hundred million people of the yellow race have all become slaves of the white race’ was a nightmare.43 China had to avoid becoming like the Ainu, American Indians or blacks “races” (groups at least seen as races) which were left behind, degenerated or becoming extinct according to social Darwinism. Thus China tried to ‘portray self awareness as the “yellow race”. It tried to construct through political reform a “yellow race” that could counter the “white race”. In order to resist rule by the great powers, China mobilized the mythical ‘Yellow Emperor’, placed itself at the center of the Yellow Race and argued for its superiority against races of other ‘colors’, the races fated to decline according to social Darwinism. The historical process of this period in China showed a contradictory development, in the same way as Japan, of establishing RR by transporting itself to the top of the hierarchy of Race with a capital letter while accepting the hierarchy of Race regarding races of other ‘colors’.

Next, let us consider cases of Race as Resistance within the same region. Eisei Kurimoto describes the internal disputes in contemporary Africa and the racism projected therein. The media tends to portray the antagonism between the Tutsi and the Hutu as an inherent tribal conflict. Having pointed out the continuity with the premodern period, Kurimoto argues that this conflict internalizes a racial hierarchy based on Race. The Ham hypothesis established in Europe in the past still exists in Africa today, and according to Kurimoto, this lies at the basis of the conflict, as ‘reverse racism’.44

The case of the Bougainvilleans of Papua New Guinea is also interesting. It is said that since independence after World War II, the Bougainvilleans used the color ‘black’, with which they had been previously negatively marked by the Europeans, positively as a political symbol. When conflicts of interest emerged over the development of mines after independence, the Bougainvilleans came to establish a collective identity as a single ethnic group. Several originally separate groups came together and reorganized themselves to counter the opposition group which belonged (or were said to belong) to the Austronesian
language group. The symbol chosen for this ethnic identity was the ‘black’ skin color. ‘Black’ was adopted at the beginning of the 1970s as a sign of differentiation from other Papua New Guineans and used as a political symbol among the intellectual class. Of course, this blackness is also an identity the Bougainvilleans established as resistance mediated by Race in the upper case, namely the ‘Austronesian language group’.

RR can also be seen amongst the burakumin in Japan. During the formation of ‘buraku, the special race’ in the Meiji period, even the theory of alien racial origin was inherited by a burakumin discourse of ‘special race’ used for the establishment of subjectivity from their own position. Moreover, the famous slogan, ‘The time has come when we can be proud of being Eta’ in the ‘Suiheisha Manifesto’ (1922), can be understood as a form of resistance by the ‘burakumin’, the special race, against forced assimilation into society. ‘Our Race’, which was declared in Love Brothers published in 1921 by the ‘Ethnic self determination group’ organized in the Taisho period, was also a group established as a form of resistance against discrimination stimulated by the world trend in ethnic self determination.

‘People who still follow feudal customs and bad bourgeois ethics call our people “hinin, the lowly people” and “base animal like non-humans” . . . attach racial class discrimination and show extreme social abuse. . . . Let our people trust in “the power or our people”. . . . Our brothers and sisters scattered all over the country unite, be prepared for liberation from hundreds of years of abuse, and strive towards the construction of a new society based on freedom and equality.’ (emphasis mine)

There are many other examples of RR. For instance, the arguments of racial minority leaders in discussions of multiculturalism in Britain and color consciousness debates in the U.S. today are based on RR. There are already many studies on this topic but what I want to emphasize here is that although Kwame Anthony Appiah and Paul Gilroy may argue that race has no philosophical legitimacy, there is the undeniable reality that “race, or racialized identities, have as much political, sociological and economic salience as they ever had”. One field in which this can be clearly seen is that of discussions regarding public policies based on race. People who oppose public policies based on race argue that a truely anti-racial society is a society in which each individual can enjoy equal opportunity and access to resources based on the original principle of ‘equality’ without being restricted by the framework of racial groups. On the other hand, minority leaders argue that in actual situations where racial dis-
crimination still exists, a ‘politics of difference’ based on groups is a necessary means for rectifying discrimination and the way to achieve ‘equality’ in the true sense in society. As many researchers have already pointed out, this kind of discourse hides the plurality within groups and creates a homogenized and essentialized group image. Floya Anthias also warns that the most important issue regarding racism in Europe is the racist situation in which minority groups claim preferential allotment of state resources in education and welfare by presupposing differential treatment based on language, culture and ethnicity in the name of multiculturalism. However, from the point of view of the minority leaders, as long as racial discrimination is depriving various individuals of opportunities, encouraging solidarity within groups and demanding rights and resources on a group basis is the way to maximize the interests of individuals within the groups in the end. It becomes strategically important to refer to themselves as a reorganized ‘race’ for the struggle against racial discrimination, the enhancement of racial identity and the practical securing of resources. In this way, RR provides minorities with an important position for voicing and practicing identity politics.

VII INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE THREE DIMENSIONS

How then should we understand the relationships between the three dimensions? A schema along a temporal axis of development from race to Race to RR is in one sense the clearest kind of relationship. Indeed the examples given above can be seen in terms of a developmental framework from premodern race to modern Race to mainly twentieth century RR.

Before assuming such a temporal axis of development, however, it should be noted that there was mutual interaction and a common project linking Europe and the colonies. Akio Tanabe argues that modern race was by no means created by the west alone and was born from a common project of the Europeans and those in the colonized India. Two genealogies of racism interacted, namely the enlightenment philosophy born in Europe and the romanticism constructed by orientalists based on a philosophy indigenous to India. Thus the idea of race was constructed through interaction between race and Race in two different continents in the colonial context. On the other hand, Kumie Inose shows that the process of reorganization of race into Race was not just a matter of Race going in one direction from Britain to colonial India. Colonizers feeling
affinity for the ornamentalism of the Indian upper classes (though they were people ranked as the highest Race in India) tried to construct their subjectivity by turning their gaze back to their homeland. Inose also focuses on the resistance found in portraits which were supposed to be a medium for Race where the object of the painting changed into the subject who in fact arranged the obedient appearance gesture.  

The simultaneous transformation of different dimensions of race can occur even today. For example, it would not be surprising for a remark by Shintaro Ishihara, the Governor of Tokyo, regarding ‘cruel crimes’, committed by the ‘Chinese’ to manifest as actual racist policies at any time. (Rather, in Tomiyama’s words, the ‘premonition of violence’ makes us stand on guard). It might not be an overstatement to say that this situation is a sign of the formation of race in the lower case. If ‘the DNA of the Chinese’ in Ishihara’s words were to be linked with the genome studies, it could easily lead to a false scientific determinism of crimes. In another context, we can imagine that race might be created if the exclusion of RR becomes too prominent. For example, there is a high rate of certain illnesses such as Tay-Sachs disease among the Ashkenazi Jews. If there were discrimination in life insurance subscription against them as a group, this could become Race with a capital letter in today’s society. The history of discrimination against leprosy patients and their families in Japan shows us that if human groups are classified according to the human genome, a situation can easily develop where certain groups are seen as dangerous and discriminated against on the pretext of conquest of genetic diseases under the slogan of ‘progress of mankind’. This is precisely why it is not appropriate to understand race in the lower case and Race with a capital letter simply as past, developmental stages of the idea of race.

Today, these dimensions sometimes interconnect with each other in a more complex way. Let us take as an example the debates in California in the fall of 2003 over Proposition 54. Proposition 54 proposed to abolish all kinds of data gathering related to race and ethnicity. In other words, it was extremely color blind. The proposition was opposed by two thirds and supported by one third. This result, however, cannot be taken at face value. Among those who opposed, there were some who supported the orientation of a color conscious society on the grounds that if such data gathering were abandoned altogether, there would be no way to identify racism. In other words, this was an argument made from the viewpoint of Race as Resistance. However, it was
not just this group which opposed the proposition. Drug and medical companies made an extensive campaign to stress the significance of race and ethnicity data gathering, claiming that there are real and significant group differences in terms of frequencies of susceptibility to certain diseases and effectiveness of certain medicines. These commercial companies’ standpoint can be opposite, depending on the analyses and interpretations of these group differences, but much of the discourse surrounding Proposition 54 emphasized differences from the viewpoint of Race with capital letter.

On the other hand, those who supported the proposition included liberal intellectuals like Appiah and Gilroy and others who, fully aware of the deep-rooted nature of racism, argued that only color blindness can change the current racist society. However, at the same time, supporters also included people who believe that the differences between whites and blacks are innate and cannot be changed by the environment and thus take the position that affirmative action and other public and social welfare policies for minorities are wrong and a waste of taxes. In other words, they supported the proposition from the viewpoint of Race with a capital letter. Thus the split reflected in this Proposition 54 is not the simple kind of dichotomy between liberals and conservatives that we saw in the old days. It is in fact a matter of RR plus Race vs. Against-Race plus Race. This example shows that RR is not the mere reverse of Race.

The examples mentioned in this paper differ in social scale, ideology, economic basis and historical period. So I expect that there may be criticism regarding whether they can be discussed on the same level. But the aim of this section is not to compare the ideas of race and the phenomenon of racial discrimination in each society, as many comparative studies by American and European researchers, comparing the U.S. and Brazil and South Africa have done. What is important is that since the idea of race has three dimensions which are linked with each other, one dimension is able to change into another according to social conditions and there is always the potential of transformation. From a different perspective, we can say that even if RR is seen as a threat to social integration and the establishment of a color blind society, in which racial frameworks and racial awareness do not exist, is hoped for, there will be difficulties as long as Race in the upper and race in the lower case are not socially resolved. RR has also become a powerful conceptual tool for identifying racism and for the practice of identity politics by minorities.
As long as essentialism based on race and Race do not disappear, just as race is a powerful concept for the essentialists, it remains a concept indispensable for understanding the politics of anti-discrimination struggles.

NOTES

1 This paper is the English translation of part of Sections One and Three of my introduction chapter to Jinshu Gainen no Fuhensei wo Tou: Seiyoteki Paradaimu wo Koete (Is Race a Universal Idea?: Transcending the Western Paradigm) (Kyoto: Jimbun shoin, 2005). I would like to thank Loring Brace, Steve Harrell, Charles Keyes, Jon Marks, Audrey Smedley, and the reviewers of the Japanese Journal of American Studies for their insightful comments. Many thanks also go to Tumiko Tokita for her professional translation. It goes without saying that I am responsible for the entire argument of this article.


3 The reason why the word ‘dimension’ is used here rather than ‘meaning’ or ‘type’ is because I am not arguing that the meaning differs according to context as race is defined in dictionaries and introductory books or that they can be put into specific categories as particular ‘types’.

4 For example, see John Rex, Race and Ethnicity (Milton Keynes, England: Open University Press, 1986); Robert Miles, Racism (London: Routledge, 1989).

5 However, this is similar to the way ‘History’ and ‘history’ is contrasted by Robert Young who critically analyzes the existing framework of European epistemology in White Mythologies: Writing History and the West (London: Routledge, 1990). But Race differs from ‘History’ in the sense that it does not propose the universality of the idea of race. ‘Race’ in RR can be ‘race’ in some cases. Here I will write RR in capital letters.

6 For the studies that discuss buraku discrimination and racial discrimination, see Midori Kurokawa, Ika to Doka no Hazama (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1999); “Burakusabetsu to Jinshusabetsu,” in Jinshu Gainen no Fuhensei wo Tou, 276–297.

7 Alien racial origin theory argues that the ancestors of the burakumin were immigrants from the continent such as China and Korea, and of course no researchers support this today when the myth of the single origin of the Japanese has collapsed. The following mistaken theories were behind this discourse: that the etymology of ‘eta’ originated from the ‘eta’ (whose job was to gather hawk’s food) who were a part of ‘takako’ in the ancient Ritsuryo system, and that many of them descended from immigrants from abroad. It is commonly thought that the alien racial origin theory already existed in the medieval period and became widespread in the middle early modern period and stronger in the modern period. Tomohiko Harada, Hisabetsu Buraku no Rekishi (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1975), 32–33.


9 Uesugi, Yomigaeru Burakushi, 36.

10 Niunoya, Kebiishi: Chusei no Kegare to Kenryoku, 130; Uesugi, Yomigaeru Burakushi, 35–45.

11 Niunoya, Kebiishi: Chusei no Kegare to Kenryoku, 513. The ‘law of non-interaction’ can be found in historical sources as early as the twelfth century, and there is also
a description in the *Konjakumonogatari* (vol. 16, verse 34) that ‘when people stop interacting with others according to the law of non interaction, that means becoming beggars which could also be amusing.’ Tetsuichi Niunoya, *Nihon Shakai no Mibun to Shakai* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobo, 1993), 508.

12 Uesugi, *Yomigaeru Burakushi*, 123.

13 *Pekchon* are people who were involved in slaughter and leatherworks from the Choson period in Korea and were considered the lowest in status. There was strong discrimination against them in residential areas, and intermarriage and registration with people of another status were not allowed.


22 Samuel George Morton, *Craniology, or a Comparative View of the Skulls of the Institutions of North and South America*, to which is prefixed an essay on the varieties of the human species (Philadelphia: D. Dobson, 1839).


27 The remaining one is the Alpine race.


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36 Information on ‘ancestors according to DNA’ and ‘tribes in Britain’ can be found in http://www.ancestrybydna.com and http://www.oxfordancestors.com respectively.
53 Tomiyama, Boryoku no Yokan.