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## Issues of Scope in Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations: An Analysis of U.S. American Concepts in the Japanese Context

### Abstract

In this article I examine problems with the application of the comparative method in cross-national studies of race and ethnic relations. I argue that the findings of different studies can be shaped in important ways by the way investigators specify the scope and scale of the core variable in the analysis – 'race and ethnic relations'. Specifically, I argue that problems can arise when comparative analyses conceptualize race and ethnic relations in terms of a limited number of qualitatively distinct configurations rather than as a highly variable, multi-dimensional construct. The former approach often tempts investigators to 'force' cases to fit into an artificially limited set of categories. The latter approach not only admits the possibility that some dimensions of race and ethnic relations vary in qualitative ways while others vary quantitatively along a continuum, but it also entertains the possibility that these different dimensions can vary independently and do not necessarily occur in pre-determined configurations.

I argue that studies of race and ethnic relations in Japan have suffered from the problem of making a specific case fit into one of a limited number of

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qualitatively distinct types of 'race and ethnic relations'. One area where this can be seen is in the common practice of analyzing 'race and ethnic relations' in Japan primarily in terms of ethnic stratification and minority-majority relations. This approach is better suited for the United States than it is for Japan. Thus, comparative analysis of the two systems of race and ethnic relations would be better served by recognizing that the ethnic stratification dimension of race and ethnic relations may be less central to the overall configuration of ethnic relations in Japan compared to the United States and then analyzing ethnic relations in Japan accordingly.

Cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations are one of the most popular disciplines in contemporary sociology. Generally guided by U.S. American and Western concepts, a number of inquiries have been conducted for the sake of illustrating cross-national conformity and testing the applicability of U.S. American perspectives in cross-national settings (Zuberi 2001). However, there is an imbalance in the nature of explanation in comparative perspectives (Scherhorn 1978 [1970], McMichael 1990, Wong 1999). Specifically, Kiser and Hechter (1991, 9) point out that 'scope (generality) and analytic power have been minimized and descriptive accuracy has become the predominant criterion for constructing and judging explanations'. In this article, I argue that ignorance of the scope and scale of the variable 'race and ethnic relations' makes investigators unaware of the multi-dimensional aspects and complexities in their findings.[2]

## Sociological Studies of Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations in Terms of the Comparative Method

The basic premise of comparative race and ethnic relations is that one of the specific components in one nation (e.g., sociohistorical construction of race and ethnicity, existence of racial and ethnic conflict, and cultural influence on racial ideology) is compared with its analogue in another and then investigators explore the respective national contexts in order to uncover the sources of the similarities

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[2] Marger (1994, 12) notes that 'because most of research in race and ethnic relations has been the product of American sociologists dealing with the American experience, we are often led to assume that patterns evident in the United States are found in other societies as well'.

and differences that they have found (Fredrickson 1995). Namely, the unit of analysis is unconsciously regarded as representing nations in particular.

However, one can be skeptical of the results of discussing each of the cases in question in roughly equal depth and detail (Elder 1976, Lieberson 1980, Skocpol and Somers 1980, Stone 1985) for the following two intertwined reasons: (1) there emerge unclear scope and scale of the variable, and (2) racial and ethnic conflicts are a common issue observable all over the world (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Omi and Winant 1994, Mills 1997, Goldberg 2002). Therefore it is easy for investigators to be misled into unsatisfactory specifications and generalizations (Wong 1999). In the following section, I discuss problems with the application of the comparative method in comparative studies of race and ethnic relations (e.g., Reuter 1945, Berrenman 1960, Rokkan ed. 1968, Vallier 1971, Payne 1973, Elder 1976, Wiatr 1977, Berting et al. 1979, Bonnell 1980, Ragin 1987, Fredrickson 1998). Two central issues associated with the variable are discussed: the difficulty in specifying its scope and scale, and the extraction of the variable from its social and cultural contexts.

## Scope and Scale of Race and Ethnic Relations

The first important methodological issue is associated with the dimension and definition of the variable. Comparative researchers have fundamentally agreed that race and ethnic relations must be studied as a sufficiently 'large structure' (e.g.,

entire nations such as the U.S. and Japan), which is large enough to encompass the entire unit of analysis as the main explanatory focus of macro-social influences (Berting et al. 1979, Fredrickson 1987, Ragin 1995). Therefore, race and ethnic relations are defined as a sense of group position that involves more than one particular group in a society (Stone 2003). However, the complexities of substantiating the variable are seen in the way different racial and ethnic groups are contextualized in a large national discourse. In fact, there are both conflicting and interchangeable remarks regarding the concept of race and ethnic relations.

The first major argument is that group relations have to be analyzed in terms of relative power, or minority groups are not to be depicted in isolation from the majority group in a society (e.g., Barth 1969, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970], Stone and Dennis 1985, 2003, Hudson 1999). For example, Abrams (1982, 248) states:

> The bringing to life of the possibility of Sambo as an actual typical identity was a work of collaboration between slaves and masters – the working-out of primitively human identities for both within the framework of the inhuman conditions created by the power of the latter.

It is suggested that unilateral interpretation through the experiences of a certain minority group does not constitute a macro-social variable 'race and ethnic relations' (Stone and Dennis 2003), because such a viewpoint does not necessarily shape a framework to describe a particular group's relations with the majority group and the affiliated functions of social institutions. Thus, analyzing the minority and majority groups simultaneously is indispensable, as investigators are able to

acknowledge the importance of 'power' in their relations. Thus, researchers such as

Gelfand and Lee (1973) distinguish the definition of 'minority-majority' from that of

'subordination-domination'. Furthermore, it is suggested that studies of race and

ethnic relations ideally encompass all minority groups in a society. Stone (1985,

47) makes an important argument:

> A central issue in the comparative sociology of race relations is the manner in which power is distributed among the different groups in society. Few aspects of race relations can be understood without considering the way in which power is exercised throughout society, although it must be recognized that the nature and dynamics of power relationships is an exceedingly complex topic (emphasis added).

The second major argument is that to comprehensively examine race and

ethnic relations, one must study the belief and behavior of the majority, rather than

the minority (e.g., Hudson 1999). Bowser (1995, 286) argues the central motive

for maintaining the race myth is common across nations: 'to use government and

the economy to maintain and justify social stratification where racial identity has a

history of being used to confer advantage and disadvantages'. However, there

appears to be a shortcoming in this perspective, as the majority group is reluctant

to show their privileged status to maintain racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2001,

Stone and Dennis 2003).

A further issue associated with the dimension of the variable is that studying

minority-majority relations would not be necessarily sufficient to constitute a

macro-social pattern because the ideological aspects of race and ethnicity contain

cultural and historical influences as well. This is an important but difficult question because most people have multiple identities that are intertwined based on class, religion, region, and in complex interrelationships with race and ethnicity (Marger 1994, Ryang 1997, Wade 1997, Fredrickson 1998, Wong 1999, Gurr 2000). Moreover, Gurr (1973) argues that researchers must consider the scope of change; which groups in a society are affected by which changes, and to what extent.[3]

The difficulty specifying the scope and scale of the variable is also seen in determining a method (e.g., Smelser 1976), substantive focus (e.g., Ragin 1987),[4] and the unit of analysis. For example, by distinguishing cross-national comparisons from cross-cultural comparisons, Berting et al. (1979) argue that while nations constitute units in the former, ethnic groups within the nations are regarded as the unit in the latter. Bollen et al. (1993) argue that comparative researchers vary in how broadly or restrictively they define the topic.[5] Due to different arguments about the definitions of macroscopic viewpoints (see Gelfand and Lee 1973), Kohn (1987, 721) notes that 'finding a cross-national difference often requires that we curtain the scope of an interpretation'.

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[3] For example, after the end of slavery, former slave masters imported labourers such as Mexicans and Chinese to compete with black labor on the plantations. Although polarized racial identities between whites versus blacks  previously existed, those who are oppressed are interchangeable over time.

[4] Ragin (1987) states that the goals of case-oriented or qualitative investigation (examining similarities and differences among a limited number of cases) are causal analysis and historical interpretation. On the other hand, the primary goal of the variable-oriented (or quantitative) strategy (looking at relations between or among variables) is the testing of abstract hypotheses drawn from general theories. Following his classification, we will note that conventional cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations do not necessarily compliment his analytical framework.

[5] For example, Przeworski and Teune (1970) take the narrowest approach when they limit comparative research to studies that compare micro-level relationships in two or more social systems.

I would suggest an appropriate conceptual race and ethnic relations should utilize a variable at a macro level sufficient enough to represent the power dimensions in the unit of cross-national comparison at large. The major issue appears to be associated with the difficulty in specifying the scope and scale of the core variable 'race and ethnic relations', rather than the principles and underlying premises of the comparative method.

## Analytical Framework

Reuter (1945, 458) notes that 'race relations are a confused complex, in varying degrees, of opposition and agreement, friction and harmony, conflict and co-operation'. It is extremely difficult to extract race and ethnic relations, which reflect various aspects of a society, from their original context in order to make cross-national comparisons. Among a number of arguments regarding analytical frameworks in the comparative method, two core factors are identified and discussed: (1) assumptions of comparative framework and (2) cultural influences.

Fredrickson (1995, 591) argues that an investigator has to 'begin with the assumption that each of her cases may be equally distinctive, equally likely to embody a transnational pattern'. However, several comparative researchers argue that cross-national comparisons of race and ethnic relations within a limited number of cases lead to unsatisfactory conclusions. For example, Elder's (1976) discussion of cross-national generalizations rejects the arguments of national uniqueness or

limited cross-national comparability. Stone (1985) claims that concluding race and ethnic relations as essentially similar can be the result of equating circumstances that are in other important respects quite different.

Nevertheless, the comparative method proposes several frameworks for comparing numerically limited number of cases (e.g., comparisons of Japan and the U.S.). It is suggested the identification of subsets of nations sufficiently similar (structurally or contextually) permits meaningful within-subset comparisons. In order to do so, investigators first need to establish cross-national subsets and from those subsets develop limited cross-national generalizations (Elder 1976). Finding constituents of equivalent concepts will solve discrepancies in meanings for valid comparisons because concepts of race and ethnic relations significantly differ across nations. The comparable variable is identifiable through comparative equivalent forms such as social structure and social process, on condition that functions and structural definitions are met (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967).

Moreover, because the validity of abstracting specific traits from their structural-functional setting leaves room for a variety of interpretations (Dumont and Pocock 1957, Elder 1976), investigators would be able to make reliable assessments only by combining cross-national indicators (e.g., social system and structure) and nation-specific settings (e.g., social function) (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). The analysis of race and ethnic relations, therefore, could be either distinct from large macro-structural situations, or the variable could be a mutually

irreducible categorical principle (e.g., Abrams 1982, Mills 1997). Both distinctive and general features may appear by contrasting race and ethnic relations themselves cross-nationally, as macro-socially structured features.

On the other hand, establishing criteria of generic similarity and difference may be detrimental to the findings because the variable is context-bound and situational (Wade 1997). In addition, investigators have to bear in mind that comparisons are made to some extent by compromising the multiple forms of the variable by assuming that race and ethnic relations are telling limited features.

Another important factor for clarifying analytical frameworks is culture. Sowell (1994, 1) notes that 'the role of a particular people's cultural equipment or human capital is much clearer in an international perspective than in the history of one country'. However, the analytical framework loses its explanatory power unless investigators are aware of the cultural influence on social structures (Fredrickson 1995). Cultures unique to each nation, which contain proliferating meanings, privilege findings of race and ethnic relations (Smelser 1973, Lebra 1992) because culture frames important elements in race and ethnic relations, such as social systems, group formations, collective consciences, and ideologies (Berting et al., 1979, Gutierrez 1997, Wade 1997, Fredrickson 1998). Nevertheless, cultural influences are not perfectly transferable from one national context to another (Douglas 1978), which unavoidably make cross-national comparisons questionable.

Accordingly, definitions of the concepts are commonly provided in comparative studies, but their dimensions remain largely absent (Bollen et al. 1993).

As discussed, investigators face the extremely difficult task of specifying the scope and scale of the variable 'race and ethnic relations'. To accurately shape different modes of race and ethnic relations, it is suggested that the variable be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct to look for 'structural' differences, by paying attention to nation-specific settings and culturally established value orientations. Investigators should also be aware of the fact that complicated plural causations could be a significant problem since in each society, there exists a particular pattern of interdependent and intervening factors (Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970]).

## U.S. American Concepts of Race and Ethnic Relations in the Japanese Context [6]

U.S. American concepts and perspectives of race and ethnic relations are often employed for the analysis of the Japanese context.[7] In its broadest definition of the comparative method, this type of study still constitutes a cross-national comparison (e.g., Frederickson 1995, Stone and Dennis 2003). According to their

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[6] Following Doak (1997), I regard minority groups in Japan as 'ethnic' groups. However, it has to be noted that ethnic minorities in Japan have other implications such as 'colonial subject' and 'overseas national'. Marger (1994) points out that ethnicity is further separable into traits such as unique culture, sense of community, ethnocentrism, ascribed membership, and territoriality. For other definitions and clarifications of race and ethnicity, see Cashmore (1994) and Wade (1997).

[7] On the other hand, most of the research by Japanese academia is concerned with relatively new foreign laborers rather than historical ethnic minorities (e.g., Komai and Watado eds. 2000, Komai ed. 2002, Komai and Kondo eds. 2002).

most important explanatory factors, the compound of the literature is broken down into three defined but overlapping categories: (1) social configurations of ethnic minority groups; (2) ideological interpretations of the Japanese; and (3) features of social institutions and structures in terms of assimilation practice.

## Social Configurations of the Ethnic Minority Groups

The first category of the literature lays out configurations of ethnic groups in Japan implicitly or explicitly by comparisons with the social experiences of minority groups in the U.S.: the Burakumin or Eta as outcaste (e.g., Hah and Lapp 1978, De Vos 1992, Howell 1996, Weiner 1997, Lie 2001), the Korean and Chinese (e.g., Conde 1947, Lee and De Vos 1981, Hicks 1997, Ryang 1997, 2000, Fukuoka 2000), Ainus (e.g., Batchelor 1971, Peng and Geiser 1977, Howell 1994, Walker 2001),[8] Okinawans or Ryukyuans (e.g., Hicks 1997, Weiner 1997, Lie 2001), and relatively new Latin American workers of Japanese ancestry (e.g., Hicks 1997, Linger 2001, Roth 2002, Tsuda 2003). They are not only numerical minorities (for example, the total sum of Koreans and Chinese in Japan does not exceed one percent of Japan's total population), but are also all collectively regarded as 'non-Japanese' (Howell 1996).

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[8] The Ainu have resided in the upper north of Japan (Hokkaido). Due to their numerical under-representation and voluntary isolation from the modern economy, the Ainu's disadvantaged social status attributes to a stratifying element rather than class (Peng and Geiser 1977, Fitzhugh and Dubreuil 1999). Outdated literatures about the Ainu are not listed here.

Descriptions of these minority groups generally emphasize similarities to the U.S. cases. One classical example is seen in the way Western sociologists have observed the social configurations of the Burakumin. Their 'outcaste' status derives from the feudal system during the Edo period (1603-1867), in which the Edo shogunate created an outcaste class to satisfy the peasantry's low socioeconomic status. The Burakumin's minority status is therefore totally based on class stratification, not phenotypically determined type (e.g., Smythe 1951, Lie 2001).

However, Western researchers claim that the class discrimination against the Burakumin resembles the color discrimination of Western societies. Particularly, investigators such as Ogbu (1978) and DeVos (1992) argue that the best analogies for understanding the African American situation are not ethnic minorities of the usual sort but rather lower castes such as the Burakumin. Investigators have found functional parallels in the discrimination encountered by the Burakumin and African Americans, regardless of physical distinction.

These two groups' 'indistinguishable' minority status is based on the argument that racism has no essential relation to various visibly different physical characteristics (De Vos 1992). Fredrickson (2000, 84) argues that 'the essential element [of racism] is the belief, however justified or rationalized, in the critical importance of differing lines of descent and the use of that belief to establish or validate social inequality' (emphasis added). In a similar vein, De Vos (1992) claims that the bases for cross national generalization about caste or racism are the

psycho-cultural mechanisms involved; cultural differences would be suggested as sufficient criteria to constitute prejudice categories (emphasis added).

Although these statements emphasize contextual similarities by pointing out that racism is reducible to human psychology, these two groups' social disadvantages are not accounted for by the full dimension of race and ethnic relations. As discussed earlier, potential problems can arise when complicated factors such as culture (e.g., national consciousness) (Scheuch 1967, Elder 1976) are disaggregated to account for a particular form of discrimination. Furthermore, cross-national differences in the majority populations' motivations for racism are ignored. As a result, the Burakumin's social exclusion is much too generalized as if contemporary Japanese society has a 'caste-type' differentiation (see different arguments by Cornell 1970 and Howell 1996). This pattern is consistent with Schermerhorn's (1978 [1970]) argument that the theme of prejudice too often monopolizes attention to the neglect of social and structural conditions.

The lack of multilateral comparisons between Japan and the U.S. is apparent once we move our attention to Chinese and Koreans in Japan. With the exception of recent inflows of illegal workers, Japanese-born Chinese and Koreans in Japan have ancestors who were forced to migrate to Japan during World War II.[9] Researchers argue that Chinese in Japan do not really fit into the U.S. type of racial hierarchy

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[9] Regarding Koreans and Chinese in Japan, a number of researchers fail to distinguish recent immigrant workers from the long-term residents (see Lie 2001).

since they derive some degree of status by association with China, which is ranked relatively high because of its cultural legacy to Japan (Hicks 1997, Dikotter ed. 1999). Taguchi (1983-1984) claims that Koreans are simply regarded as 'foreigners' due to their different historical and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Korean minority status is not simply a result of class exploitation, rather it is a reaction to deeply rooted fears of cultural contamination or alteration of the pure Japanese identity (Lee and De Vos 1981, Weiner 1994). However, their major issue has been shifted to their psychological complexities, or the internal dilemma of whether maintaining a separate ethnic identity for themselves or accepting identity as Japanese (Ryang 1997).[10]

Kashiwazaki (2000) claims that continuity in the principle of 'assimilation or exclusion' (e.g., Hicks 1997) does not fully account for a contemporary Japanese society in which nationality and ethnic identity are substantially weakened. Koreans are able to assimilate by becoming totally invisible with the acquisition of Japanese nationality (Lee and De Vos 1981), but it involves becoming a 'perfect' Japanese, willing to abandon one's own ethnic traits (Taguchi 1983-1984, Morris-Suzuki 2002).

Studies focusing on different minority groups have shown us the issue of ethnic identity conflict (see Takenaka 2000). However, these different findings have

[10] As Schermerhorn (1978 [1970]) argues, primarily a problem of 'updating' obstructs a wider view of interpreting changes in ethnic relations in Japan.

resulted in inadequate specifications of ethnic stratification in Japan, in that social formation of minority-majority relation in Japan, particularly the difference between the U.S., has been scarcely discussed. In other words, the literature does not sufficiently meet a major premise of the comparative method: regarding 'race and ethnic relations' as a macro-dimensional construct, as particularly seen in Stone's (1985) argument (discussed earlier).

## Ideological Interpretations of the Japanese

The second group of literature focuses on Japanese ethnic identities. While Lee and De Vos (1981) claim racism exists regardless of obviously different physical components, others argue that there has been no intrinsic meaning to racism or a cultural barrier to social assimilation for the Japanese (Smythe 1951, Riesman and Riesman 1961, Taguchi 1983-1984, Lebra 1992, Hicks 1997, Fukuoka 2000, Lie 2001). Although Howell (1996) points to Japanese identity as a source of 'racism', it is almost invisible to most Japanese themselves.

Japan's denial of the historical existence of minority groups (De Vos 1993, Hicks 1997, Lie 2001) is marked by a 'mono-ethnic' society with a distinctive character such as the nation itself as an ethnic body (Taguchi 1983-1984, Doak 1997). Although Japanese ethnic homogeneity forces minorities to select either the abandonment of non-Japanese identity or the agony of institutionalized otherness, the majority does not use the racial categorization to block the access of ethnic

minorities. The establishment of a Japanese nation, which regards homogeneity as an essential element in its national ethos, obscures the disadvantaged situations of ethnic minorities (Beer 1981).

Creighton (1997) explains that the construction of Japanese ethnic and national identity is strongly tied to notions of uchi (inside) and soto (outside), and De Vos and Wagatsuma (1966, 1972) point to the notions of 'visibility' and 'invisibleness'. From the minorities' point of view, therefore, the essence of racism could be virtually the same between phenotypically distinguishable African Americans and undistinguishable ethnic minorities (particularly the Burakumin) in Japan. Nevertheless, Creighton (1997) argues that the otherness of foreigners has multiple loci. According to him, 'definitions of these soto Others, or 'outside Others', is often differentiated along sociological categories of race, confirming to the white, yellow, black continuum' (Creighton 1997, 212). In fact, the notion of minority exclusion in Japan and the ideology of whiteness in the U.S. appear to differ in a power analysis of race and ethnic relations between these two nations.

Weiner (1994) postulates that ethnic stratification in Japan is embedded in objective economic realities. However, Reubens (1981) claims that the concept of 'low-level workers' in Japan is distinct from the Western status, and it is not commonly used, understood, or socially disdained. He further points out that in a broad comparison with the U.S., the persons occupying lower social positions i

Japan are mostly not ethnic minorities. It is suggested that there is lack of assessment of economic determinants of 'racism' (Kashiwazaki 2000).

Minority-majority relations are compared quite interchangeably between the U.S. and Japan with studies highlighting interchangeable micro-level similarities on behalf of system-level features. For instance, Lee and De Vos (1981, 356) argue:

> Just as the so-called black problem in the United States is really a problem of developing an inclusive American identity, even so the Korean problem in Japan, of much smaller numerical proportions, is a Japanese problem related to a continuing myth of racial superiority.

Although the maintenance of Japanese identity boundaries is briefly discussed in the ideological dimension, the state of human motivation for the establishment of ethnic stratification in Japan seems to differ in tone from the arguments seen in the U.S.

Lie (2001) argues that the American accusation of Japanese racism seems misplaced, because Western researchers have been more likely to inflict derogatory comments on the Japanese, such as most Japanese people are 'passive racists'. It is very difficult to locate irrefutable evidence of Japanese 'racism' (Lie 2001) because the political context and particularly the role of emergent nationalism also explain social configurations of minority groups (Stone 1985).

## Japanese Social Institutions and Structures

The third category within the literature approaches Japanese ethnic relations in terms of institutional structure (Gelfand and Lee 1973, Schermerhorn 1978 [1970], Davis ed. 1979, Marger 1994, Bowser. ed. 1995, Mills 1997), following the idea that the reality of racism has to be accounted for in terms of variations in the economic, political and social balance of power (Cornell 1970, Stone 1985).

The literature focuses on the post-Second World War concepts of nationality and citizenship to account for Japanese ethnic relations (Lie 2001). Oguma (2002) points out that the Japanese are united not by belonging to the same ethnicity or race, but by national cohesion which separates Japanese from non-Japanese. Therefore, other concepts such as ethnicity and cultural differences became conterminous in the symbol of national cohesion. Being a Japanese became a primary basis for the differentiation of legal status, drawing a distinction between citizens/nationals and non-citizens/non-nationals (Kashiwazaki 2000). Researchers point out that the legal regulation of nationality enforces the Japanese mode of discrimination (Beer 1981, Taguchi 1983-1984, Beer 1981, Kashiwazaki 2000).

The issue of different conceptual components of 'racial' identity in Japan is also seen in the case of the U.S. Kashioka (1996) points to the optimistic view of attaining a 'melting pot' in the post-war U.S., in which the identity of a U.S. citizen

simply covered identities based on racial classifications.[11] In fact, it is difficult to specify the feature of contemporary U.S. American racial structure among different forms of social integrations, such as assimilation, amalgamation, cultural pluralism, and multiculturalism.

Tsuda (2003, 382-383) compares both nations by differentiating cultural assimilation from structural assimilation:

> In most cases, some level of cultural assimilation is necessary for socio-occupational mobility to occur. However, in some multiethnic societies such as the United States with a pluralistic national ideology, many minority individuals can frequently retain a certain amount of ethnic distinctiveness and cultural difference without jeopardizing their chances of socioeconomic integration and class mobility. . . In contrast, a type of 'hegemonic nationalism' (Medina 1997, 760) predominates in homogeneously conceived societies like Japan where cultural assimilation to the dominant majority group is a necessary prerequisite for social acceptance and socioeconomic integration. In such cases, minority groups that remain culturally different continue to face institutional discrimination, impending their social class mobility.

The development of ethnic stratification in Japan cannot be simply attributed to hegemonic Western thought, due to a number of historical and cultural factors in the Japanese context. In fact, Berting et al. (1979, 32) argue that 'there is a large and perhaps irreducible degree of indeterminacy about complex historical sequences involving large collectivities'.

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[11] Also see Winant's (2001) discussion on double consciousness or racial dualism.

**Issues of Scope and Scale in Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations**

The comparative method raises questions about the methods of cross-national comparisons, the scale and definition of units of comparison, the context of comparison and the cultural production and conditioning of particular forms of classification. The central problem is attributed to the extent to which an investigator specifies the scope and scale of the variable.

First, it appears that problems can arise when comparative analyses conceptualize race and ethnic relations in terms of a limited number of qualitatively distinct configurations rather than as a multi-dimensional construct. One example discussed in this paper is African American-Burakumin comparisons. Although findings emphasize a common form of discrimination experienced by these two groups, findings tend to assume that racism is merely deducible to human psychology (e.g., Reuter 1945, Fredrickson 2000), and thus structural differences across the nations are not necessarily observable. In fact, once other ethnic groups in Japan are included in the analysis, Japanese society shows quite different aspects (see earlier discussions on Chinese and Koreans in Japan). However, the exclusionary practices against minorities in Japan are regarded as having the same empirical effect as the practices found in the U.S., which is Fredrickson's (2000) concern (cited and discussed earlier).

Studies limited to the configurations of minority groups often tempt investigators to 'force' cases to fit into an artificially limited set of categories. Weiner (1994) argues that studies of racism have often been reduced to a preoccupation with the disadvantages associated with particular traits of minority groups. For example, in highlighting the outcaste status as the single defining factor of the Burakumin's minority status, a range of other factors (e.g., socioeconomic mobility of minorities and cultural influences) have been obscured (see Berting et al. 1979). In comparisons, these intermediate meanings of race and ethnic relations seem to be avoided when the researcher is clear about the social dimension and its implication of the variable.

Studies limited to the configurations of ethnic minority groups do not possess sufficient explanatory power for some adherents to the comparative method (e.g., Dumont and Pocock 1957; Wong 1999); although transnational patterns are observed in a limited manner (e.g., Fredrickson 1995), nation-specific elements are not determined to demonstrate the cross-national differences (e.g., Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). To give cross-national comparisons a clearer analytical framework, efforts have to be made to encompass a vast array of possible independent, intervening, and interdependent factors that define the functions of nation-specific elements in order to be incorporated in a more embracing synthesis (e.g., Przeworski and Teune 1966-1967). Because race and ethnic relations are context-bound, they are 'related to various social conformations in such a way that

their meaning is determined by the system, be it a culture, a historical period, a nation . . .' (Berting et al. 1979, 94).

Cross-national comparison by nature has to have analogy at its heart. However, social configurations of ethnic minorities in Japan are compared with its analogue in the U.S. cases in a large part in separation from intertwined social contexts (Reuter 1945, Beer 1981, Frederickson 1998). Namely, specific components are laid out to represent the large Japanese context as the macro-variable of 'race and ethnic relations'. These methodological issues and the unrevealed complex interplay of ethnic stratification lead to conflicting arguments about Japanese society in terms of the 'caste-type' stratification by Cornell (1970) and Howell (1996) (discussed earlier). Similar functions may be performed by differing means across nations (Fredrickson 1995), if a variety of dimensions such as the struggle over economic resources, political power, and cultural, symbolic and moral dimensions are included (see Wade 1997).

There is a good reason for being aware of the scope and scale of the variable. Fredrickson (1995, 604) claims that what we compare requires theoretical attention to the meanings of analytical categories. He asserts that John Dower's War Without Mercy enforces racist potentiality of American nationalism,[12] while Mills (1997, 81) gives Dower's evidence for his argument that 'the Japanese are

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[12] War Without Mercy is a comparison of the role of race in American and Japanese propaganda during World War II. Fredrickson (1995, 602) asserts that the Japanese were quite capable of racially

inheritors of the global Racial Contract'. As Fredrickson (1995) points out, the literature shows that while the total regularity is emphasized, the absolute uniqueness is not given enough attention. Therefore, investigators have to be clear about what facets are emphasized in their comparisons.

I discussed issues of scope as a consequence of the ignorance of the comparative method. Nevertheless, it seems that studies of race and ethnic relations in Japan have suffered from another problem of making a specific case fit into one of a limited number of qualitatively distinct types of 'race and ethnic relations'. One area where this can be seen is in the common practice of analyzing 'race and ethnic relations' in Japan primarily in terms of ethnic stratification dimension, or minority-majority relations.

U.S. American researchers have adopted a racial discourse in the U.S. to conceptualize the Japanese as ethnic dominants. However, the literature discussed above strongly suggests Japanese mode of ethnic relations does not constitute a U.S. type of race and ethnic relations due to a lack of shared components, such as minorities' economic disadvantage (e.g., Gelfand and Lee 1973, Bowser ed. 1995) and the racial attitude of the majority. Rather, the central component of ethnic hierarchy in Japan is attributed to identity issues of ethnic minorities (e.g., abandonment of non-Japanese identities in favor of the pure Japanese identity). It

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stereotyping their American antagonists and proclaiming their own innate superiority to the Yankee 'devils'.

is likely that the U.S. American concept of race and ethnic relations are used interchangeably and in various guises to account for the Japanese context, but the difference in the major components are not necessarily deducible even from large macro-level inquiries, unless the investigator identifies the driving force of social integration (see Weiner 1994).

Although the literature suggests macro-structural similarities in race and ethnic relations between the U.S. and Japan, findings are not persuasive enough to deduce the magnitude of minority-majority relations peculiar to the Japanese cases (Bower 1995). For example, the literature explains the attribution of Japanese ethnic relations to a multiplicity of social, cultural and historical reasons, but they often fail to discuss how innate national affiliations such as 'uchi' (inside), 'soto' (outside), and 'invisibility' are unique to Japan. To put forth an interpretation of the comparisons, researchers are required to observe cases by assuming that comparisons with careful considerations of macro-social contexts may still lead to empirically insufficient substantiations.

How one thinks about race and ethnic relations is often limited and distorted by the received knowledge that racism is ubiquitous in the world (Schlesinger 1943, Winant 2001). However, this is a very different matter from saying that the literature provides partial accounts, or we cannot examine cross-national similarities and differences between the U.S. and Japan because of the absence of any 'true' comparative studies; this is to say that as a consequence, discussions

without clear scale of race and ethnic relations result in natural outcomes similar to Omi and Winant's (1994) world-wide view of the definition of racial stratification.

Strictly speaking, there are many perceptions of Japanese ethnic stratification but they do not necessarily clarify for us the breadth in subtleties of Japanese ethnic relations. Nevertheless, conceptualizing race and ethnic relations as a multi-dimensional construct not only admits to the possibility that some dimensions of race and ethnic relations vary in qualitative ways while others vary quantitatively along a continuum, but it also entertains the possibility that these different dimensions can vary independently and do not necessarily occur in pre-determined configurations.

The problem of alternative and competing narratives of Japan has been left largely unexamined (Doak 1997). Institutional and functional analyses emphasize how ethnic stratification is maintained and rationalized in the Japanese context, to emphasize empirical overlaps between the U.S. and Japan. However, the literature notes that Japanese ethnic stratification is not deducible from the examination of the national identities of the Japanese (e.g., Howell 1996, Hudson 1999). Furthermore, neither class distinction nor the color-line take precedence over minority status classifications (see Reubens 1981). Therefore, comparative analysis of the two systems of race and ethnic relations would be better served by recognizing that the ethnic stratification dimension may be less central to the

overall configuration of ethnic relations in Japan compared to the U.S. and then analyzing ethnic relations in Japan accordingly.

## Conclusions

In this paper I provide a sociological explanation for a problem I have identified in the theorization of comparative race and ethnic relations. This problem with comparative race and ethnic relations can be improved by addressing the way researchers have specified the scope and scale of the core variable 'race and ethnic relations' in cross-national settings. I suggest that comparative race and ethnic relations requires a reassessment of its principles and underlying premises, because past studies are insufficiently conscious of potential sources of methodological error in spite of the availability of a sophisticated comparative method. I also argue the unsuitability of U.S. American concepts of race and ethnic relations in the Japanese context, in which the ethnic stratification dimension and minority-majority relations cannot centrally account for the social configurations of ethnic minorities.

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