

13: Race II

Read: Wade: Genetics and Kinship: The Interpenetration of Nature and Culture, 69-96; Race, Nature and Culture, 97-111; Embodying Racialised Natures, 112-122

- I. Review: Race, racialization, racism
 - A. Race is a social fact, not a biological one
 1. A social construction
 2. A very powerful social fact
 - B. Even if we're not interested in the history of a concept, how its meanings evolved
 1. Learning about it can help us get some distance from the term's current, taken-for-granted meaning and be able to analyze it
 - C. Wade provides a very thorough discussion of race, its links to "nature" (how reproduction was understood, notions about heredity, environmental influences) and culture
 1. In particular the surprising variety of theories, both scholarly and in the general public
- II. Today's meaning of race—components
 - A. Biology determines behavior (at least in part)
 - B. Europeans are superior
 - C. Race can be scientifically studied
- III. A social construction, but what kind?
 - A. Wade's discussion of what kind of construction:
 1. The modern idea that races exist, with definable physical characteristics, with some superior to others
 - a. Is the result of particular historical processes:
 - b. Colonization by European powers

- B. If race is a social construction, we can't assume that races don't exist as objective biological entities BUT ARE grounded in phenotype
1. The "natural fact" of phenotypical variation is in itself socially constructed
 2. Not just any physical differences, only some have become cues for racial distinctions
 - a. These cues correspond to the geographical encounters of Europeans in their colonial histories
 3. **Specific combinations** of skin color, hair type and facial features that have been worked into racial signifiers
 4. Only certain phenotypical variations become racial categories
 - a. Those that have emerged through history
- C. Particular aspects of phenotypical variation that have been worked into visual signifiers of difference
1. Vital signifiers of difference
 2. "Worked into" *for a reason*—they work; they help achieve certain goals: social, cultural, political, economic
- D. Could height serve as a racial signifier?
1. It could, but it hasn't
 2. Height IS a signifier, just not a racial one
 - a. Could it be a racial cue, somewhere? Sure.
 - b. It is in *Brave New World*
- E. Other phenotypical variations, more locally, have served as racial signifiers
1. My example of body hair
 - a. In the U.S., body hair means certain things
 - b. Unwanted in women
 - c. In Colombia, at least earlier, it racially signified European descent, and was desirable

- d. A racial cue resulting from European colonization
- F. Wade is generalizing about racialization in the West, but always when you look at specific cases there will be difference, elaborations
- 1. Colorism (Latin America) vs. categorical (U.S., apartheid South Africa)
 - 2. Differences in language
 - 3. Spanish “Raza” not the same meaning as “race”—and both are polysemic
 - 4. Examples of difference
 - a. A saying in Brazilian Portuguese: “money whitens,”
 - b. Or “A sua branqueza”—“your whiteness” in Portuguese
 - c. Both sound silly to us
 - d. In Brazil, someone poor with light skin will be perceived and classified as darker
 - 1) Might be true here
- IV. Race in Japan¹: a contrast with our system
- A. In 1986 former Prime Minister Nakasone contrasted his country’s supposed homogeneity with the ethnically mixed U.S.
 - 1. Said the homogeneity was responsible for Japan’s success in international business
 - 2. The statement created an international furor
 - B. As a major industrial state, Japan is indeed relatively homogeneous

¹ Discussion of race in Japan follows C. Kottak, 1996. *Mirror for Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.: 61-65; and Barbara Hall, Burakumin—The Untouchable Caste of Japan,

1. Most Japanese have strongly held opinions about Japanese being one race, one people
2. Linguistically, too (although some dialects of Japanese are mutually unintelligible)
3. Only 4%-10% of Japanese are minorities (sources differ)
 - a. Burakumin are the largest minority
4. Assimilation of minorities happens, but has been discouraged

C. The minorities:

1. Aboriginal Ainu in the north
2. Annexed Okinawans
3. Immigrant nationalities, mostly Koreans
4. Outcaste Burakumin (who, unlike Koreans, are citizens)
 - a. They number 2-4 million (sources vary)

D. Burakumin

1. History
 - a. Present-day Burakumin's ancestors were outcasts
 - 1) Who did unclean jobs—animal slaughter, disposal of dead
 - 2) Similar to India's Untouchables
 - 3) Association with impure materials, death, made them ritually impure
 - 4) Polluting to others
 - 5) Residentially segregated, official lineage books made it impossible to escape from the identity
 - b. Their origins are from a tiered system of stratification (Tokugawa period—[1603-1868])
 - 1) 4 ranks: warrior, farmer, artisan and merchant

- 2) And outcasts:
 - a) Eta (Great Filth), earlier name for Burakumin
 - b) And the Hinin (not human—criminals and survivors of suicide)
- 3) Not human, not in the census, but yes registered by government
- 4) Not human, didn't have to pay taxes
- 5) Life of 7 Etas was equal to that of one human being
- 6) Had to wear 5"x4" rectangular pieces of cloth identifying themselves as Eta
- c. Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) emancipated them, recognized their humanness
 - 1) But, although registers merged, Burakumin were called "new commoners"
- d. 1926 Emperor Showa called them Dowa, "same people"
 - 1) Burakumin prefer "Buraku"
2. Are physically and genetically indistinguishable from other Japanese
 - a. But are seen to be racially different
3. Present-day notions about the content of difference
 - a. Virtually indistinguishable appearance, culture, religion
 - 1) Sometimes slight speech differences
 - 2) But mainly known through residence and family last name
 - a) Originally had no family names, then were named after their dwelling sites
 - b) Kristi Yamaguchi—means "mouth of mountain"
 - c) She's thought to be Buraku

- b. Japanese racial classifications include notions of what people like Burakumin or Koreans smell like
 - 1) But note the built-in contradictions similar to Wade's points about racial classifications being both fixed and flexible
 - 2) These differences sometimes will be attributed by Japanese themselves to non-genetic factors like diet and level of cleanliness
 - 3) Not some relatively immutable and long-standing separation between the races
- c. Discrimination mainly seems to stem from the association with ancestors and their perceived difference
- 4. Present-day differences
 - a. Some job niches still hold (e.g., leather work, and Burakumin are more likely to do manual work)
 - b. Systematic ostracism accounts for some estimates that 70% of Yakuza (Japanese mafia) are Burakumin
 - c. Live mainly in Western Japan
 - d. 1974 Ministry of Health and Welfare forbade the practice of showing family registry details, restricted access
 - e. But in 2 years nine lists from the registers were secretly sold at high prices to large companies and major banks
 - 1) So they could identify them, reject job applications
 - f. No Burakumin are found in high government office: most are engaged in garbage collection and similar jobs
 - g. Google Earth caused an uproar by overlaying old maps that highlighted Burakumin neighborhoods
 - h. If Burakumin attend schools with majority Japanese, they will face discrimination
 - 1) Some people will refuse to eat with them

- i. Many of them “pass” as a majority Japanese person
 - 1) As do some blacks in the U.S.
- j. But if they marry a non Buraku Japanese and are discovered, a divorce might take place
 - 1) Many Japanese hire marriage mediators to check out the family histories of prospective spouses
 - a) Looking especially for Burakumin
- 5. Many outsiders don’t know about Burakumin, many Japanese know very little
 - a. Embarrassing if it comes up in conversation
- 6. The discrimination—attitudinal and institutional—is strikingly similar to what blacks face in U.S.
 - a. Even though there is no clear phenotypic difference
 - b. Now in Japan, like the U.S., the discrimination is *de facto* rather than *de jure*
- 7. In response to Burakumin political mobilization:
 - a. Japan has dismantled the legal structure of discrimination against them
 - b. And worked to improve conditions in their racially segregated neighborhoods (*buraku*)
 - 1) Poor sanitation, housing, etc.
 - 2) For example, a Sports Day for Burakumin children was established

V. Koreans in Japan

- A. During WW II more than 2 million Koreans were in Japan
 - 1. Recruited to replace Japanese farm workers

2. 70,000 to 200,000 women were forced to serve as “comfort women,” prostitutes for military forces
3. Most had been repatriated to a divided Korea by 1952
4. Those who remained were denied citizenship
5. Koreans qualify for citizenship if resident for 3 years and one parent was born in Japan
 - a. Some qualify for citizenship but choose not to take it
 - b. Resentful of earlier and continuing discrimination
 - c. And many maintain strong ethnic ties, often residentially
6. If they do become citizens
 - a. They are strongly encouraged to take a Japanese name
 - b. A kind of semi-occult assimilation that helps maintain the ideology of Japanese homogeneity

VI. The valued group is the majority “pure” Japanese

- A. Strong feelings about “same blood”
 1. Example: a caption under a photo of a Japanese-American:
 - a. “She was born in Japan but raised in Hawaii. Her nationality is American but no foreign blood flows in her veins”²
 2. Children of mixed marriages may not get the same “racial” label
 - a. But they are still stigmatized
 - b. As are Japanese who spend a long time away from Japan
 - 1) When they return, a process of reintegration must take place
 - 2) Children are sent to special schools³

² Jennifer Robertson, Koreans in Japan. Paper presented at U Michigan Dept. of Anthropology Jan. 1992. Cited in Kottak.

³ See Merry White, 1988. *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children*. New York: Free Press, 1987, and Tokyo: Kodansha. Also in Japanese: Shueisha, 1992.

- B. Again, built-in contradictions—the idiom of “pure blood,” which presumably remains in the body no matter what
 - 1. Japanese “race”
- C. Another idiom: a notion of contamination from foreign influence
 - 1. That must be cleansed, eliminated
 - a. Not permanently impure
 - 2. Remind you of Wade?

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