

Skin as a Metaphor: Early European Racial Views on Japan, 1548–1853

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The forced opening of Japan by an American squadron in 1853–54 provided the Western world with a long-awaited opportunity to freely inspect the land at the edge of the Orient. It was indeed a momentous event because for more than two centuries, only few Europeans had been able to catch a brief glimpse of the enigmatic archipelago and its legendary inhabitants. Like Napoleon, who enlisted several dozen savants for his Egyptian expedition, the squadron commander, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, recognized the historic importance of his voyage and brought along several scholars and curators to record the discovery.

Perry's scientific aspirations notwithstanding, Japan was in fact anything but unknown to the new explorers. Since medieval times, ongoing scholarship regarding Japan had existed in Europe, and however dated and inaccurate, detailed accounts of its people and their customs were widely available to would-be explorers. For three centuries of actual contact, pre-1853 European scholarship on Japan showed a growing interest in the racial make-up of the Japanese. As a whole, the racial perspectives on Japan were only an offshoot of a greater discourse, a new scientific worldview that placed mankind within a broader natural system and classified human variety in term of unequal races.

The discourse on Japan is fascinating precisely because it was limited and delayed; moreover, it demonstrates bluntly how in a relatively short time the racial image of a group may change, or even be invented, regardless of the group's own actions. At the turn of the eighteenth century, adverse attitudes to any nonwhite peoples started to affect European attitudes to the Japanese, despite the fact that there was almost no contact between the nations. The rising Western interest in Japan during the years

before its opening and the republication of old accounts suggest that the racial discourse on Japan exerted much influence on the mid-nineteenth-century visitors' perceptions and on their subsequent treatment of the Japanese. In the same vein, it appears that when Perry and other Western pioneers landed in Japan, their racial attitude toward the Japanese was already largely formed.

In this article, I examine the evolution of the European discourse on the Japanese race from the time the first Europeans had landed in the archipelago in the mid-sixteenth century to the end of Japan's isolation in the mid-nineteenth century. In a three-century period this discourse underwent a transition similar to that of attitudes to other non-European peoples. It certainly had some unique features as well, because the Japanese, as a result of particular political and geographical circumstances, escaped the fate of many other non-Europeans: they were neither colonized nor enslaved, they lost no battle with the Europeans, and they were not much affected in this period by Occidental culture and religion. For these reasons, European scholars refrained from referring to Japan in the same abusive language they used with other non-European cultures, and their discourse remained within almost a purely theoretical framework until the mid-nineteenth century.

Initial Observation: The Christian Century (1548–1640)

The Venetian commercial traveler Marco Polo (c. 1254–1324) was the first European to refer to Japan, and his thirteenth-century memoirs served as a precursor of early perceptions concerning the Japanese. On the basis of Chinese sources, Polo depicted the people of *Chipangu* as “white, civilised, and well-favoured.”¹ The color he chose to describe the Japanese was not without meaning: For Polo and his contemporaries, as well as for any other European explorer until the seventeenth century, the color white did not carry explicit racial connotations but signified culture, refinement, and a “just like us” designation.

The antiforeign sentiments that characterized the rise of the Ming dynasty in China, and more particularly the expansion of the Turks into Minor Asia, blocked most of the land routes previously used between Europe and Asia. The loss of the lucrative trade in spices and the memories of Polo's fantastic descriptions of China brought Europeans, primarily the Portuguese, back to Asia, but now by sea. A decade after the superb feat of Vasco de Gama, who in 1497 sailed from Lisbon directly to the Cape of Good Hope and proceeded to India, Lusitanian navigators approached

Malacca (now in Malaysia). This city port, which was finally taken over by Alfonso Albuquerque in 1511, served as a center for the sea trade of the whole region, and it was there that the Portuguese first encountered traders and sailors from China and the island kingdom of Ryukyu (now the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa).² Interestingly, the natives of Malacca drew the attention of the Portuguese conqueror to the presence of other “white” people in the area, pointing to Chinese immigrants in the town.³ The Portuguese also probably met Japanese and Koreans, who frequented the port either on vessels of their own or as crew members on Chinese junks.

An early text written by Tomé Pires, the Crown factor of Malacca in 1512–15, provides us with a depiction of the people of Ryukyu (*Lequjon* in Portuguese) and Japan (*Jampon* in Portuguese). Although there has been some scholarly debate about whether the people mentioned in the text as *Lequeos* or *Guores* were indeed Ryukyans, Japanese, or even Koreans, note that Pires described them first of all as heathens and then, in a later paragraph, as “white men, well dressed, better than the Chinese, more dignified.” Morally, they were depicted as “trustful men—more than the Chinese—and feared.”⁴

The mystery regarding the inaccessible golden Chipangu or Jampon, as early writings referred to Japan, was kept alive until the Portuguese and Spaniards reached the Far East three centuries later. In 1543, three Portuguese merchants had landed, apparently by mistake, on the small island of Tanegashima, south of Kyushu. Half a century later, the official historian of Portuguese India, Diogo do Couto (1542–1616), gave his account of this seminal encounter: “From the land,” he wrote, “small boats at once put out to meet them, in which men whiter than Chinese, but with small eyes and short beards.”⁵ The nonviolent nature of this first encounter, and especially the great sum the local lord was willing to pay for the Portuguese arabesques, persuaded other traders to follow in the steps of these first merchants.

Five years after the discovery, Lisbon first received its testimonies of Japan based on hearsay. The Spaniard Garcia de Escalante Alvarado, the writer of the first report, described the Japanese as “good looking, white, and bearded, with shaved heads,” and added the obvious if deplorable fact that “they are heathens.”⁶ Although Escalante did not deal with the question of Japanese origins, as many European writers later did, he wrote that their language is “similar to German” but that they read and wrote in the same manner as the Chinese.

The same year, the eminent Jesuit missionary of Basque origins, Francisco Xavier (1506–52), sent another report from Malacca, written by Captain Jorge Alvarez. The Japanese, he informed the Jesuit leader Ignazio Loy-

ola, were of average height, well proportioned, and fair.⁷ This report and Escalante's would be the last documentation by laymen until the arrival of the Dutch and English traders in 1600; South European Jesuits became the main source of knowledge about Japan. In 1547, Xavier himself met a Japanese fugitive named Anjiro in Malacca and was enthralled by Anjiro's depictions of his motherland. Determined to evangelize Japan, Xavier landed in Kagoshima in 1549 and remained in the country for more than two years. Although his mission did not fulfill his hopes, Xavier developed a deep affection for the Japanese. He did not pay much attention to the Japanese appearance or to their racial origins, but Xavier did set the general tone among the Jesuits who followed him to Japan during the first four decades. He informed Lisbon that of "the people whom we have met so far, the Japanese are the best who have yet been encountered."⁸

The ensuing reports concerning the physical features of the Japanese were similar in tone. The Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), who visited Japan in the late sixteenth century, noted that "the people are all white and very cultivated."⁹ This was also the impression of the Spanish trader Bernardino de Avila Girón, who referred to the color of the women in Japan as white,¹⁰ and of the Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues (1561–1634), who commented that "the people are white, although not excessively pale as the northern nations, but just moderately so."¹¹ Admittedly, the majority of these early narrators came from the Mediterranean, where skin color is somewhat darker than in the north. Yet if judgment of complexion is relative to oneself, we should note that their north European contemporaries, such as the English trader John Saris (1579–1643), who established a trading post in Japan, described in 1613 four noblewomen who came aboard his ship as "well-faced, handed, and footed, cleare skind and white, but wanting colour, which they amend by arte. Of stature low, but very fat."¹²

As for the racial affinity of the Japanese, early writers, such as the Spanish friar Juan González de Mendoza, followed indigenous and Chinese traditions, speculating that the Japanese "who in their bodies and faces differ very little fro[m] the Chinos", were originally Chinese" Mendoza suggested that those forefathers had been banished to the archipelago after participating in a failed plot to topple the Chinese Emperor, and for that reason there was hatred between the two peoples.¹³ The Spanish missionary Pedro Morejon (1562–1633), who was for a period the procurator of the Jesuit mission in Japan, argued that these immigrants came not only from the Chinese mainland but also from the neighboring kingdoms lying to west of Japan and "by the way of Tartary." He opposed, however, the fantasy some Europeans believed in, that the people of East Asia were descen-

dants of the ten lost tribes of Israel, because their annals “were founded long before the time of Abraham.”¹⁴

Implicitly, at least, some of the early visitors did place the Japanese within an ethnic hierarchy. In that unwritten graded Weltanschauung, the Japanese were at the top. Xavier, as noted earlier, placed the Japanese at the tip of an ethnic pyramid.¹⁵ Similarly, another member of his delegation, Cosme de Torres (d. 1570), saw some parallels between the Japanese and the ancient Romans in their warlike and proud characters.¹⁶ Subsequent writers did not hesitate to compare the Japanese with Europeans. Valignano, for example, declared that they excelled “not only all other Oriental people, but surpass the European as well,”¹⁷ and his view was echoed in Giovanni Maffei’s *Historiarum Indicarum libri XVI*: “They surpass in judgment, docility, and memory not only the oriental but also the occidental nations.”¹⁸

Valignano criticized the people of the east coast of Africa as being without talent, lacking any culture, and being of low intelligence, and concluded: “They are a race born to serve, with no natural aptitude for governing” (ibid.) Slightly above the Africans he ranked the inhabitants of India. They too, according to Valignano, were ignorant and of a very low intelligence. The Japanese, in contrast, were cultivated and polite, and in this “they outdo not only the other people of the East, but us Europeans.” Although Valignano was unaware of the distinction, he implied that the difference was not only cultural because it started at an early stage. Japanese children, he testified, “are fully capable of taking in all science and disciplines, and they recite and learn to read and write in our language much more easily and more quickly than European children do.”¹⁹

In addition to the level of cultural development, physical resemblance became another important criterion for rudimentary ethnic construction in this period. Early observers were quick to notice physical links among the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and Tartars. The English navigator John Davis (1550–1605), for example, observed that the Japanese and Tartars were “small eyed” like Eskimos.²⁰ João Rodrigues, however, had a different opinion. Rodrigues, who served as interpreter for the Japanese rulers Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu until his expulsion in 1612, noted that the Japanese “look like the genuine Chinese of the interior, not like those of Canton; they resemble the Koreans on account of their hair, dark eyes and small noses.”²¹

The resemblance Europeans found between the Japanese and other neighboring peoples supports the notion that there was nothing unique about the descriptions of Japanese physique. In fact, reports of Europeans who visited other parts of northeast Asia at that period also depicted the

Koreans and Chinese, among other peoples, as having white skin.²² Nevertheless, some visitors seemed to hold a less favorable opinion of the Chinese. The Spanish friar Martin Da Rada pointed out that when the Chinese “are small they are very fair, but when they grow up they become ugly. They have scant beards and small eyes.”²³ Spanish friar Gaspar da Cruz expressed even greater distaste, portraying them as “ill-favored, having small eyes, and their faces and noses flat, and beardless, with some little hairs on the point of the chin.”²⁴

The early hierarchy had also some practical implications, such as admission to the Society of Jesus. In considering the variety of recruits available in India, Valignano placed the Portuguese born in Europe at the top of his list and then ranked those of European blood born in India, followed by those of “mixed blood,” with natives at the bottom of the list. Whereas those of mixed blood were unfit, he argued, the natives were not even to be considered: “All these dusky races were stupid and vicious, and of the basest spirit.”²⁵ Ultimately, the society barred the admission of any Asian except for Japanese, and this unique privilege was later extended to Chinese and Koreans. Still, the Jesuits did not treat even the Japanese on equal terms, and the first Japanese brother priest was not ordained before 1601, despite much grumbling and frustration in the Japanese Christian community.

Racial Conceptualization as the Limit of Perception

Reading these and other early reports of European visitors, one is struck by the meager attention, if any, the Europeans paid to physical details. The illustrious navigator William Adams (1564–1620), for example, left his generation with no physical details of those he lived with for two decades.²⁶ This first recorded Englishman to arrive to Japan met in 1600 with the future Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and other central figures of this critical era, and yet he did not bother to describe their appearance and probably remained oblivious to the historical significance of his adventures.

Others did not fare much better. Apart from sporadic portrayals of the Japanese fair skin and medium to short stature, the travelers provided very limited information on the features that two centuries later were so essential in drawing the racial portrait of the Japanese. These visitors were primarily concerned with matters that had direct implications for either their commercial fortunes or success in converting the masses into Christianity, such as political institutions, religion, and social custom. Still, this was not the main reason they ignored the issue of race.²⁷

Until the Enlightenment, the prime source of explanation and knowl-

edge about human variety was the Bible, or rather its interpretation by the church clergy. Spaniards and Portuguese were especially under the control of the Roman Catholic Church, with its emphasis on the papacy and its stress on the salvation of souls. At this stage, argues historian Michael Adas, virtually all European travelers viewed the world in ways that resembled the outlook of the people they encountered. They believed in supernatural creatures and forces that affected their fate, and they thought that the universe was geocentric and fixed. They also felt that the most decisive distinction between the people they encountered and themselves was religious: Christians versus non-Christians. The most valued truths of these individuals were religious rather than scientific.²⁸

As such, the concept of race was not conceived in the way it would be two centuries later. In the early centuries of their global expansion, European explorers and merchants rarely resorted to racial explanations of the differences between themselves and the newly discovered peoples. Without a conceptual background, categories, and even an adequate vocabulary, these early European visitors to Japan were unable to perceive more than a few divergent features between the Japanese and themselves. Likewise, the seemingly limited difference in culture and technological development between the Japanese and Europeans did not stimulate the latter to devise a satisfactory system of classification. These conceptual constraints seem to support Pierre Van den Berghe's notion that, "it is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates races, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant."²⁹

In Europe during that period, race was mixed with religion and ethnicity without any clear inclination to scientific methodology. The ethnic discourse in Spain, for example, concerned the ideology of blood and purity of origins. All heterogeneous groups that were perceived to originate outside the Iberian Peninsula, notably Muslims and Jews, were represented as non-Spanish and feminine. Within the debate about blood, historian George Mariscal pointed out, race was "at the center of all discussions about social relations and subjectivity."³⁰ However, this discourse did not involve the modern notions of race, such as sweeping classifications and an explicit hierarchy: It encompassed only ethnic groups of the Iberian Peninsula and involved physiognomic depictions of their body as more feminine and as differing substantially from the ideal body of the male aristocratic Spaniard. It is possible that the Japanese were not depicted as such simply because they were too far from the Spanish internal discourse.

The Europeans divided Asians at this period into three types of color: black, shades of brown, and white. The Japanese and Chinese were evidently white, and this color judgment was related to their habits and abili-

ties. Whereas the “black people” of Asia were regarded as inferior, suggests Donald Lach, “the whitest peoples generally meet European standards, may even be superior in certain regards, and are certainly good prospects for conversion.”³¹ Indeed, in contrast to European explorers in other parts of the globe, the Jesuits did not express any racial superiority toward the Japanese.³² Some may have felt a certain cultural superiority, but this did not prevent them from admiring the Japanese for their dignity, courtesy, sense of honor, and rationality.

The question of racial attitudes to the Japanese is complicated as a result of the political and social circumstances surrounding the European presence in Japan. When the conduct and attitudes of the Portuguese, for example, is compared with their approach to indigenous peoples at other places where they landed during this period, such as Angola, Goa, and Brazil, substantial differences are evident. In the latter such places, a sharp distinction was made between the Portuguese, the native population, and descendants of unions of the former and the latter.³³ At the same time, Portuguese attitudes to non-Europeans also showed a gradual regression: Whereas at the end of fifteenth-century miscegenation between Portuguese settlers and local women in the Gulf of Guinea was supported by Crown policy, and their descendants were elected to the city council, two centuries later an effective color bar was erected in colonial Brazil in municipal institutions, the army, and the Church.

Undoubtedly, there was much correlation between Portuguese disrespectful attitudes to a host population and that population’s relative military prowess, as well as the willingness of locals to desert their cultural assets and convert to Christianity en masse. Likewise, the existence of an increasingly large number of descendants of unions of invading fathers and local mothers helped support the patriarchal hierarchy. At least as important, racial attitudes were also affected by colonizers’ scathing indictment of an indigenous civilization abounding in illiteracy, technological backwardness, and paganism.

In Japan, most of these colonial phenomena did not materialize, but this is chiefly because Japan was not colonized and the Europeans were there as guests. Among the relatively small number of European visitors, only a few ventured to stay for more than a short sojourn or married native women, whereas all were under the constant surveillance of local Japanese authorities. As in China earlier, the attitudes of the Europeans in Japan were greatly affected by their positive impressions of the culture and intensity of life, as well as their inevitable dependence on the continued favor of the rulers for their survival.³⁴ Moreover, within less than a century, the limited conversion of the native population to Christianity was eradicated

with tremendous bloodshed. As a consequence, the majority of Europeans were forced to leave the country before fragments of the racial discourse that emerged in Africa and the New World could affect their perceptions of the Japanese.

In retrospect, the proto-racial writings on the Japanese during the Christian century cannot be considered part of a true discourse.³⁵ Although these writings may satisfy several rudimentary criteria to be called a discourse (such as realization in texts, having objects and subjects, being historically located), they show no coherent system of meaning, only rarely refer to other (racial) discourses, and do not aim to support any institution (e.g., the church). Critically, the writings neither produced power relations between European writers and the local population nor exerted an ideological effect on either side. This was to change dramatically during the subsequent centuries.

The Birth of a Racial Discourse (1640–1800)

Following the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries and merchants, Japan closed most of its gates to European contact for more than two centuries.³⁶ The main source of information about the country during this period was sporadic accounts written by employees of the Dutch East India Company, stationed on an extended wharf called Dejima at the port of Nagasaki. One such employee was François Caron (1600–1673), a son of Huguenot parents, who stayed in Japan in various roles for 22 years and who, as an official of the Dutch East India Company, rose to the rank of chief of the Dutch factory. Although Caron left Japan in 1641, he published his memoir in Dutch in 1661, and two years later, the book appeared in English translation as well. Caron's main contribution was his view that "the Chinese, Iapanners, Corees and Torquains [inhabitants of the area surrounding the Gulf of Tongking, presently around the border of Vietnam and China] have their distinct languages, wholly strange to each other . . . and yet they have another fashion of letter common, and understood by the Studious and Learned of these four nations." He added without elaboration that the characters of these peoples lacked "any resemblance," thus pointing out the dissimilarity between the Japanese and the Chinese.³⁷ Caron also depicted the officers at the court of the Shogun as persons "of Noble Extraction, fair, and well bred." He did not use the word *white*, and neither did most of the subsequent European writers on Japan.³⁸

The most conspicuous writer among the employees of the Dutch company was the German physician and scholar Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), who resided at the trading settlement of the Dutch East India

Company in Nagasaki in 1690–1692 and provided Europe with a more meticulous account than any of his predecessors. Kaempfer's writings did not lead to any major change in the European racial views of the Japanese. Like Caron, he did not depict them as white, nor did he elaborate much on any discernible physical difference when portraying Japanese individuals. When writing, for example, about Makino Narisada, the great chamberlain at the Shogun court, whom he met on his annual visit of respect to the capital Edo, Kaempfer opened with a depiction of his physical attributes and only then went on to discuss his character. This gentleman, Kaempfer recorded, without any mention of racial differences, was "somewhat tall and thin, he has a long, ordinary, nearly German face." The wife of the Shogun, he noticed, behind the transparent curtains at the Shogun's audience, was "brownish, rounded, and of beautiful shape, with black European eyes."³⁹

Kaempfer's main contribution to the racial discourse was his scholarly explanation of Japanese origins. He followed Caron's views and disputed the prevailing opinion of the time that the Japanese were "originally of Chinese extraction, descended from the inhabitants of that mighty empire."⁴⁰ There were two sources for that view, and both, Kaempfer asserted, were questionable. The first, according to Kaempfer, mentioned several families who conspired against the Chinese emperor and who consequently were exiled to this remote island. The second source described a group of young men and women who were sent to the islands of Japan to find an elixir for the emperor. Kaempfer reasoned that the Japanese could not be the descendants of the Chinese because the two peoples differed in language and religion. In addition, he argued, they greatly differed in their "civil customs and way of life" and "the very inclinations of the mind."⁴¹

Repudiating the Chinese hypothesis, Kaempfer suggested that the Japanese were "descendants of those, who, after the confusion of languages at *Babel*, came over and settled in these islands."⁴² He hypothesized that the Japanese migrated from an area by the Caspian Sea, via the Silk Road and the Korean peninsula. Because Kaempfer could not ignore the physical resemblance of the Japanese to neighboring peoples, however, he added that, "time to time new colonies were sent over thither, chiefly from *China* and *Corea*, and perhaps also from other neighboring countries."⁴³ The reasons for Kaempfer's insistence on the ethnic differences between the Japanese and the Chinese are unclear. It is possible that Kaempfer had simply enough scientific evidence to pronounce what is now accepted as a fact, but it is also possible that geopolitical sources affected his view. In the decades around Kaempfer's visit, European admiration for China was in its zenith.

Despite the faulty translation of Kaempfer's manuscript, his assump-

tions on the origins of the Japanese had an effect on Western writers for the next 150 years.⁴⁴ The want of new information forced European historians to act like their forerunners from Ancient Greece and Rome, who would copy each other rather than attempt to reestablish the text.⁴⁵ Kaempfer's scholastic breadth and the fact that very few Europeans were allowed to land in Japan played a key role in keeping his views intact for a long period of time. He also influenced many of his contemporaries, such as the French Jesuit traveler and historian Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1682–1761), who wrote on the history of Christianity in Japan but who had never visited Asia. Charlevoix recounted the myth of the Japanese originating from the Chinese and concluded that “the notable difference, which can be observed between the inhabitants of the various provinces of Japan, such as the face, and character, does not allow us to doubt that many nations contributed to populate these islands.”⁴⁶ The differences in language, religion, and national character between the two peoples led Charlevoix to conclude that “Chinese and Japanese are so different that it is sufficient to convince one that the Japanese did not come from China” (ibid.).

Another case in point is the Scot novelist Tobias George Smollett (1721–71), who mentioned Japan in the eighth volume of his geographical collection, *The Present State of all Nations, Containing a Geographical, Natural, Commercial, and Political History of All the Countries in the Known World*, published in 1769. “The Chinese pretend,” Smollett rephrased from the writings of his predecessors, “that the islands were first peopled by themselves but it is more probable, that the original inhabitants were a mixture of different nations, driven thither by those tempestuous seas, and at different times; and this conjecture is confirmed by the great difference observable between the present inhabitants, in regard to feature complexion, shapes, habits, customs, and language, notwithstanding their having been so long united under one monarch.”⁴⁷

The turning point in the European racial view regarding the Japanese, among other ethnic groups, was not based solely on the Other's level of science: It was tied closely to the emergence of scientific trends in Europe, which rationalized natural phenomena in an attempt to account for human behavior. The incessant flow of information that reached Europe regarding other civilizations and newly discovered peoples slowly eroded medieval ethnographic beliefs in monstrous races who were “always far away, in India, Ethiopia, Albania, or Cathay.”⁴⁸ Now literate Europeans were ready to accept what they perceived as a more valid, but not necessarily egalitarian or Christian, account of mankind, based on first-hand testimonies rather than a religious doctrine or mythology.

There are several identifiable milestones in the slow transformation of the concept of race, a process that affected the European perception of the Japanese as well. *The Scale of Creatures* (1676–77), written by the founder of the Royal Society, Sir William Petty (1627–87), was one of the first theses to raise the issue of natural gradations of creatures,⁴⁹ and in 1684 the French physician and traveler François Bernier (1620–88) made the earliest rudimentary classification of mankind based on race. Bernier named four races, European, African, Lapp, and Asiatic, and depicted the last as “truly white; but they have broad shoulders, a flat face, a small squab nose, little pig’s-eyes long and deep set, and three hairs of beard.”⁵⁰ Bernier’s ideas perhaps came too early, and they had only a small effect on the scientific perspective of his generation, as the field of human taxonomy was still in a need of a grand thesis to make it work. Several decades later, it was the Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné (Linnaeus, 1707–78) who satisfied this need with his treatise, *A General System of Nature*.

Although Linné’s eminence stemmed from his general taxonomic system, he also paid close attention to the human race. Initially, Linné treated mankind as one species, called *Homo sapiens*, which he loosely divided into four types. In the tenth edition of his text (1758–59), however, Linné elaborated on the description of races, to which he added two semi-human varieties (as relatives): the wild and the monstrous. His races matched four main geographical regions and were characterized by particular color, temperament, and moral characteristics: *americanus* (red, choleric, erect), *europaeus* (white, ruddy, muscular), *afēr* (black, phlegmatic, indulgent), and *asiaticus*, whom he described as “sallow, melancholy, stiff; hair black, dark eyes; severe, haughty, avaricious, covered with loose garments; ruled by opinions.”⁵¹ Before the end of the eighteenth century, several scholars modified and elaborated Linné’s classification. The German naturalist and anthropologist Johann Blumenbach (1752–1840) proposed a five-race system,⁵² whereas the Anglo-Irish physician and writer Oliver Goldsmith (1730–74) classified mankind into six races.⁵³ Without exception, all of them considered the Japanese, together with the Chinese, as members of the great Tartar (Mongolian) race.

This system of human taxonomy raised a European racial awareness and a sense of superiority. Although linking specific moral dispositions, behavior, and phenotypic features, it also endorsed popular convictions regarding the existence of a racial hierarchy wherein positive traits were assigned to Europeans and negative traits characterized other races. A new dichotomy emerged: “We, the Europeans,” and “they, all the others”; with this, the idea of Europe reached maturity.⁵⁴ That is not to say that Linné holds sole responsibility for this change in perception. His thought reflected a general transformation in Europe’s self-identity and its treatment

of other peoples. In France, for example, the eighteenth-century encyclopedists believed in a rigid hierarchy of values, at the top of which sat European civilization.⁵⁵ Even earlier, by the end of the seventeenth century, skin color in north America “had become an independent rationale for enslavement,” and a system of fine color gradation was established without much theoretical rationalization.⁵⁶ A century later, the American slave trade reached its zenith,⁵⁷ and in other colonies as well, extreme forms of exploitation and domination were taking place, leading to rigidly hierarchical ethnic relations. Under these circumstances, Europeans who benefited from the economic exploitation outside their continent started to feel an acute need for ethical justification of their abuse of other human beings—a moral exoneration that Christianity could barely provide.

The same historical circumstances and intellectual atmosphere that stimulated Linne to develop his racial views had probably also prompted Kaempfer to observe a few decades earlier that, “the Japanese in the main, particularly the common people of *Nippon*, be of a very ugly appearance, short siz’d, strong, thick-legg’d, tawny, with flattish noses, and thick eyelids (tho’ the eyes stand no so deep in the forehead, as in the Chinese).”⁵⁸ Linne’s contemporary, the French naturalist Georges de Buffon (1707–88), was among the first theorists to emphasize the significance of skin color. Lack of civilization produces blackness of skin, Buffon argued, and these circumstances “are sufficient to render the Tartars more swarthy than Europeans, who want nothing to make life easy and comfortable.”⁵⁹

The transformation in European perceptions of Japanese skin color was an evident outcome of this epoch. During the eighteenth century, racial theorists adopted this physical feature, which was traditionally a cue for within-group status in almost any society, and in Asian and African societies in particular, as one of the primary markers for their human taxonomy. In other words, skin color was chosen because it was used as a status cue within many cultures, while it still could provide an unparalleled phenotypic demarcation of biological and unalterable difference in status between whites and others. Thus, the difference caused by a mere “handful of melanin,” if any, became the primary mark of superior or inferior groups.⁶⁰

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, George Psalmanaazaar (or Psalmanazar, 1680–1763) was still able to praise the Japanese as having fair skin color. “If we may believe the proverb,” he wrote, “*Turkey* and *Japan* breed the fairest women in the world.”⁶¹ In 1704, Psalmanaazaar’s book, *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, caused a great stir in London because of its elaborate, multifaceted account of the practically unknown island. Years later, it was revealed that this proclaimed native of Formosa and a Christian convert was probably a Frenchman who

“had never been nearer to Formosa than the Rhine.”⁶² For many of Psalmanaazaar’s avid readers, however, this distance did not make much difference. The writings of the erudite impostor reflected as much of the historical descriptions of the seventeenth century as his creative mind, and more important, they left their mark on his ingenuous contemporaries, as well as in the following decades if not much later still.

Still, Psalmanaazaar could not stem the tide. Not only were the Japanese a marginal topic in his book but race was gaining prominence in European thought. Only a few years later and a few decades before Linne’s definition of Asians as sallow, Charlevoix was the first to depict Japanese skin color as not white but as olive (yet lighter than other Asians).⁶³ Charlevoix, as pointed earlier, had never seen a Japanese, but this fact should not mar the historical importance of his assertion. Like Linne and Blumenbach, he belonged to a generation of armchair specialists and would-be ethnographers who had not been to Asia but were responsible for the degrading of Asians in their new racial order.

The perceptual change was irreversible. Linne’s followers maintained his focus on color as a major component of their racial classification: The Scottish anatomist John Hunter (1728–1793) depicted Mongoloids as brown, whereas Johann Blumenbach was apparently the first to depict the peoples of East Asia as yellow.⁶⁴ This color better suited the Japanese, for whom the designation *brown* was frequently far from reality. The Europeans could easily see yellow in others’ skin color because it is so vague, and it was enough that a few members of a group were perceived as such to generalize the characteristic to the whole group.

In 1775, the year Blumenbach’s book was published, the Swedish botanist and Linne’s disciple Charles Peter Thunberg (1743–1828) left for Japan. Thunberg, who worked as a physician at the Dutch mission for one year, was the first naturalist of the new school to examine the Japanese. A decade later, when Thunberg wrote his own account of his experience in Japan, he depicted the Japanese as having “yellowish colour over all, sometimes bordering on brown, and sometimes on white.”⁶⁵

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, China, the leading nation of East Asia, fell from grace in European eyes. Aware of the recent international developments, Thunberg emphasized the dissimilarity between the Japanese and the Chinese, believing the former to be a distinct subrace. “It is by their eyes,” he argued, “that, like the Chinese, these people are distinguishable,” and these organs, he found, “have not the rotundity which those of other nations exhibit, but are oblong, small, and are sunk deep in the head.”⁶⁶ Another unique feature he discovered among the Japanese was their eyelids, which formed “in the great angle of the eye a deep fur-

row” and made them look “as if they were sharp-sighted” and to have, in general, “almost the appearance of being pink-eyed” (*ibid.*).

As with the Jesuits almost two centuries earlier, Thunberg’s racial observations were not detached from a gradual worsening in the attitudes of the Dutch residents in Dejima to the local population, even though the Dutch were much better treated than a century earlier.⁶⁷ Thunberg himself lamented that “the pride which some of the weaker-minded officers in the Dutch service exhibit to the Japanese, by ill-timed contradictions, contemptuous behavior, scornful looks and laughter, which occasions the Japanese in their turn to hate and despise them.”⁶⁸ Although these manifestations of the Dutch attitude were not without precedent, it seems that corrupting contacts with subjugated populations and exposure to ethnocentric teaching in Europe also took their toll in Japan.⁶⁹

More than any European before him, Thunberg was aware of physical differences, and, with Kaempfer, he played a crucial role in the reconceptualizing of the Japanese within European racial perceptions. With their first-hand observations and scientific authority, the two would continue to dictate Western racial views of the Japanese well into the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, after Kaempfer, and especially Thunberg, only a few Europeans would ever depict the Japanese in the amicable and racially almost indistinguishable fashion that had been so common two centuries earlier. In the new racial discourse, the Japanese seemed uglier and their skin color darker than any European people. Compared with the next century, however, the racism of the eighteenth century, concluded anthropologist Marvin Harris, remained “a modest doctrine, circumscribed by environmentalism and plagued with doubts about the respective merits of the noble savages and their vice-ridden civilized conquerors.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, even the mild racial accounts of the eighteenth century demonstrate that the concept of race had become a reality created in the human mind based on biological (mainly phenotypic) variations in the human species. Physical differences, writes Audrey Smedley, “were a major tool by which the dominant whites constructed and maintained social barriers and economic inequalities; that is, they consciously sought to create social stratification based on the visible differences.”⁷¹

This mode of thinking, adopted from the racial discourse that started to develop in the colonies of the new world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was now prevalent within European narratives on the Japanese, even though hardly any economic ties existed with Japan. The darkening of the Japanese skin color signified the emergence of color prejudice against them, which was usually the forerunner of intergroup racism. Still, because of its seclusion, Japan remained a safe haven at a time when

Africans were enslaved and Native Americans were being exterminated systematically. To a lesser extent, the Japanese also benefited from the association Europeans often made between them and the Chinese, as in this period the admiration Europeans felt for the laws and government of China was at its peak.⁷² Thus, although eighteenth-century Europe witnessed a worsening of the attitude toward the Japanese, this rudimentary change was only a mild reflection of a major shift in attitude toward non-Europeans as a whole, and not toward the Japanese in particular.

Toward a Reencounter with Japan (1800–1853)

A year before the end of the eighteenth century, and only a few years after Thunberg's book was published, Charles White, a physician from Manchester, produced the first comprehensive and explicit manifest of racial hierarchy, entitled *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man*. European racial superiority, according to White, was based on physiognomic aesthetics. "Where shall we find unless in the European that nobly arched head . . . where that perpendicular face, the prominent nose and round, projecting chin?"⁷³ White supplemented his thesis with a series of illustrations showing the profile of an ostrich at one extreme and the profile of a European at the other, and of a native in between. These illustrations had a powerful effect on generations of Europeans, and during the nineteenth century they were to be reproduced by many raciologists.

The idea of racial and physiognomic hierarchy also soon penetrated the realm of linguistics. In 1808, the German philosopher and critic Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829) advanced the theory of Aryan origins. The Greek, Latin, and German languages, this most prominent founder of the German Romanticism contended, derived from the Sanskrit and were vital and organic languages, whereas the languages derived from Chinese, such as Japanese, and the Slavic languages were labeled as atomized and lacking in depth. Schlegel never asserted an explicit hierarchy, yet he virtually divided mankind into speakers of noble languages and those who spoke degraded languages. The Japanese people were associated with the low-born group.⁷⁴

In the following years, the narrative of captivity written by Vasily Golovnin (1776–1831), a Russian explorer and captain of ship who was imprisoned in 1811 for two years in Ezo (now Japan's northernmost island Hokkaido), became a major source of information on the Japanese. On the basis of the texts of earlier writers and Japanese hearsay, Golovnin assumed that the Japanese had descended from the Tartars rather than from the Chinese. "Every thing testifies," he concluded, "that the Chinese and the Japa-

nese were never one people. The Japanese even abominate the idea that the Chinese may have been their ancestors.” Golovnin suggested, however, that the blood of Chinese prisoners taken during sea raids did flow in Japanese veins, and he even speculated that Indian emigrants landed in the island, spreading what had become “the faith of the Brahmins disfigured.”⁷⁵

An insightful reference to the Japanese at the same period came from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), the lieutenant-governor of Java and an administrator with the British East India Company. In contrast to most of his contemporaries, Raffles depicted the Japanese as a civilized, European-like people, different from their neighboring nations. In an address to the Batavia society of Arts and Sciences, he offered the following remarks on the Japanese: “They are represented to be a nervous, vigorous people, whose bodily and mental powers assimilate much nearer to those of Europe than to what is attributed to Asiatics in general.” To prove his point, Raffles paid special attention to appearance: “Their features are masculine and European, with the exception of the small lengthened Tartar eye which almost universally prevails, and is the only feature of resemblance between them and the Chinese. The complexion is fair and indeed blooming, the women of the higher classes being equally fair with Europeans and having the bloom of health more generally prevalent among them than is usually found in Europe.”⁷⁶

This positive portrayal of the Japanese seems at first not only to ignore the intellectual development of the era but also to challenge it. Indeed, Raffles was renowned for his liberal attitude toward peoples under colonial rule and for his rigorous suppression of the slave trade. A closer look at the background of this peculiar articulation, however, demonstrates sharply how flexible the notion of race might be when other motives, and those that are personal and economic in particular, are involved. Raffles’ interest in the Japanese was related to Britain’s bitter struggle with Napoleon’s France and its ally the Netherlands. After taking over Java in 1811 from Dutch hands and learning that Dutch trade with Japan had been suspended two years earlier, Raffles suggested placing this lucrative commerce in the hands of the East India Company. His greater ambition, however, was to make Java the center of an Eastern insular empire and to establish closer relations of friendship and alliance with the Japanese. On the basis of accounts by Dr. Ainslie, a compatriot Raffles sent to Japan in 1814 to negotiate the British trade, and who apparently stayed in Nagasaki for four months, Raffles prepared various reports and conducted intensive correspondence regarding the prospects of trade with Japan. These reports were to provide a rational setting for his grandiose schemes in general and for the possible fortune to be made by trading with Japan in particular.

It is unclear how much of the opinion on the Japanese was Ainslie's and how much was Raffles' own elaboration. Nevertheless, it is contended here that to facilitate British willingness to venture into trade with Japan, Raffles and perhaps also Ainslie were more than willing to promote the status of the Japanese to honorary whites. Upgrading the Japanese could be made easier by downgrading the Chinese. Therefore, never before was the gap between the Japanese and the Chinese in national character made so wide: "For a people who have had very few, if any, external aids," Raffles reasoned, "the Japanese cannot but rank high in the scale of civilization. The Chinese have been stationary at least as long as we have known them but the slightest impulse seems sufficient to give a determination to the Japanese character which would progressively improve until it attained the same height of civilization with the European."⁷⁷

The most influential testimony on late Tokugawa Japan, however, was the writings of the German physician and naturalist Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866). The erudite von Siebold, who was employed by the Dutch mission in Nagasaki in the 1820s as Kaempfer had been over a century earlier, took special interest in the origins of the Japanese. Reviewing previous writings on the theme, von Siebold examined four notions regarding Japanese ancestry: they were descendants of the Chinese, of the so-called Tartaric race, of a mixture of more Asian races, or of the aborigines of the archipelago.⁷⁸ Like Kaempfer, von Siebold disputed the Chinese hypothesis because of historical evidence, differences in language, and physical traits.⁷⁹ He noted, curiously, that the hair color of young Japanese ranged from brown to blond and that among the higher classes the skin color was white and pinkish red ("as among our European women"), whereas the lower classes ranged from copper red to sallow earthlike colors. Finally, following Thunberg, von Siebold minutely compared the Japanese eyes with those of the surrounding peoples and found them simultaneously similar yet unique.⁸⁰ Von Siebold found the Japanese to resemble the Koreans and the inhabitants of Hokkaido, and he concluded, "the Japanese have all the organic characteristics of Mongol conformation, the oblique position of the eye included; but they seem to be the least uncomely of that ugly race."⁸¹

Another glimpse of the forbidden country was reported by the crew of the British vessel *Morrison*, which sailed to Japan in 1837 in an attempt to open its ports on the pretense of returning Japanese sailors to their motherland. Although the Japanese prevented the *Morrison* by gun fire from entering two Japanese ports, the short negotiation allowed the crew to obtain a fresh look at local people. The Japanese, noted Peter Parker, the medical missionary of the expedition, were characterized by a healthy appear-

ance: “They are above the common stature of Chinese or Europeans. Their complexion much fairer than the Chinese.”⁸² Notwithstanding the violent reception and the heavy influence of Eurocentric physiognomic theories of his day, Parker’s portrayal of the Japanese was complimentary, perhaps a reflection of his respect for the unyielding natives. “Phrenologically speaking,” he wrote, in keeping with the vogue, “they had fine heads. Their facial angle is large; they have high and broad foreheads, and the ‘cincipital region’ is very high and capacious. Their muscles were full, giving them an athletic appearance.”⁸³

A year before the first appearance of Commodore Perry on the Japanese coast, the English Journalist Charles MacFarlane completed a comprehensive account of the Japanese.⁸⁴ His book was based on earlier European records as well as on the recollections of a dubious military officer, called James Drummond, who allegedly resided in Japan, “passing for a Dutchman.”⁸⁵ MacFarlane followed Kaempfer (whose book was reprinted by two publishers in 1852 and 1853) and von Siebold in rejecting the Chinese origins of the Japanese by reason of different language and religion, arguing that “the stock to which they really belong is the great Mongol race . . . which now fills the undefined country of Tartary, a great part of the Russian empire, and central Asia.”⁸⁶ MacFarlane depicted their features as follows: “Their eyes show their Mongol origin, not being round, but oblong and small, their hair is black, thick, and shining, and their noses, although not flat, are rather thick and short. Their complexion is yellowish.”⁸⁷

General books on race and geography that mentioned Japan in this epoch were based on a short list of primary sources—mainly Kaempfer, Thunberg, and perhaps von Siebold—as well as on several secondary sources. In 1817, the leading French zoologist and anthropologist, Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), who two decades earlier had thrilled the members of the Institut National de France talking about an extinct mammoth, joined the racial debate. Although he had at first rejected the notion of racial hierarchy, Cuvier divided mankind into three unequal races. The Negroid races, the “hordes [that] . . . have always remained in a state of total barbarism,” he believed, approached the primates. The Japanese, however, were in a higher position. Together with the Koreans and “nearly all the hordes which extend to the north-east of Siberia,” they were classified as members of the Mongolian race.⁸⁸

The leading writer on race in that period, the famous English ethnologist and philologist James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848), wrote at length about the Japanese in his monumental *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, first published in 1813. Prichard classified the Japanese as a “race of truly Turanian type” and maintained that they belonged to the

same race or family as their neighbors, the Chinese and the Koreans, despite their linguistic differences. "If we regard their physical characteristics," he explained, "one sort or stock of people, no human races bear a stronger resemblance. . . . They all have the same physical type."⁸⁹

Three decades later, following the defeat of China in the Opium War, European writers and scholars scarcely mentioned the Japanese in the same breath with their Chinese neighbors. Robert Latham, the vice president of the British Ethnological Society and author of a major textbook on race, classified the Japanese in 1850 as members of the Peninsular Mongoloidæ, in which he also included the Koreans, the Ainu, the Koriaks, and the Kamskadales (the last two peoples inhabited East Siberia and Kamchatka).⁹⁰ The American anthropologist Charles Pickering, whose book *The Races of Man and Their Distribution* was published in 1848, offered another hypothesis but admitted to having difficulties in classifying the Japanese. Pickering, who had the opportunity to observe five Japanese fishermen brought by an American whaler to Hawaii, found them to be "short, rather stout built men, with the complexion nearly as dark as in the Hawaiians."⁹¹ After some hesitation, he defined the Japanese as members of the Malay race, in which he included the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, Indo-China, Malaya, most of the islands of the Pacific Ocean, the west coast of North America, and the Caribbean islands.⁹²

Japan Rediscovered: The Death of the Old Discourse

Well informed by earlier writings, Perry's scholars were not surprised by what they saw in Japan. Apart from haphazard portrayals of people's countenances, the Americans did not mention any racial matters: they neither discussed Japanese origins nor compared them with other peoples. In various memoirs, Perry (1794–1858) and his crew referred to the custom of tooth blacking among women and the femininity of the interpreters, but they avoided using racial terms.⁹³ The first British visitors sent back similar reports. Lawrence Oliphant (1829–88), an author and traveler who joined the Lord Elgin's mission to China and Japan in 1857–59 and who wrote its narrative, also noted the "ghastly" appearance of the Japanese women but refrained from raising any racial issues.⁹⁴ It is more than likely that all these pioneers considered the Japanese to be Asians and did not think that there was anything new to elaborate beyond what had been known. Until 1860, writers of popular anthologies on Japan reiterated much of Kaempfer's narrative, updated with racial concepts of the period. Others elaborated further the distinction between the Japanese and Chinese that Kaempfer and Charlevoix had established a century earlier.⁹⁵

In the following decades, however, Westerners produced an immense amount of data regarding Japan and its people, surpassing anything that had ever been written before. New scientific trends, such as racial determinism and the theory of evolution, changed their view of the Other in general, and of the Japanese in particular. The old discourse, a relatively mild racist approach that lacked an in-depth perspective on power relations, had been overcome by the birth of a new discourse. On certain issues it only crystallized earlier biases: newcomers perceived the Japanese complexion as more yellow than ever before, and their countenance uglier. Totally novel, however, were new scientific theories that explicitly placed the Japanese, among other peoples, at a lower evolutionary stage than the white race.⁹⁶

Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did racial antagonism attain full maturity. In an era in which the sun never set on British soil, the great imperial powers of Europe as well as the United States began to justify their economic exploitation of other peoples with theories of racial superiority and inevitable dominance. Japan, in turn, could no longer remain silent to Western racism. In the century that followed the end of its seclusion, Japan was poised to launch an intense struggle with the West not only to secure and later extend its physical sovereignty (on the account of its neighboring nations) but also to free itself from European labels inscribed centuries earlier.

As a part of a broader racial discourse that took place in Europe during a period in which there was little contact with Japan, the early discourse on the Japanese race is fascinating. With virtually no diplomatic, military, or commercial contacts between major European states and Japan, Japanese national status *vis-à-vis* the Europeans became an unexplored mystery. These static relations, however, could not prevent the Japanese decline in racial terms. The color transformation of the Japanese in European eyes, and the increasingly disparaging descriptions regarding their appearance, show the human tendency to categorize people according to collective status and suggest that stereotypes of racial attractiveness derive from categorization processes linking status and appearance. Finally, these changes show both how prejudice tends to distort perception and how perception, in turn, may corrupt emotions.

Notes

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- 1 Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, ed. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, vol. 2 (London, 1903), 253.
- 2 See Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*. Second corrected ed. (Berkeley, CA, 1967), 10-14; Charles Ralph Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550-1770* (Hong Kong, 1968), 2.
- 3 P. Huard, "Depuis quand avons-nous la notion d'une race jaune?" *Institut Indochinois pour l'Etude de l'Homme* 4 (1942): 40, cited in Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. (Hong Kong, 1992), 11.
- 4 In Armando Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, vol. 1 (London, 1944), 128-31, cited in Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, 452, n. 8. As for the debate, see *Ibid.*, 11-13.
- 5 Cited in Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, 25.
- 6 Cited in Joaquín F. Pacheco, Francisco de Cárdenas, and Luis Torres de Mendoza, eds. *Colección de documentos inéditos, relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de América y Océania*, vol. 5 (Madrid, 1866), 117-205. For English translation see E. W. Dahlgren, "A contribution to the history of the discovery of Japan," *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society* 11 (1912-1913): 239-60.
- 7 For a summary of the report, see Henry James Coleridge, *The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier*, vol. 2 (London, 1890), 216-22.
- 8 The letter has several versions. For a full version see Georg Schurhammer and Josef Wicki, *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta, 1535-1552* (Rome, 1944-1945); for English excerpts see Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, 37.
- 9 Alessandro Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias Orientalis (1542-1564)*, ed. Josef Wicki (Rome, 1944), 128; for English excerpts of this book, see Michael Cooper, ed., *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640* (Berkeley, CA, 1965), 4.
- 10 Bernardino de Avila Girón, "Relación del Reino de Nippon," *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 37 (1934), 17-18.
- 11 João Rodrigues, *História da Igreja do Japão*, ed. João do Amaral Abranches Pinto, vol. 1 (Macao, 1954-1956), 167-68; for English excerpts, see Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, 37-38.
- 12 In Samuel Purchas, ed., *Purchas His Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travells by Englishmen and Others* (London, 1625). The quotation is from a reprint published in Glasgow by James MacLehose and Sons in 1905-6, vol. 3, 445. For similar descriptions published in England at the same period, see Thomas Rundall, ed., *Memorials of the Empire of Japon: In the XVI and XVII Centuries* (London, 1850), 5.
- 13 Robert Parke's translation of Juan González de Mendoza, *Historie of the Great and Mightie Kindome of China* (London, 1588), cited in Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New Haven, CT, 1990), 66.
- 14 For the idea that the Japanese and Chinese are descendants of the ten tribes, see Pedro Morejon, *Historia y Relación de lo sucedido en los Rerinos de Iapon . . . (1515-1619)*, vol. 2 (Lisbon, 1621), 59; for English excerpts, see Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, 23. The link between the Japanese and the Tartars, rather than the Chinese, provides perhaps a clue to European attitudes toward the Japa-

- nese character and even more toward their military prowess in this period. Only little earlier, the Tartars, as the Mongols were called, were still regarded in Europe with utter horror, and any reference to them implied infernal origins, cannibalism, and atrocities. See G. Guzman, “Reports of Mongol cannibalism in the thirteenth century Latin sources,” in *Discovering New Worlds*, ed. Scott D. Westrem (New York, 1991); C. A. Connell, “Western views of the origins of the Tartars: an example for the influence of myth in the second half of the thirteenth century,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1973): 115–37.
- 15 Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549–1650*, 401–5.
 - 16 9 October 1561, cited in Georg Schurhammer, *Die Disputationen des P. Cosme de Torres, S.J., mit den Buddhisten in Yamaguchi im Jahre 1551* (Tokyo, 1929), 94. For an English translation of this letter, see Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, 40.
 - 17 Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan* (St. Louis, 1980), 127.
 - 18 Giovanni Pietro Maffei, *Historiarum Indicarum libri XVI. Selectarum item ex India epistolarum eodem interprete libri IV* (Florence, 1588), 488, cited in Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1966), 707.
 - 19 J. F. Moran. *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London, 1993), 97.
 - 20 Richard Hakluyt, ed., *Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1589), 782.
 - 21 João Rodrigues, *História da Igreja do Japão*, vol. 1, 169, cited in Cooper, *They Came to Japan*, 37.
 - 22 The Jesuit Gaspar Vilela depicted Koreans in 1571 as “white in color”; cited in Johannes Laures, “Koreas erste Berührung mit dem Christentum,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und religionswissenschaft* 40 (1956): 177–89, 282–87. Four years later, Martin de Rada described the Chinese people of Taybin as “white and well-built”; Gaspar de San Augustin, *Conquistas de las islas Philipinas* (Madrid, 1698); for English translation, see Charles R. Boxer, ed., *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1953), 243–310. The detailed description of the Chinese made by Mateo Ricci was rather exceptional for the period. The Chinese, he said, “are white (but nearer the South more browne) with thinne beards (some having none) with staring haire, and late growing: their wholly blacke; eyes narrow, of egge forme, blacke and standing out; the nose very little, and scarcely standing forth; ears meane: in some Provinces they are square faced,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. 12, 450.
 - 23 Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 282.
 - 24 Gaspar da Cruz, *Treatise in which the Things of China are Related at great Length, with Their Particularities, as Likewise of the Kingdom of Ormuz*, (Evora, 1569); for the English translation, see Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 44–239.
 - 25 Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549–1650*, 81, 218. For the attitude of the Jesuits and other Christian orders to admission of indigenous people to their society in South America, see Stuart B. Schwartz, “The formation of a colonial identity in Brazil,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Padgen (Princeton, NJ, 1987), 15–50; and Anthony Padgen, “Identity formation in Spanish America,” in Canny and Padgen, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World*, 51–93.

- 26 See, for example, a letter Adams wrote to his wife, in Rundall, *Memorials of the Empire of Japon*, 18–32; Sir William Foster, ed., *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East, 1602–1617*, vol. 1 (London, 1896–1902), 142–52. For Adams's life, see William Corr, *Adams the Pilot: The Life and Times of Captain William Adams, 1564–1650* (Sandgate, 1995).
- 27 Interestingly, the encounter with the Europeans seemed to have a much greater effect on the Japanese, who expressed their puzzlement and amazement with the physique of the “other” in writings and iconographies. See Ronald P. Toby, “The ‘Indianness’ of Iberia and changing Japanese iconographies of other,” in *Implicit Understanding: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, 1994), 323–51.
- 28 Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, 1989), 31.
- 29 Pierre Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism* (New York, 1967), 11.
- 30 George Mariscal, *Contradictory Subjects: Quevedo, Cervantes, and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Culture* (Ithaca, 1991), 42.
- 31 Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, 827.
- 32 For early European denigration of other races at the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1963), 410–6.
- 33 Charles R. Boxer, “The color question in the Portuguese Empire,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 47 (1962): 113–38.
- 34 Phillips argues that this kind of dependency of the European traders and missionaries in China largely accounts for the changing medieval attitudes toward the Mongols from “the almost supernatural bringers of doom” to a “benign and trustworthy and potential ally against the world of Islam,” in Seymour Phillips, “The outer world of the European middle ages,” in *Implicit Understanding: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, 1994), 23–63.
- 35 On criteria for distinguishing discourses, see Ian Parker, *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* (London, 1992), 6–20.
- 36 Although in “classic” Western writings Japan has been depicted as a closed country (*sakoku*) during 1637–1854, the idea of a complete isolation has been widely challenged in recent years. See, for example, Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ, 1984).
- 37 François Caron and Joost Schouten, *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan & Siam* (London, 1663). The quotation is from a reprint of the English edition under the same title, edited with introduction, notes, and appendixes by Charles R. Boxer (London, 1935), 56. On the life of Caron, see the introduction by Boxer in the 1935 volume.
- 38 Caron and Schouten, *A True Description*, 36.
- 39 Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan*, trans. Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu, 1999), 357, 361.
- 40 Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan: Giving an Account of the Ancient and Present State and Government of that Empire* (London, 1727), 81.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 92
- 43 *Ibid.* In a later part of the text, Kaempfer grew unsure about his speculation

- and returned to the “Chinese hypothesis”: “There is a mixture in their blood of the fire and impetuosity of the Tartars, and the ferocity and calmness of the Chinese,” *Ibid.*, appendix, 59.
- 44 The first publication of Kaempfer’s German manuscript was in an English translation published in 1727. Recent studies have drawn attention to the numerous mistakes in that translation, which was later translated back to German. Although the text has been retranslated recently, the original translation, rather than the original text, has seminal significance to this study. See Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey’s introduction in Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer’s Japan*, 1–21; see also Wolfgang Michel, “His story of Japan: Engelbert Kaempfer’s manuscript in a new translation,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 55 (2000): 109–20.
 - 45 On ancient historiography, see Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago, 1988), 7.
 - 46 Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale du Japon* (Paris, 1736); excerpts reprinted in Peter Kapitza, ed., *Japan in Europe: Texte und Bildokumente zur europäischen Japankenntnis von Marco Polo bis Wilhelm von Humboldt*, vol. 2 (München, 1990), 336.
 - 47 In Tobias George Smollett, *The Present State of All Nations, Containing a Geographical, Natural, Commercial, and Political History of All the Countries in the Known World* (London, 1769), excerpts reprinted in Kapitza, *Japan in Europe*, vol. 2, 592.
 - 48 John B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 1.
 - 49 Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, 418–22.
 - 50 For English excerpts from Bernier’s work, see James Sidney Slotkin, ed., *Reading in Early Anthropology* (Chicago, 1965), 94.
 - 51 Carl von Linne, *Systema Naturae* (Stockholm, 1758–59), 20–32, in Slotkin, *Reading in Early Anthropology*, 178. See also Carl von Linne, *A General System of Nature* (London, 1806).
 - 52 Blumenbach’s fifth race, the Malay, was to add another element of complication to the racial classification of the Japanese a century later. See Johannes Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*, 3rd ed. (Gottingen, 1795); for an English translation see Thomas Bendyshe, ed., *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter* (London, 1865), 145–276.
 - 53 Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, vol. 2 (London, 1774), 111.
 - 54 For the history of the European idea, see Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, 1957).
 - 55 Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 101.
 - 56 Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1968), 96.
 - 57 Pierre van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York, 1981), 125.
 - 58 Kaempfer, *The History of Japan*, 95.
 - 59 George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, vol. 3, *The History of Man and Quadrupeds* (London, 1812), 443.
 - 60 See Rotem Kowner, “Effect of group status on physical attractiveness pref-

- erences—from the Japanese case to a general cognitive perspective,” *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs* 122 (1996): 215–48.
- 61 George Psalmanazar, *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* (London, 1704), 223; travelers at this epoch also continued to describe the Chinese as fair. The French Jesuit Lewis Le Comte, for example, remarked on their skin color: “they are naturally as fair as we, especially towards the north,” in Lewis Le Comte, *Memoirs and Remarks Made in above Ten Years Travels through the Empire of China* (London, 1697), 127.
 - 62 See the chapter “Psalmanaazaar, confidence-man,” Rodney Needham, *Exemplars* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), 75–116.
 - 63 Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de l’Établissement, des Progrès et de la Décadence du Christianisme dans l’Empire du Japon* (Rouen, 1715), excerpts reprinted in Kapitzka, *Japan in Europe*, vol. 2, 125–30.
 - 64 John Hunter, *Inaugural Dissertation: On the Variety of Man* (Edinburgh, 1785), reprinted in Bendsyshe, *The Anthropological Treatises*, 357–94; Johannes Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (Göttingen, 1775); for an English translation, see Bendsyshe, *The Anthropological Treatises*, 65–143. In the third edition of his book, Blumenbach was more explicit about this color. See Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*, in Bendsyshe, *The Anthropological Treatises*, 209.
 - 65 Karl Peter Thunberg, *Travels in Europe, Africa, and Asia: Performed between the Years 1770 and 1779*, vol. 3 (London, 1793–1795), 251–52.
 - 66 Thunberg, *Travels in Europe*, vol. 3, 251–252.
 - 67 Although Japanese officials certainly improved their treatment of the Dutch mission, the local population of Nagasaki remained somewhat distant and suspicious. On the Japanese attitude toward the Dutch in Nagasaki, see Charles R. Boxer, *Jan Compagnie in Japan, 1600–1817* (Hague, 1936), 126–29.
 - 68 Thunberg, *Travels in Europe*, vol. 3, 29.
 - 69 As early as in 1670, the government in Batavia denounced the “recklessness and thoughtlessness” of many Dutch sea officers in Japan. See Charles, R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London, 1965), 238n5.
 - 70 Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York, 1968), 98.
 - 71 Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America* (Boulder, CO, 1993), 22; see also Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London, 1977); and Michael Banton, *Racial Consciousness* (Essex, 1988).
 - 72 For the attitudes toward China at this period, see Harold Robert Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York, 1958); Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London, 1967).
 - 73 Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* (London, 1799), 135.
 - 74 See Friedrich von Schlegel, “Über die Sprach und Weisheit der Inder,” in *Friedrich Schlegel’s Sämmtliche Werke*, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Vienna, 1846).
 - 75 Vasily Mikhailovich Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan, during the Years 1811, 1812, and 1813, with Observations on the Country and the People*, vol. 3 (London, 1824), 9–11.
 - 76 Stamford Raffles, *Report on Japan to the Secret Committee of the English East India Company*, ed. M. Paske-Smith (Richmond, 1971), iv; the report was written during 1812–16 and was published for the first time in Kobe in 1929. See also

- M. Paske-Smith, *Western Barbarians in Japan and Formosa in Tokugawa Days, 1603–1868* (Kobe, 1930), 130–1.
- 77 Raffles, *Report on Japan*, iv–v.
- 78 Philipp Franz von Siebold, *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan*, vol. 1 (Würzburg, 1897), 281. This text originally appeared in the Transactions of the Batavian Society (Batavia) in 1832.
- 79 Von Siebold, *Nippon*, I, 281–87.
- 80 Von Siebold, *Nippon*, I, 299–303.
- 81 M. Busk, *Manners and Customs of the Japanese in the Nineteenth Century, from the Accounts of Recent Dutch Residents in Japan, and the Work of Dr. Ph. Fr. von Siebold* (New York, 1842), 23.
- 82 Peter Parker, *Journal of an Expedition from Singapore to Japan, with a Visit to Loo-Choo* (London, 1838), 43.
- 83 Parker, *Journal of an Expedition*, 43.
- 84 For the intensified popular publications in the first half of the 1850s in the United Kingdom, see Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation, 1850–80* (Houndsmills, 1987), 1–20.
- 85 Charles MacFarlane, *Japan: An Account, Geographical and Historical, from the Earliest Period at Which the Islands Composing This Empire Were Known to Europeans, Down to the Present Time; and the Expedition Fitted out in the United States, Etc.* (London, 1852), viii.
- 86 MacFarlane, *Japan*, 162.
- 87 MacFarlane, *Japan*, 164.
- 88 In Earl W. Count, ed., *This is Race: An Anthology Selected from the International Literature on the Races of Man* (New York, 1950), 46. See also William Coleman, *George Cuvier, Zoologist* (Cambridge, MA, 1964).
- 89 James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, vol. 4 (London, 1851–60), 518, 528. Prichard included in the “Turanian race” the Mongolian, Turkish, and Tungusian types (612–13).
- 90 Robert Gordon Latham, *The Natural History of the Varieties of Man* (London, 1850), 273–81.
- 91 Charles Pickering, *The Races of Men and Their Distribution* (London, 1848), 117. Dr. Judd, of the Hawaiian mission, informed Pickering that the five men were members of the lowest class. Judd said he had seen some educated Japanese in Matsumai who “appeared to him, unlike the Chinese, identical in physical race with the Hawaiians” (116).
- 92 See a map of geographical distribution of the races of the world in Pickering, *The Races of Men*, 4–5.
- 93 See Matthew Calbraith Perry, *The Japan Expedition 1852–1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*, ed. Roger Pineau (Washington, DC, 1968), 190; James Morrow, *A Scientist with Perry in Japan: The Journal of Dr. James Morrow*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947), 122–3. For similar impressions, see also Matthew Calbraith Perry and Francis L. Hawk, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan under the Command of Commodore M. C. Perry, U.S.N.* (New York, 1952), 77.
- 94 Lawrence Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin’s Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, ’58, ’59*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1859), 113.
- 95 See, for example, Marquis Alfred de Moges, *Recollections of Baron Gros’s Embassy to China and Japan in 1857–58* (London, 1860), 332, 334; James White,

- “Lord Elgin’s Mission to China and Japan,” *Blackwood’s Magazine* 87 (1860): 255–77.
- 96 For a discussion of the Western racial view of Japan in the second part of the nineteenth century, see Rotem Kowner, “Lighter than Yellow, but Not Enough: Western Discourse on the Japanese ‘Race’, 1854–1904,” *Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 103–31; Joseph Michael Henning. *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York, 2000).