active sect in modern Japan. As such, the fact that Shin Buddhism was unable to convert a sizeable number of Western Buddhists in a non-colonial setting like North America calls into question the reasons given for Shin Buddhism’s “failure” to gain a large number of Korean converts in the colonial setting. It is generally believed Shin Buddhism failed in Korea because of its imperialist agenda. Wouldn’t the failure then be attributable to the (Japanese) Buddhists’ inherent lack of Christian-like missionary zeal, despite their elated slogan of “the eastward transmission of Buddhism” (Bukkyō tōzen), combined with their endemic ambivalence about crossing national and ethnic boundaries, now shown to persist even outside a colonial context? If so, then it is something of an accomplishment that Shin Buddhism did in fact convert some Western Americans and initiated transnational events. Likewise, the four thousand Korean converts that the two Honganjis made in colonial Korea can also be thought of as a rather impressive phenomenon driven by modern forces.

For this reason, Ama’s advancement of a transnational perspective is an important contribution to the study of American religions as well as to the study of modern East Asian Buddhism. The case of Shin Buddhism’s acculturation in North America demonstrates more similarities to Shin Buddhism’s developments in modern East Asia in general, and in colonial Korea in particular, than it does differences.

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If “Persistence of Memory” is arguably the most famous of Salvador Dali’s works, the persistence of race in everyday discourse, representation and practice is likewise probably one of the most frequently dissected issues in contemporary life. Discussions of underrepresentation, stereotyping, whitewashing, tokenism, fetishization and discrimination via race are even more prominent and ubiquitous in the twenty-first century than the melting clocks in Dali’s 1931 painting. The nearly inescapable four-letter word has received plenty of academic attention in English based on examples drawn from the US and Europe and, to a lesser extent, from other continents. Racial Representations in Asia, despite its title, focuses largely on constructions and representations of race in Japan.

The book is composed of an introduction and ten additional chapters. After a brief overview of the main themes and the structure
in her introduction, Yasuko Takezawa argues the case for looking at non-visual approaches to racial representation and non-Western cases to racism in the first chapter, titled “Towards a New Approach to race and Racial Representations: Perspectives from Asia.” Her discussion of the significance of non-visual markers of racial differences is particularly interesting and her typology of the three dimensions of race—as self-identification, scientific constructions and as resistance—cogently highlights the multivalence of race. Takezawa’s assertion that non-European or American examples need to be incorporated to challenge assumptions that race and racism are universal and/or modern Western constructs is perfectly sensible, but seems closer to a familiar refrain than some of her other points given the large volume of work that has already been published about race and ethnicity in Asia in English.

Ella Shohat then explores the complex spaces between two approaches: realism that sees media representations as verisimilitude and poststructuralism that emphasizes the problematic linkages between media images and the “real.” Although this discussion is familiar to readers versed in media theory, film studies or reception studies, and the non-visual elements of the construction of race do not receive much consideration, the chapter provides a foundation of sorts for the subsequent chapters that are mainly devoted to visual and textual analysis.

Midori Kurokawa looks at the representations of burakumin (“untouchables”) in Japan in the 1969 and 1992 filmic versions of the same serial novel Hashi no nai kawa (River without a bridge). While essentially an exercise in textual analysis, there is some attention paid to the ways in which non-visual markers were used by characters in the film to maintain distinctions between buraku and others. In chapter 4, Sun Yup Lee uses a range of sources, including official publications, public discourse, academic research and popular literature to highlight the various contradictions and complications of the concept of race that writhed within the Japanese colonial project in Korea. There were, Lee shows, notable changes in depictions of Koreans by Japanese writers over time, but also multiple conflicting streams of thought among Japanese and Korean writers. As with Kurokawa, he follows up on the introduction’s call to analyze race beyond phenotype by explaining how affect and secondary visual markers such as clothing and hairstyles were mobilized and debated in the attempts to distinguish between Koreans and Japanese.

Chapters 5 and 6 are largely textual or visual in their approach. Caroline S. Hau analyzes the politics of belonging in Jose Anglioniato’s 1969 work, The Sultante, the first novel to have dealt with the plight of the Philippine Chinese. The contextual analysis here is limited to brief references to the overlaps between the novel and contemporary context in the conclusion. Next, Takezawa guides readers through “post-race”
resistance in art works in various media by Asian-American artists, based on readings of the artworks and interviews with artists and curators.

John Russell and Marvin Sterling look at blackness in Japan in the next two chapters. Russell overviews the history of blackface in the US and racial representation of blackness in contemporary Japan, then analyzes various Japanese media such as literature, popular music, fashion and cosmetics styles and pornography to conclude that the increasing prevalence of blackness in Japan ultimately reinforces caricatures and perceived racial hierarchies. Sterling focuses more closely on the representations of blackness and Jamaican culture in Japan, with an emphasis on reggae. Three interlinked discourses of colonial modernity, postcolonialism and global postmodernity have shaped representations of blackness in Japan, he concludes.

The last two chapters take a turn towards the realm of molecular biology, genomes and wider comparative scope. In chapter 9, Hiroki Ookta and Mark Stoneking summarize the effects of migration on genome diversity in East Asia, while in the last chapter, Troy Duster examines the role of molecular genetics in the various discourses and practices of constructing and maintaining human taxonomies. The chapters combine to highlight the uses and the limits of using science to define populations and race.

There are inevitably some areas that could have been fortified. Explaining the selection criteria for types of media (why novels, documentaries and pornography, but not commercial films or TV dramas), geographic spaces within Asia (why the focus on Japan), and specific groups within Japan (why burakimin but not Zainichi Koreans) would have helped strengthen the argument. Further, there is less than full contextualization within the wide range of existing approaches to race across disciplines. In particular, engagement with critical race theory or the recent spate of research published in Japanese that deconstructs the “one race-one nation” discourse, and explaining how Takezawa’s three-type approach to race intersects with other existing approaches such as the four-type categorization of race—primordial, situationalist, resurgent and emergent—would have been helpful. Also, the call for attention to non-visual forms of differentiation could have been taken up more consistently in some of the chapters.

On the other hand, as Dali noted, perfection should not be feared, as it is unattainable. The above points do not alter the fact that this volume is a source of stimulating perspectives and rich empirical research that will be useful reading for all those interested in analyzing all that is covered under that persistent word, race.

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