



Embedded Racism: Japan's Visible Minorities and Racial Discrimination

By Debito Arudou

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Despite domestic constitutional provisions and international treaty promises, Japan has no law against racial discrimination. Consequently, businesses around Japan display “Japanese Only” signs, denying entry to all 'foreigners' on sight. Employers and landlords routinely refuse jobs and apartments to foreign applicants. Japanese police racially profile 'foreign-looking' bystanders for invasive questioning on the street. Legislators, administrators, and pundits portray foreigners as a national security threat and call for their segregation and expulsion. Nevertheless, Japan’s government and media claim there is no discrimination by race in Japan, therefore no laws are necessary.

How does Japan resolve the cognitive dissonance of racial discrimination being unconstitutional yet not illegal? *Embedded Racism* carefully untangles Japanese society’s complex narrative on race by analyzing two mutually-supportive levels of national identity maintenance. Starting with case studies of hundreds of individual “Japanese Only” businesses, it carefully analyzes the construction of Japanese identity through legal structures, statute enforcement, public policy, and media messages. It reveals how the concept of a “Japanese” has been racialized to the point where one must *look* “Japanese” to be treated as one.

The product of a quarter-century of research and fieldwork by a scholar living in Japan as a naturalized Japanese citizen, *Embedded Racism* offers an unprecedented perspective on Japan’s deeply-entrenched, poorly-understood, and strenuously-unacknowledged discrimination as it affects people by physical appearance.

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Editorial Review

Review

This book, though, is more than a narrative of instances of discrimination and campaigns for redress. The author also seeks to explore the roots of the problem, which he locates in the legal apparatus of nationality, the workings of the court system, the lack of serious official mechanisms to combat discrimination, and stereotypes perpetuated by the mass media.... This book is an important addition to the literature on problems of citizenship and minorities in Japan, particularly because it highlights the distinctive problems of visible minorities, rather than focusing on the large 'invisible minorities' (Zainichi Koreans and Chinese, etc.) who have been the subject of much existing research.... This is an important, courageous and challenging book, and it casts a sharp light on problems which are often ignored or veiled, but which have profound consequences for the present and future of Japanese society. (Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Australian National University, *Japanese Studies*)

That is what his long and passionately argued book is all about [racial discrimination]. . . .Arudou's book describes . . . convoluted problems very well and some of the ludicrous situations they produce. (*JPRI: Japan Policy Research Institute*)

Japan Times readers familiar with columnist Debito Arudou's views on the politics, policies and perils of an exclusionist national identity can now access a fuller scholarly elaboration in 'Embedded Racism: Japan's Visible Minorities and Racial Discrimination.' (Jeff Kingston, Director of Asian Studies, Temple University Japan, writer at The Japan Times)

Debito Arudou demonstrates that racism is pervasive in Japan and that many individuals and institutions deny this reality. He also shows that racism augurs ill for a society that will shrink for decades to come unless it changes how it treats visible minorities. People who care about the future of Japan need to engage with this pellucid and provocative account of one of the country's most urgent but neglected problems. (David T. Johnson, University of Hawaii)

In this important and insightful book, and based on a long personal experience, Debito Arudou offers a sophisticated critical analysis of the way visible minorities are treated in contemporary Japan. As immigration of work seekers to wealthy countries is on the rise, the issues treated here have wider relevance not only to the conduct and future of the Japanese society, but also to many other societies in the West and beyond. Highly recommended! (Rotem Kowner, University of Haifa)

Hats off to Arudou for breaking once and for all the Silence Barrier that has permitted Japan's profound racial discrimination to purr along undisturbed well into the 21st century. Exposing at long last the definitional acrobatics of Japanese and foreign Japan Studies experts—who have argued that since there is nothing we could call racist attitudes in Japan it follows that there can be no systemic racial discrimination either—Arudou lays out voluminous evidence to the contrary showing how Japan actually operates in its laws, public policy, media messages, and social ordering. (Ivan P. Hall, author of *Bamboozled: How America Loses the Intellectual Game with Japan and its Implications for Our Future in Asia*)

About the Author

Debito Arudou is author of *Handbook for Newcomers, Migrants, and Immigrants to Japan* and *Japanese Only: The Otaru Hot Springs Case and Racial Discrimination in Japan*. www.debito.org.

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