

De-Provincializing Eugenics: The Persistence of ‘Race Hygiene’ in Japan after Its Decline in the West

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Eugenics is often held to have entered global obsolescence after World War II, even as the notion of distinct human “races,” let alone a hierarchy of races, was swiftly losing scientific credibility. Yet in Japan, that truism does not hold true. In fact, defeat and occupation heightened the relevance of race-based eugenics as a prescription for national strength. Consider the following quotation from an article on sickle cell and other blood disorders in the *Journal of the Japanese Society of Internal Medicine*.

The author was not able to confirm even a single case of abnormal hemoglobin among our 3000 countrymen, but two cases of abnormal hemoglobin were confirmed among 179 *konketsuji* [mixed-blood children] 混血児. ... This is proof that at this moment, genes that factor in abnormal hemoglobin are being introduced by *konketsuji* on an ongoing basis. On the grounds of our science of racial hygiene, this is a problem we cannot take lightly. ... With regard to hemoglobin, our country is truly pure. (Mamiya 1967)

This is just one example of the tenor of race science that was produced in Japan after defeat in World War II. Bereft of a strong state to pin their hopes to, many scientists and laymen devoted themselves instead to a supposedly “pure” Japanese “race.” In the late 1940s, anthropologists, geneticists, and others began studying *konketsuji*, or “mixed-blood children,” in order to prove their essential otherness. Essentially, *konketsuji* were children born to Japanese mothers of foreign fathers who were posted in Japan with the Allied forces during the occupation, UN forces during the Korean War, or as part of the ongoing US military presence. These children were identified racially with the foreign father rather than the native mother, such that *konketsuji* were labeled either white or black—but not Japanese.

Japan today seems enthralled with a sense of race-based identity that Oguma (2002) famously decries as a “myth of racial homogeneity.” As Kanō (2007) notes, this myth gained popular and political sway during the postwar era when people began to claim that a *konketsuji* was ipso facto neither kin nor countryman. The furor over “mixed-blood” children called into being the “pure-blood” Japanese. Although the scientific, popular, and political discourse

on *konketsuji* during the postwar were not identical, they reinforced each other and often intersected, such that a government bureaucrat who advocated mass deportation of *konketsuji* and legal bars to further miscegenation labeled black *konketsuji* “mutations” (Takasaki 1952). Meanwhile, Koya Yoshio (1890-1974), director of Japan’s National Institute of Public Health and vice president of the Japan Race Hygiene Association, wrote an article for a leading women’s magazine warning of genetic “disharmony” between races.

Koya (1953) attributed the discovery of “disharmony” to Charles Davenport (1866-1944), a Harvard-trained zoologist who achieved international fame as a human geneticist and eugenicist. By the 1940s, Davenport’s influence in the Anglophone sciences was declining rapidly (Allen 1986; Farber 2004; Kuhl 1994; Provine 1973). In Japan, however, bioscientists made eager use of Davenport and his theory of “disharmony” for decades to come (see e.g. Ishiwarara and Kubota 1953; Kubota 1953; Kōseishō jinkō mondai kenkyūjo 1954; Koyama 1954; Hoshi 1959; and Michibe 1961).

The model of disharmony relied on two key premises. One was that discrete human traits were determined by discrete human genes, often in a one-to-one correlation, such that “tooth size” depended upon a certain gene and “jaw size” depended upon another. The next key premise was that “race” itself was a genetic unit, specifically, a collection of genes that had evolved together in a fixed relationship in a given environment. “Race” was a set of genes that needed each other. This conception of race and of evolution was nothing novel. Davenport derived his notion of racial “harmony” from Herbert Spencer (1865, 159-61), the English philosopher who formulated his theory of racial “equilibrium” long before Mendel and even before Darwin. Spencer’s immense influence in late-nineteenth century Japan primed twentieth-century Japanese scientists to adopt Davenport’s interpretation of Mendel’s laws of heredity. Davenport simply added Mendelian ratios to renovate Spencer’s old racial philosophy as cutting-edge science. His genetic argument was this: since the vast array of human genes came pre-arranged in co-dependent racial sets, any rearrangement of genes through “hybridization” with outside races would create genetic “disharmony” (Davenport 1917). To return to our earlier example, a “hybrid” child with one black parent and one white or Asian parent thus ran the risk of inheriting the black race’s characteristically large teeth but another race’s small jaw. Disharmony was the fear, in essence, that one’s teeth might not fit in one’s head.

Studies on the teeth of *konketsuji* began almost as soon as they had any teeth to study. In 1949, Hanihara Kazurō (1927-2004), a student conducting research under eminent anthropologist Suda Akiyoshi (1900-1990) at the University of Tokyo, began collecting plaster casts of the teeth of *konketsuji*. Dentition was a sensitive issue for Japanese scientists, given the crass and pervasive Western stereotypes of Japanese as “buck-toothed.” In fact, Japanese scientists accepted this label, and often explained their “irregular dentition” as a

consequence of blood mixing early in Japanese history. Tellingly, this perfectly mirrors Davenport's claim that "Nothing is more striking than the regular dental arcades commonly seen in the skulls of more inbred native races and the irregular dentitions of many children of the tremendously hybridized American" (Davenport 1917, 366). Neither Davenport nor Japanese race scientists paid much heed to the possible impact of diet or lifestyle on dentition; all was in the genes, and in the race. What is particularly interesting about the postwar tooth studies by Suda (1952), Hanihara (1955-1956; 1965), and others is that they set out to find Mendelian inheritance of tooth and jaw traits—and disharmonies between them—in "mixed-blood children" by comparing them against a control group of "pure-blood Japanese." In other words, the Japanese population that was deemed "mixed-blood" with "irregular dentition" in earlier science became, in a stroke of the pen, a "pure-bred" genetic group with harmoniously arranged teeth.

Teeth attracted scientific interest not only because they were a measure of harmony or disharmony, purity or mongrelization; teeth were also a measure of primitivity. Skulls and teeth had long been established at the heart of race science as supposedly objective measures of who, among the world's living populations, had evolved first and farthest from apes. Hanihara tried but was unable to find a statistically significant difference among his racial groups in the occurrence of the double tubercle on the lingual surface of the upper canines, a feature associated in European science with colored races and a "primitive anthropoid character." Hanihara had more luck in other cases, noting a number of "very primitive features" in the baby teeth of "black" *konketsuji* in particular (ibid.). It can hardly be overstated the extent to which Japanese race scientists embraced the anti-African hierarchy developed in the West. Indeed, it is one of the darker ironies of postwar history that Japanese researchers began propagating scientific negrophobia at the very moment Western scientists finally began to turn against this enterprise.

One of Japan's leading researchers on *konketsuji*, and leading advocates of the model of disharmony, was Ishiwara Fusao (1883-1974). Ishiwara (1941) had studied "blood mixing" during the war, and at that time he expressed effusive praise for the positive effects of racial hybridization, particularly between Japan and China, at the moment Japan was struggling to conquer and absorb that country. After the war, Ishiwara lost interest in that topic, and began instead decades of research on white-Japanese and black-Japanese hybrids, about whom he never found anything positive to say. As the vice director of the Microbial Institute at Nihon University, Ishiwara expressed deep interest in physical maladies among *konketsuji*. He diagnosed these children with high rates of hemophilia, abdominal hernia, skin diseases, impaired intelligence and sociability, and outright idiocy. He summed up his conclusions in the journal *Heredity* as follows. "In consanguineous marriages, genetic ties are too close, and in *konketsuji* genetic ties are too distant. In these cases, the skin and mucous membrane lose

their powers of resistance [to disease]....” In brief, *konketsuji* suffered from “Disharmonie” (Ishiwara 1953). Ishiwara’s attempts to prove this point went on for decades, and his opinions are of particular import because he was the head of a team of researchers investigating *konketsuji* under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare’s Institute of Population Problems (1954).

The difference in the fate of Davenport and his theory of “disharmony” in Japan and the West after World War II is striking. Extant scholarship on race science and eugenics generally takes for granted that they declined everywhere and roughly evenly in the mid-twentieth century. Yet that is demonstrably not the case, and the misunderstanding about place is also a misunderstanding about causation. In his classic study of “the retreat of scientific racism,” Barkan (1992) opens with the declaration that “the Nazi regime has compelled us all to recognize the lethal potential of the concept of race and... led to the decline and repudiation of scientific racism.” Similarly, Dubow (1995) opens his history of race science with the assertion that “the traumatic experience of the Nazi Holocaust... alerted humanity as a whole to the terrifying consequences of politicized racism.” But who is this “humanity as a whole,” this “all of us”? Western scholars have too quickly elided the constituency of their universal human “we.” Ironically, narratives of the decline of race science and eugenics have come to function as yet another installment in the epic march of progress and modernity in which the West takes center stage and plays the leading role. This epic cries out for us to “provincialize Europe” and its experience of eugenics. As Chakrabarty (1992) asserts, “To attempt to provincialize ... Europe is to see the modern as inevitably contested.” Japanese modernity contested the postwar Euro-American declaration that eugenics and race science were null and void.

The *Diary of Anne Frank* was translated into Japanese in 1947, and it quickly became a best-seller. It continues to be reissued and reimagined by Japanese translators, manga artists, filmmakers, and audiences to this day. So postwar Japanese certainly shared with Westerners a knowledge of and interest in the Holocaust. They also shared in the global postwar antipathy to fascism. But in Japan, eugenics was not characterized as fascist, nor was the link made from eugenics to genocide. Why should it be otherwise? After all, eugenics was common to fascist, communist, and democratic states alike. Furthermore, Japan had had both fascism and eugenics, but never genocide. So if neither the specter of genocide nor that of fascism could unite Japan with the “mainstream,” or rather *specifically Western* postwar narrative of the decline of race science and eugenics, what other global force could?

The answer usually given is science itself. Science is often taken as universal, if implicitly emanating from the West—a progressive agent ushering mankind into a brighter and more Western future. But postwar Japanese were not passive consumers of Western scientific ideology; they were scientific producers. And the factors that spurred mid-century Anglo-

American scientists to reject race hygiene were not universal; they were unique to that time and place. Anglophone genetics and physical anthropology were led at the mid-century by immigrants and minorities, prominently including Theodosius Dobzhansky and Israel Ehrenberg, more famously known as Ashley Montagu. These men had strong personal motives to lead a revolution against the principles of racial purity and race hygiene, and to bring the theory of “disharmony” into scientific disrepute (Barkan 1992, 1996; Farber 2003, 2009). The outflux of scientists (especially Jews) from Nazi Germany and their settlement into the Anglophone scientific community played a pivotal role in shifting Anglophone racial discourse at its highest intellectual levels. Among these Jewish émigrés, significantly for Japan, was geneticist Curt Jacob Stern, whose 1949 treatise *Principles of Human Genetics* reached Japan in 1952 through the efforts of translator and geneticist Tanaka Katsumi (1911-1982). Tanaka (1960, 239-41; 1964) went on to repeatedly challenge the doctrine of “disharmony” and Japan’s widespread disapproval of “blood mixing” but his efforts failed to generate much echo in Japan.

The reason is not far to seek. Minorities did not lead the Japanese sciences. Immigrants and refugees did not wash ashore in the halls of Japanese science and make their careers there. Japanese geneticists and anthropologists who identified as having “pure blood” never questioned that biopolitical category or the costs it imposed on those it excluded. Nor did adults who publically identified as “mixed-blood” participate in scientific research and writing. The speaking voice of Japanese science was the voice of the Japanese majority, which identified as a stream of “pure blood.” The conclusions that science would reach in Japan reflected not some inevitable global trajectory away from racism and eugenics, but this local political milieu. *Who* practices science counts for much more than is allowed by objectivist narratives of self-correcting scientific “progress.” *What* registers as scientific “truth” depends on who has the authority to make that determination. In the West, the battle between Nazi race hygiene and its Anglophone opponents was ultimately resolved not in the halls of science but on the battlefields of Europe. Today, the relationship of science to racism and other biological elitisms depends upon its practitioners, their politics, and their power, just as it has in decades and centuries past.

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