Racializing Chōsenjin: Science and Biological Speculations in Colonial Korea

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Abstract Recent literature on the history of medicine in colonial Korea has revealed that Japanese medical scientists studied Korean bodies to expose racial differences between the Japanese and Koreans and justify Japanese colonial rule. Previous scholars, however, have focused mainly on finding a connection between colonial medical research and eugenics. This article attempts to consider things as yet underinvestigated, in particular, the way in which medical research on Koreans emerged and was intertwined with Japanese colonialism in other ways, separate from contemporary eugenics projects. The article examines the emergence and development of what we now considered as “racial sciences”—physical anthropology, serological anthropology, and human genetics—with regard to the biological characteristics of Koreans. In doing so, it argues that biological speculations on Koreans originated as a subdiscipline of Japanese origin studies and resonated with a newly emerging type of colonial racism in colonial Korea—incorporationary racism. The article also presents the colonial scientific enterprise’s conclusion that Koreans were biologically heterogeneous, contradicting colonial Korean intellectuals’ assertion about Korean ethnic homogeneity. The use of Korean ethnic homogeneity as an ideological basis for nation building by two Korean governments meant that postcolonial Korean scientists had to seek a way to reconcile the colonial era’s “scientific conclusion” (biological heterogeneity) with the postcolonial era’s “politically approved” conceptualization (biological homogeneity). Therefore, regardless of whether it was trying to refute, appropriate, or revitalize the colonial legacy, biological research on Koreans in the postcolonial period was carried out under the framework that had been constructed by colonial racial sciences.

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In recent years, race studies scholars have made efforts to incorporate science and East Asia into race and racism literature. The use of racial categories in genomics and other new biomedical sciences has led scholars to reconsider their tenet—the scientific rejection of race as a biological concept (Fujimura et al. 2008). At the same time, East Asia has been spotlighted because its study casts new light on race and racial representations previously overseen by the “Western paradigm of race” (Takezawa 2005). In particular, Western racial theories and thoughts on East Asians and their co-option of theories and thoughts for their own purposes—from imperial colonialism to postcolonial nationalism—have become a new research focus to broaden the analysis on the rise of modern racial thought and the development of racism (Kowner and Demel 2013).

Scientific research on Chōsenjin 朝鮮人 (colonial Koreans) during the colonial period is a salient case in point. Following Japan’s colonization of Korea in 1910, the bodies of colonial Koreans became a medical object for Japanese clinicians and medical scientists.1 Recent literature on the history of medicine in colonial Korea has revealed that Japanese colonial medicine constructed the Korean body in complicity with colonial racism (Park 2014; Suh 2017; Yoo 2008).2 With the institutionalization of Western medicine in colonial Korea by Chōsen sōtokufu 朝鮮総督府 (the government-general of Korea), Japanese doctors began to explore the uniquely Korean nature of health and disease, employing the category of Chōsen in their medical research (Suh 2017: 72). A prevalent feature of these Japanese doctors’ work on Korean bodies was the attempt to identify racial differences between the Japanese colonizer and colonized Koreans.3 Blood group distribution, anthropometric data, vital statistics, and disease distribution in the Korean population, which were intensively collected by Japanese researchers in the 1920s and 1930s, were all employed to justify Japanese colonial rule in diverse ways (Jung 2012; O.-J. Kim 2008; Kim 2013; Lee 2013; Park 2006; Park 2014, 2015, 2017).

Doubtlessly, this complicity between medicine and colonial racism was not maintained throughout the whole colonial period. Suh Soyoung persuasively illuminates how Japanese doctors themselves rendered the biological category of colonial Koreans unstable and in fact destabilized the idea of racial differences on which colonial racism was based. In the 1930s, based on their intensive anthropometric fieldwork throughout

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1 I adopt the McCune-Reischauer Romanization and the Revised Hepburn systems as the Romanization of Korean and Japanese, respectively; all Korean and Japanese names in this article are listed in the order of surname first, followed by the given name. I transliterate names following the persons’ preferences as stated in their English written publications.

2 Henry (2013) diagnoses that when claiming the racial superiority of the Japanese colonizer, Japanese officials and settlers in colonial Korea relied less on biomedical research than their Western counterparts in India and other Asian colonies. For him, Japanese colonial racism was “affective racism,” making boundaries based on the different cultural practices and coercing the colonized to embody a cultural sensibility deemed adequately Japanese.

3 Another part of their work was intervening in the reproduction of colonial Korean women in regard to jinko mōndai 人口問題 (the population problem). See S. Kim 2008, Park 2017, and Yoo 2008.
the Korean peninsula, physical anthropologists at Keijō Imperial University Medical School concluded that Koreans were not biologically distinct from the Japanese, thus refuting the colonial racism of early Japanese anthropologists that had highlighted biological differences. While previous scholars have interpreted this as being a direct result of the rise of a colonial assimilation policy called Naissen ittai 内鮮一体 (the unity of Japanese and Koreans) during the Bunka seiji 文化政治 (cultural rule) period (1919–31), Suh objects to such a linear understanding of the relationship between politics and science, as such a narrow perspective reduces science to a product of political ideologies and deprives historians of the chance to examine scientific efforts and research processes. For this reason, she suggests looking at the internal research trends in Japanese racial science. According to Suh, the assertion was a result of a change in “scientific” aims and not political ones. New scientific aims targeted tracing the evolutionary procedure of the Japanese race rather than simply seeking to make the Korean race distinct from the Japanese race (Suh 2017: 91–95).

This article furthers Suh’s efforts with an analysis that focuses on the variety of research programs and conceptual tools used within Japanese racial science. One issue that has remained unexamined despite Suh’s careful analysis is the way in which Japanese scientists turned their interest to Japanese origins in the 1930s. What motivated the sudden change in research direction away from racial differences? To what extent was this a result of political demand from Japanese colonialism? Above all, if their interest in studying colonial Koreans was to construct the evolutionary map of the Japanese race, where did they place colonial Koreans within that map? This article traces how Japanese scientists of colonial Korea came to study Korean bodies to identify the biological origins of the Japanese and how they framed the origins of Koreans in the course of their research. In doing so, I argue that biological research on Koreans originated as a subdiscipline of Japanese origin studies and resonated with a newly emerging type of colonial racism in colonial Korea in the 1930s—inclusionary racism. I will also reveal that this colonial scientific enterprise concluded that Koreans were biologically heterogeneous. Such a conclusion would go on to play a vital role in the formation of scientific-political discussions about the biological nature of Koreans and Korean national identity in postcolonial Korea.

Two analytical concerns should be considered at this point. First, in contrast to previous literature that had a strong focus on eugenic concerns (Park 2006; O.-J. Kim 2008; Yoo 2008), there were Japanese scientists whose motivations were mainly (or at least more so) studying Japanese origins. Recently, historians of anthropology and genetics have begun to recognize that focusing on eugenic and racist aspects of scientific research tends to overlook the sociopolitical problems and scientific issues that racial sciences produced (Conklin 2013; Lipphardt 2012; Teslow 2014; Roberts 2011). In line with current efforts, I use the term racial science to summarize scientific speculations on human biology with concerns of race. In this article, physical anthropology, serological anthropology, and human genetics are examined in this regard. I investigate the emergence and the development of these sciences concerned with Korean origins during the colonial period, arguing that those studies echoed Japanese colonialism despite their claim to scientific objectivity. These studies also attempted to distinguish themselves from Nazi racist science and domestic eugenics projects.

The second analytical frame, I am keenly aware, is the changing meaning of minzoku 民族 (minjok in Korean). Minzoku is translated into English (Yoshino 2007:
in various ways—“race,” “ethnic group,” or “nation.” In my case study, the Korean minzoku initially indicated the Korean race but from the 1930s onward came to mean the Korean ethnics or nation after Japanese scientists began to employ the category of Tōyō jinshu 東洋人種 (the oriental race). It might support Sakano Tōru’s (2005) argument about “Jinshu gainen no seibutsugakuka” 人種概念の生物学化 (the biologization of the concept of race) in the late 1920s. According to his observation, the distinction between jinshu 人種 (race) and minzoku 族 was quite opaque in early racial research. Along the line of the development of racial sciences from the mid- and late 1920s, however, the biological understanding of race was expanded (229–54). I generally agree with Sakano’s argument but would also go further by showing that minzoku often, if not always, implicated the shared biological properties of a group’s members—even though, due to the very cultural specificity, it basically meant cultural “ethnos” or “nation.” For this reason, the Korean minzoku could be maintained as a valid unit for biological research even when, in the 1930s and 1940s, it meant Koreans as a cultural “ethnic group.”

In addition to the above discussions, in this article I will provide some assessments on race and science in Korea after the collapse of the Japanese Empire, especially on post-1945 debates about the biological characteristics of Koreans in Korea. Instead of an interruption of these racial sciences, I will illuminate how the biological speculations of colonial Koreans became the scaffolding of postcolonial research on Koreans and the politics of Korean national identity. Japanese scientists at the time concluded that Koreans were biologically heterogeneous, and it was this conclusion that became the starting point for scientific research on and discussions about Koreans after Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonialism. The Korean term tanil minjok-lon 單一民族論 (the theory of Korean ethnic homogeneity), invented and circulated by colonial Korean intellectuals, was unconvincing to contemporary medical scientists throughout the colonial period. Indeed, the ethnic homogeneity of Koreans was not a given fact but part of a scientific-political agenda that postcolonial Korean scientists had to reassemble because the heterogeneity thesis stood as the established scientific theory. While a more interpretative flexibility concerning the scientific outcome of colonial racial sciences would allow postcolonial Korean intellectuals to repackage them in nationalistic terms, the postliberation debate on the biological characteristics of Koreans would follow the binary framework of biological heterogeneity and homogeneity just as shaped by colonial racial sciences—even to this day.

The rest of this article goes as follows: First, it presents how Japanese eugenic researchers became interested in Korean bodies in relation to racial mixing between colonizers and colonized in the mid-1930s. Second, it examines the formation and development of racial sciences immediately after the colonization of Korea, independent of eugenic concerns. Third, with the help of Japanese historian Fujitani Takashi’s insight into colonial racism in colonial Korea during the 1930s, it observes how those

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4 Here I translate tanil minjok 單一民族 and honhap minjok 混合民族 as “ethnically homogeneous nation” and “ethnically heterogeneous nation,” respectively, according to Shin (2006). Claiming the ethnic nationalist nature of Korean nationalism, he defines “being ethnic” as an entity having common biological properties as well as cultural ones. Oguma Eiji’s criticism of the myth of Japanese ethnic homogeneity (Oguma 1995) has inspired Korean historians and sociologists to develop a critical approach to Korean nationalism grounded on the belief of Korean ethnic homogeneity.
studies became complicit with Japanese colonialism, moving away from the line of eugenic projects, and how they constructed the understanding of Koreans as being biologically heterogeneous. Fujitani claims a transition of exclusionary colonial racism to an inclusionary one following the colonial administration’s strong assimilation policy for war mobilization in the 1930s. I will reveal that racial sciences echoed this inclusive form of colonial racism. Finally, the article illuminates how the outcome of colonial racial sciences became shaped within the framework of the post-1945 debate on the biological nature of Koreans, and, thus, on Korean national identity.

1 Japanese Eugenics and the Problem of Race Mixing

In the early twentieth century, leading eugenicist Eugen Fischer (1874–1967) studied the children of the colonizers (Boer men) and the colonized (Khoisan women) in German South West Africa and concluded that these mixed-race children were racially inferior to the colonizer but superior to the colonized (Fischer 1914). Fischer and proponents of eugenics in Europe thus claimed that intermarriage between white Europeans and “inferior” races should be prohibited to protect the white race from intellectual and cultural decline (Schmuhl 2003: 336). In the context of worldwide colonial expansion, Fischer’s work raised urgent scientific questions for eugenicists about mixing between a “superior” white race and “inferior” races.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Japanese scholars began to talk about the eugenic implications of race mixing. Japan’s imperial expansion into Taiwan and Korea led scholars to extend their discussion from the mixing with white races to mixing between Japanese colonizers and colonized Asians. When Japan colonized Korea in 1910, Unno Yukinori (1879–1954), a popularizer of eugenics, claimed to promote “miscigenation between the Japanese and Chōsen jinshu” 朝鮮人種 (the Korean race) (Unno 1910: 104). According to him, a mixture of biologically similar races would be eugenically superior to both original populations, and thus interracial marriage between Japanese and Koreans would benefit the Japanese Empire.

However, it was not until the influx of Korean immigrant workers into Japan in the 1930s and the subsequent intermarriage between Japanese women and Korean men that eugenicists were pushed to seriously consider the issue of race mixing and the fear that miscegenation would lead to the loss of Japan’s national identity. The outbreak of the Pacific War in 1937 and aggressive Japanese expansion into the Asia-Pacific region encouraged the rise of comprehensive eugenic research on racial mixing between the Japanese and other colonized populations (Sakano 2009: 189–90). For example, in 1942, the eugenicist and psychiatrist Ikemi Takeshi (1907–2016) proposed the development of “minzoku kagaku” 民族科学 (science for ethnic policy). He claimed that colonial ethnic policy concerning qualitative and quantitative enhancements of the Japanese population and assimilation policy for different ethnic groups should be based on scientific research on racial genesis, improvement, and mixing and suggested that the Japanese government adopt the British ethnic separation policy. Intermarriage between the Japanese colonizers and the colonized Asians could not make the latter Japanese—Nihon minzokuka 日本民族化—because “the populations [of non-Japanese ethnic groups living] in Greater East Asia 大東亜共榮圈 (Co-Prosperity Sphere) is about 1.1 billion, but the Japanese is about one hundred million” (Ikemi 1942).
Koya Yoshio (1890–1974), a professor of hygiene at Kanazawa University Medical School, also attempted to establish a scientific basis for colonial ethnic policy. He promoted rassenbiologie (racial biology) in Imperial Japan, just as racial hygienists had done in Nazi Germany. Koya was concerned about the assimilation policy because he viewed race mixing without proper eugenic measures as biologically unhealthy for the Japanese stock. He explained the phenomenon irekawari (replacement): “A civilized ethnic group (kulturvolk) is replaced by a primitive ethnic group (naturvolk) when the two ethnic groups live in the same area” (130–31). The civilized group generally has a lower fertility rate than the primitive group because of birth control policies, although the difference in fertility can also occur between civilized groups. He was anxious about the immigration of Korean workers to mainland Japan and he envisioned the biological replacement of “civilized” Japanese people with “culturally inferior” Koreans, where intermarriage between Koreans and the Japanese would bring about the biological extinction of the Japanese “race” on the mainland (130–31).

Not every eugenicist agreed with this objection to miscegenation with Koreans. In the early 1930s, Tanimoto Tomeri (1867–1949) of Kyōto Imperial University argued that Japanese racial superiority stemmed from beneficial intermarriage with “the Korean race” and “the South Pacific race” (Tanimoto 1931). In the early 1940s, Mizushima Haruo (1896–1975) and his students at Kyushu Imperial University Medical School and Taniguchi Toratoshi (1902–63) and his colleagues at Keio Gijuku University Medical School independently carried out comparative research on physical and mental traits among Japanese, Korean, and mixed-race children. They reported that the latter had stronger physiques than the Japanese and Korean children due to hybrid vigor. In their view, miscegenation with Koreans would not cause Japanese racial degeneration (Mizushima and Miyake 1942; Noda 1944a, 1944b).

To ascertain the effects of miscegenation, Mizushima and Taniguchi’s groups studied the biological traits of the Japanese and Koreans, and in 1942 Taniguchi (1942: 104) demanded that anthropological research on colonized Asians be conducted prior to evaluating an assimilation policy.

2 Racial Sciences and the Search for Japanese Origins

Japanese scholars in colonial Korea, before eugenic concerns over race mixing arose, had already begun carrying out biological research on Koreans in the 1910s and 1920s. This was when the institutional basis and research directions started to take shape. Medical institutions became a centerpiece of the racial sciences in colonial Korea, and clinicians in medical schools and hospitals studied the biological traits of Koreans in their search for the origins of the Japanese race. This section examines the historical background of those aspects of racial sciences in colonial Korea.

First, clinicians at medical institutions took a leading role in biological research on Koreans. For example, Kubo Takeshi (1879–1921), clinician-cum-anthropologist, was...
the first to collect anthropometric data on Koreans for anthropological purposes; Kirihara Sinichi (1889–1949), who carried out the survey of blood-type distribution among Koreans, was a professor of medicine. Both Japanese clinicians worked at Keijō Medical School and published their research in medical journals such as Chōsen igakkai zasshi 朝鮮医学会雑誌 (Chōsen Medical Journal) (Suh 2017: 82–84).

This kind of medicine-based institutionalization of human biology in Korea was closely intertwined with the empire’s colonial science policy. The government-general of Korea introduced modern science and technology to Korea in order to develop the mining and railway industries, as part of colonial resource extraction. As a result, the colonial regime only promoted applied sciences such as geology, chemical engineering, civil engineering, animal husbandry, and agriculture in vocational schools (Kim 2005). For this reason, there were no higher education institutions for biology. In colonial Korea, both Japanese and native Koreans interested in biology had no choice but to enter imperial universities on mainland Japan or biological research institutions abroad (Moon 2012: 66, 72–3). Meanwhile, the colonial government did establish medical education institutions. The success of public health management based on medical expertise in colonized regions became a bellwether of “modernization” through colonization and a justification for colonial rule (Rogaski 2004). For this reason, the colonial government quickly established Keijō Medical College in 1916 and approved the establishment of Severance Medical College a year later (Park 2004). Although the primary aim of those institutions was the training of clinicians, Japanese scholars teaching in medical schools were also able to conduct academic research on the biological traits of Koreans and they could easily take physical measurements and blood samples in the name of a clinical examination (Kim 2013: 421). Such institutional contexts enabled medical doctors to study the biological traits of Koreans throughout the colonial period.

The field of biological speculation on Koreans was a subdiscipline of Japanese origin studies. Japanese scholars began their research on Koreans in order to understand the biological origins of the Japanese. Torii Ryūzō (1870–1953), a member of the first generation of Japanese anthropologists, believed that Koreans were ancestors of the Japanese and claimed that systematic studies of both biological and cultural characteristics of Koreans should precede research on Japanese origins (Sakano 2013: 213–4). As early as the 1880s and 1890s, Erwin Otto Eduard von Bälz (1849–1913), the German advisor and foreign teacher at the University of Tōkyō Faculty of Medicine (later Tōkyō Imperial University Medical College), established a hierarchical classification between the Japanese and Koreans to explain the biological genealogy of the Japanese race. In 1883, using the measurement data of human skulls, he explained that East Asians consisted of the Korean-Manchurian type, the Mongol-Malayan type, and the Ainu type. He supposed that the Korean-Manchurian type formed the upper class of the modern Japanese and Koreans while the Mongol-Malayan type had become the lower class. Koganei Yoshikiyo (1859–1944), Bälz’s student and the founder of physical anthropology in Japan, carried out anthropological research on Korean and Ainu skulls, accepting his German teacher’s racial theory (Sakano 2013: 90–91). According to Hoi-eun Kim (2014: 117), Bälz’s (and thus Koganei’s) work was complicit with Japanese colonialism, particularly when it came to colonial assimilation policy and racial pan-Asianism. In fact, the anthropological research on Koreans served as
scientific justification for Japan’s colonization of Korea due to the biological relatedness of the two groups.

Kubo Takeshi inherited Koganei’s research program and had hoped to figure out the biological relationship between the Korean and Japanese races. In his dissertation, Kubo (1913: 1; quoted in Kim 2014: 119) defined his work as being “to determine whether and to what extent Koreans stand in their physical and anthropological relations to the Japanese.” From 1907 to 1910 he measured the weight, stature, and skull size of 3,425 Koreans. Although he insisted that Koreans were racial inferiors to the Japanese, Kubo considered the study of Koreans critical to Japanese origin studies (Kim 2013: 419).

Meanwhile, Kirihara Sinichi conducted a survey of Korean blood groups. Kirihara and his colleague examined the “biochemical race index” seikagakuteki jinshu sisū (生化学的人種示数) of Koreans and the Japanese settlers living in Keijō (now Seoul). The index was a mathematical formula devised by Ludwik and Hanka Hirschfeld to classify racial types based on proportions of A and B blood types in a population. After calculating the race index, they found that Northern and Southern Koreans were of different racial types and speculated that Southern Koreans were ancestors of the modern Japanese (Kirihara and Paek 1922). When it comes to Japanese origins, it seems, that contrary to Suh Soyoung’s (2017: 91–95) description, the shift of focus to searching for evolutionary relationships happened in the 1930s. Early racial scientists had already made efforts to find the biological connection between Koreans and the Japanese. Such research had already been carried out by early Japanese medical researchers in colonial Korea, helping justify colonial rule of Korea even before the cultural rule period.

3 The Development of Racial Sciences and the Biological Discourse of Korean Origins

In the 1930s, racial sciences began to diversify in colonial Korea and mainland Japan. After the establishment of Keijō Imperial University Medical School in 1926, the study of Korean biological origins was professionalized. The rise of three fields of racial sciences—physical anthropology, serological anthropology, and human genetics—proceeded in tandem with the knowledge production of Korean origins, as a by-product of Japanese origin studies.

3.1 Physical Anthropology and Anthropometric Data

Physical anthropology, a leading racial science for Japanese origin research in the empire, gained disciplinary independence from anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s under its new title, shizen jinruigaku 自然人類学 (physical anthropology). A principal aim of this discipline was to establish a scientific classification of the Japanese and their neighboring racial groups (Sakano 2013: 381–86).

Medical researchers like prominent physical anthropologists Ueda Tsunekichi (1887–1966) and Imamura Yutaka (1896–1971), professors in the Department of Anatomy, Keijō Imperial University Medical School, shaped the development of biological origin research among Japanese and Koreans. Upon joining Keijō’s faculty,
Ueda initiated anthropometric research on Koreans with the aim of establishing the origins of the modern Japanese. To this purpose, from 1930 to 1934, Ueda and Imamura conducted a series of field studies to take measurements from Koreans all over the Korean peninsula. They eventually collected anthropometric data from 2,216 colonial Koreans by 1934. Accepting the geographic difference of Koreans in the northern and southern areas of the peninsula, they classified their database into three groups: Northern, Middle, and Southern Koreans (Arase et al. 1934a, 1934b).

Using the database, Ueda developed an anthropological hypothesis of the Japanese and their biological relations to Koreans. According to him, the physical traits of modern Japanese had, in his words, “chihō-sa” 地方差 (local differences) and the physical differences between Koreans and Japanese were even smaller than the local differences present among the Japanese. Therefore, two people could be of the same jinshu or rasse (race) and possess similar physical traits, but be of a different minzoku or volk (ethnic group) in terms of customs and languages (Ueda 1935: 148, 160). In particular, Middle and Southern Koreans were more similar in height and weight to the Japanese than to the Northern Koreans. He suggested that Koreans living in the central region of the Korean peninsula might be the main ancestral group of the Japanese now living in the Kansai region of the Japanese archipelago. Ueda (1935: 161) proposed that Northern Koreans could be biologically closer to ethnic groups living in Manchuria than to Southern Koreans and the Japanese. Despite the definition of Korean minzoku as an ethnic group rather than a biological race, they kept up biological research on Koreans because they assumed that a fine distinction among minzoku based on anthropometry was possible, and that very detailed work would help them shed light on the origins of the modern Japanese.

As the empire expanded into mainland China, Ueda’s team extended their fieldwork to include Manchuria. In November 1932, the faculty at Keijō Imperial University organized manmō bunka kenkyū 滿蒙文化研究会 (the Research Society for Manchuria and Mongolia) to promote academic research on Manchurian culture (Jung 2015: 101). Ueda and Imamura, with Takakusu Sakae (1880–1959) of the Department of Gynecology, collaborated on a research project titled “Physical Anthropology of Races in Manchuria and Mongolia.” From 1934 to 1937 Imamura and his colleagues administered anthropometric surveys to regional ethnic groups and collected the skulls of Manchurians and Mongolians. Based on their fieldwork in Manchuria, Imamura posited that Northern Koreans were biologically linked to Manchurians and other ethnic groups living in Manchuria and Mongolia (Imamura and Shima 1938; Imamura 1939). Ueda developed his hypothesis of Japanese origin in relation to Koreans using the results of these Manchurian surveys. Northern Koreans, he claimed, shared physical traits with the “Turk race” and were also strikingly similar to “Mongolians” such as the Khalkha people and Manchurians. In contrast, “Middle and Southern Koreans” were similar to Kansai Japanese and distinct from Manchurians. Such anthropometric observations led him to conclude the biological closeness of the Manchurians, Koreans, and the Japanese, dividing Koreans into three biological groups (Ueda 1939: 142, 148).

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6 For a detailed explanation on the history of physical anthropology at Keijō Imperial University and its postcolonial transformation, see Hyun 2015 and Kim 2016.
3.2 Serological Anthropology and Blood Groups

Meanwhile, along with physical anthropologists, forensic clinicians-cum-biologists were exploring the origins of the Japanese and their relatedness to neighboring ethnic groups. They called their work *Kesseigakuteki jinruigaku* 血清学的人類学 (serological anthropology) (Furuhata 1935: 85). Serological anthropologists mainly worked in the Department of Legal Medicine, where they investigated biological relations between Koreans and the Japanese using the ABO blood group database.

Satō Takeo (1897–1959) at the Department of Legal Medicine at Keijō Imperial University led serological research on Koreans in colonial Korea. He graduated from Tōkyō Imperial University Medical College under the guidance of Mita Sadanori (1876–1950) in 1922 and accepted a position as professor of legal medicine at Keijō in 1929 (Keio-gijuku 1958: 675). Satō and his students conducted a cooperative survey with members of the Department of Anatomy from 1931 to 1934 during which they collected blood samples from 24,929 Koreans from all regions of the peninsula except Gyeonggi-do and Cheju-do (Satō et al. 1935: 44). Satō and his colleagues adopted American serologist Rueben Ottenberg’s modified biochemical race index to find racial relatedness between Koreans and Japanese. Like Imamura’s team, they also classified their blood database into three groups—Northern, Middle, and Southern Koreans. According to their calculation, Northern and Middle Koreans were part of the India-Manchurian type while Southern Koreans were Hunan type, just like the Japanese (Satō et al. 1935: 53). Also, after the establishment of the Research Society for Mongolia and Manchuria, Satō’s team conducted several field studies in Manchuria along with physical anthropologists, collecting blood samples from 3,019 Manchurians and Mongolians (Hyun 2018: 95).

In 1942, based on those blood group databases, Satō formulated a hypothesis on the migration of East Asians from continental East Asia to the Japanese archipelago. He calculated the modified biochemical race index of Mongolians (0.89), Manchurians (0.91), and Northern Koreans (0.99) and compared them to the race index of Southern Koreans and the Japanese. He separated Southern Koreans from Northern Koreans as physical anthropologists did: he assumed that the latter group had biological proximity to Manchurians and Mongolians, but the former was serologically closer to the Japanese than ethnic groups in Manchuria.

One prevalent difference from their physical anthropologist colleagues was serological anthropologists’ conceptualization of *minzoku* and *jinshu*. According to the biochemical race index theory, human races could be separated into three to six racial types serologically. People in the same *minzoku* can be part of different biochemical races: for example, among “*chōsen minzoku*,” Southern Koreans were the Hunan (racial) type and Northern Koreans were the India-Manchurian (racial) type (Satō et al. 1935: 46). According to their scheme, the same *minzoku*, sharing culture and language, would be divided into different *jinshu*, even in cases where their physiognomy did not seem to significantly differ. Although serological and physical anthropologists conducted their fieldwork in colonial Korea and Manchuria in tandem, they...

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Jung (2012) offers a detailed explanation of Satō’s activity inside and outside colonial Korea. For the history of blood science and race in colonial and postcolonial Korea, see Hyun, forthcoming.
reached different conclusions on the relations between Koreans and the Japanese. Since the race index of people living in the provinces closest to the Korean peninsula—Kyushu, Shikoku, and Chugoku—was the highest among the Japanese, they considered it to be Southern Koreans who were influenced by the Japanese rather than vice versa (Satō 1943: 414–15). This conflicted to a certain degree with conclusions drawn by Ueda’s group, who had supposed that human flows in the ancient period occurred from the Korean peninsula toward the Japanese archipelago and not the other way around.

In the field of serological anthropology there was a consensus that the Korean minzoku was serologically heterogeneous. For Ottenberg (1925: 1393), the biochemical race index’s reviser, Koreans were “a transition” of races, because their race indexes showed the transition from the Manchus to the Japanese. Furuhata Tanemoto (1891–1975), a professor of legal medicine at Tōkyō Imperial University and an opponent of Ueda’s argument on the biological relatedness between Koreans and Japanese, also divided Koreans into Northern and Southern groups according to their biochemical race index (Furuhata and Kishi 1926). Despite a debate over the serological relationship between the Korean minzoku and the Japanese minzoku, serological anthropologists shared physical anthropologists’ idea of Korean biological heterogeneity.

3.3 Human Genetics and Twinning Rates

It was in the 1930s that the pioneers of human genetics emerged in the empire (Yanase 1997: 265–66). They were mostly active in Nihon iden gakkai 日本遺伝学会 (the Japanese Society of Genetics) and published their research in its journal. They began their career with genetic research on animals and plants and later turned their attention to human heredity. For this reason, they became professors or researchers in departments of zoology, botany, or agriculture. Given the lack of such departments in higher-education institutions at the time, it is understandable that there were no researchers in colonial Korea conducting human genetic research.

Komai Taku (1886–1972), professor of genetics in the Department of Zoology at Kyōto Imperial University, was a precursor of this field throughout the Japanese Empire. He graduated with a degree in zoology from Tōkyō Imperial University and studied in Thomas Morgan’s fly genetics lab at Columbia University in the United States from 1923 to 1925. After returning to Japan, he was appointed professor of animal taxonomy and genetics at Kyōto Imperial University and began his career as an animal geneticist.

Komai became interested in human genetics in the late 1920s. He first looked for racial differences in hereditary diseases and congenital malformations, assuming that “the Japanese race is different from Occidental races in physical and mental abilities” (1934a: 1). Here the “Japanese race” was considered representative of “Oriental” or “Mongolian” races and was compared to the “White” and “Negro” races. Komai did not limit his genetic research to the heredity of abnormalities and diseases, but defined population statistics and twin studies, as well as pedigree studies, as research methods for studying human heredity (1934b: 127–28). He paid much attention to finding normal, uniquely Japanese racial traits, as distinct from “Occidental races” (1934a, 1934b).
In the course of his statistical studies, Komai and his colleagues collected data on the twinning ratio at birth among the Korean population obtaining 7,191 birth records from 1926 to 1936. Using this database, they calculated the frequency of twin births among Koreans and the dizygotic twin birth rate. Although they identified differences in the twin birth rate between Koreans and the Japanese, Komai’s group did not think that this demonstrated racial differences between the two populations. Instead, they considered that, given the frequency of twin birth and dizygotic twin birth, Koreans shared more “racial traits” with the Japanese than with “Occidental races.” According to them, Koreans and the Japanese were the same “Mongolian race” (Komai and Fukuoka 1936: 440).

Komai recognized minzoku and kokumin 国民 (national citizens) in terms of geographical or national boundaries and understood them as “ethnic groups.” Unlike his anthropologist colleagues, he did not consider minzoku a unit of human heredity research, believing hereditary differences in human populations could only be found at the level of race, not ethnic groups. It was doubtless that ethnic groups living in neighboring regions sometimes showed different physical and mental traits; but those “minzokuteki” 民族的 (ethnic) differences were the combination of genetic influences and kokudo kankyō 国土環境 (national environment), not solely genetic mechanisms (Komai 1944: 196).8

Komai’s emphasis on the environment as a primary factor for creating ethnic differences allowed him to explain local differences among the Japanese in terms of climatic and geographical variations. In his scheme of races and ethnic groups, the Chinese and Koreans could be easily recognized as ancestral groups of modern Japanese because they were biologically identical (Komai 1942: 290). At the same time, it raised the possibility of dividing Koreans into two or three different “subethnic groups” according to geographical variations.

Colonial medical researchers interested in population statistics also found such biological differences among Koreans according to environmental conditions. Matsuyama Shigeru (Matsuyama 1944), one of whose advisers was Ueda Tsunekichi, adopted the classification of Northern and Southern Koreans in his comparative research on menarche in Japanese and Korean populations. Mizushima Haruo’s protégé Sai Kieiat at Keijō Imperial University Medical School also classified regional fertility differences among Northern and Southern Koreans: for example, the birth rate of the Korean population was highest in the Northern region and lowest in the Southern region despite the regional disparities in the death rate (Sai 1937: 104). In fact, while working as a professor at Keijō, Mizushima (1935) emphasized the role of climate in the change in fertility rate and the progress of civilizations.9 Despite emphasizing

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8 It is worth noting that Komai’s discussion about national environment and minzoku had some commonalities with a philosophical argument on the relation between climate fudō (風土) and minzoku developed by Watsuji Tetsurō (和辻哲郎, 1889–1960). The Japanese philosopher was also a professor at Kyōto Imperial University and thus might have interacted intellectually with Komai, although I have not found any historical materials indicating this.

9 Mizushima claimed that cold and typhoon-prone regions of temperate climate zones were the best place to develop civilization. According to his argument, the climate of the Korean peninsula was superior to the Japanese archipelago concerning bunka no shinten 文化の進展 (the progress of culture). See Mizushima 1935: 17–18. I thank Shin Chang-Geon at Tokyo University of Science for helping me find the bibliographic information about Mizushima’s article.
environmental factors in the formation of ethnic differences between the Japanese and Koreans, those researchers and anthropologists still shared the idea of Korean biological heterogeneity.

4 The Making of Koreans Konwa Minzoku for Japanese Colonialism

Kudō Takeki (born in 1878), who ran Keijō gynecological hospital, was notorious for his racist and sexist research on Korean women, which he used to delineate colonial racial hierarchy throughout the colonial period (Park 2015: 194–98). In 1933, Kudō reported that the number of husband killers was much higher in northern parts of the Korean peninsula than in its southern counterparts. He adopted serological anthropologists’ classification of Northern and Southern Koreans and claimed biological differences between the two Korean groups in relation to female crimes (Hong 2013: 605). Regardless of the irrationality and prejudices displayed in his study, it shows that classifying Koreans into Northern and Southern Koreans was commonplace in medical research at the time.

Japanese eugenicists also adopted the idea of Korean biological heterogeneity. Following physical anthropologists in colonial Korea, Taniguchi Toratoshi (1942: 38–39) believed that Koreans were divided into Northern, Middle, and Southern Koreans because of differences in their “jinshuteki tokuchō” 人種的特徴 (racial characteristics). Even Korean medical scientists incorporated this understanding into their research. Ch’oe Tong (1896–1973), the only Korean professor of forensic medicine at the Severance Medical School, collected 1,290 ABO data from Korean patients, workers, and students at Severance Hospital during the early 1930s and calculated its biochemical race index. He then classified his data into eight groups based on the family clan’s origin. Ch’oe Tong found different race indexes between Northern and Southern Koreans. Although Ch’oe Tong followed Korean historian Ch’oe Namsŏn’s ethnic classification concerning the ancient history of Korea instead of the version supported by Japanese anthropologists, he recognized Koreans as a population with biologically heterogeneous origins in the same way his Japanese counterpart had done (T. Ch’oe 1935: 44). From the 1930s to 1945, the idea that Koreans were heterogeneous in terms of ethnic origins and biological characteristics was widespread in the fields of racial sciences. Just as the Japanese were konwa minzoku 混和民族 (a mixture of different minzoku) made up of the Ainu, the Chinese, and Koreans (Komai 1942: 290), Koreans were also konwa minzoku, comprised of two or three groups, culturally similar but biologically different from each other.

In this context, racial sciences contributed to justifying Japanese colonialism. Not surprisingly the biological similarity thesis of the Japanese and Koreans lent scientific support to colonial policy. The government-general of Korea asserted Naissen ittai and Nissen dōso 日鮮同祖 (the Japanese and the Koreans share common ancestry) to justify assimilation policy (Shin 2006: 44). Colonial officer Kurashima Itaru found the rationale for his assimilation policy in Ueda’s anthropological research on Koreans. He contended that biological similarities between Middle Koreans and Japanese living in the Kansai area, revealed by physical anthropology, showed ketsueki yūwa 血液融和 (the coalescence of blood) between the two races since the ancient period (Kurashima 1942: 12). The colonial government organization Kokumin sōryoku Chōsen renmei...
国民総力朝鮮連盟 (the Korean Coalition for the Total National Mobilization) also claimed the common ancestry, citing Satô’s serological research on Koreans as scientific grounds for the biological closeness between the two peoples (Kosörenmei 1943: 46–47). Previously, scholars have interpreted this as a case for the “pseudo-scientific” nature of racial science. They argued that racial scientists in colonial Korea simply converted their earlier conclusion of Koreans’ racial inferiority to racial similarity in line with the transition of colonial rule from budan seiji 武断政治 (military rule) to cultural rule (O.-J. Kim 2008; Park 2006). As Suh Soyoung correctly points out, this interpretation presumes an oversimplified, linear relationship between science and politics—science as a blind supporter of political ideology. Instead, Suh suggests tracing the internal trends of racial science in detail. In doing so, Suh (2017: 91–95) concludes that in the 1930s racial research—particularly physical anthropology—began to subvert the premises of colonial racism by showing biological similarity between Koreans and the Japanese even though its early research had been driven by racial discrimination.

With the recognition of the diversity of colonial racism, I would like to offer here a new interpretation by examining how eugenic science and racial science both served different kinds of colonial racism. Fujitani Takashi (2007: 17) has observed a transition from a “vulgar racism,” based on exclusionary discrimination, to an inclusive and “polite racism,” present in colonial Korea during the 1930s. At that time, due to war mobilization intensifying the colonial assimilation efforts, the colonial administration began to embrace Koreans in the “Japanese population”—whose life and welfare should be fostered. The inclusive drive to mobilize Koreans for the Pacific War paralleled the emergence of inclusive racism—highlighting Koreans’ cultural and historical inferiority in order to maintain racial hierarchy (22). Thus, rather than focusing on the biological inferiority of the colonized as had been done previously by eugenic scientists, racial scientists supported colonial assimilation policy, on the one hand, while highlighting Koreans’ cultural and historical inferiority, on the other. Both supported and were used to support colonial racism, but, whereas eugenic projects served an exclusive form of colonial racism, the outcome of racial sciences became an ideological backup for an inclusionary colonial racism.

In this context, it is worth noting how much racial scientists resisted Nazi-style or mainstream eugenic projects, which assumed biological differences between the Japanese and Koreans. Ueda (1935) claimed that Koreans were biologically almost identical to contemporary Japanese. Furthermore, he criticized racially biased explanations of Korean bodies, emphasizing biological sameness. Satô (1943) also accepted the idea of biological relatedness between Koreans and the Japanese, and Komai (1944) denied the idea of racial differences between them positing that ethnic differences between the two populations might derive from environment, not heredity. Furthermore, as a reformed eugenicist, he was skeptical of mainstream eugenicists’ concerns about the racial degeneration of the Japanese stock by miscegenation with Koreans and other Asians (1942: 290). In this context, Komai rejected use of Charlese Davenport’s eugenic theory of the “disharmony” of mixed-blood children when it came to intermarriage (297). From his view, Koya Yoshio and other mainstream eugenicists’ argument was not grounded in scientific research on human heredity, but more or less on political fears.
Meanwhile, despite these arguments Japanese racial scientists did consider Koreans to be the primitive ancestors of the Japanese. Physical and serological anthropologists at Keiţo promoted their research on Koreans as a part of Japanese origin studies. Komai (1942: 290), a geneticist, recognized Koreans as ancestors of the modern Japanese just as anthropologists had done. In fact, they assumed the cultural superiority and more advanced civilization of the Japanese compared to that of Koreans. For example, Komai saw the Japanese minzokusei 民族性 (national characters) as the most superior in “the Oriental race” despite the recognition of biological similarities between the Japanese and other Asian peoples (1944: 195–200). Their assumption of the Korean minzoku as an ancestral group presupposed that Koreans were historically much older and thus more primitive than the Japanese minzoku, regardless of their biological similarity. Their research constructed Korean bodies as a living repository of the modern Japanese past while strengthening the idea of Koreans’ primitive nature.

One should be cautious about reducing racial scientists’ understanding of Korean cultural inferiority to an ideological outcome of inclusive colonial racism. The cultural turn of racial science, such as the one in colonial Korea, was not an isolated case. Hoshino Noriaki (2016) has analyzed how the Japanese sociologist Koyama Eizō (1899–1983) developed his race theory centered on the concept of minzoku as a historical and cultural entity in the 1930s and 1940s. In contrast to his early reliance on biological arguments of racial differences, Koyama articulated how to “construct” a Greater East Asian minzoku 大東亜民族 (Daitōa minzoku)—a future Japanese “nation” that would consist of all imperial subject populations sharing culture and history against the white race—albeit emphasizing cultural hierarchy among the Japanese and other colonized populations (Hoshino 2016: 196–200). American physical anthropologists also began to include cultural variation in their racial research as a way to classify human species into several races in a similar period. Even anthropologists, who did not subscribe to the possibility of identifying “correct” racial classifications, developed the idea of racial variation as a historical outcome of human adaptation to environmental constraints interacting with cultural variation (Teslow 2014). Along the line of a global trend of racial sciences, Japanese racial scientists developed their framework of Koreans in a way that was compatible with the new type of colonial racism. Through the scheme of cultural differentiation between Japanese and Korean minzoku, they were able to maintain the hierarchical distinction between the colonizer and the colonized.

5 Postcolonial Legacies: From Nationalist Appropriation to Revitalization

Before and during the colonial period, Korean historians and litterateurs developed Korean nationalism as a countermeasure to Japanese colonialism, with the belief in Korean ethnic homogeneity at its core (Shin 2006). In a short article titled “Chosŏn minjok-lon” 朝鮮民族論 (“On the Korean Minjok”), leading Korean writer and nationalist activist Yi Kwang-su (1892–1950) claimed that “the Korean minjok is doubtlessly biologically and culturally homogeneous.” The leading Korean intellectual asserted that “even God cannot change the innate and hereditary nature of the Korean characteristics that is in the Koreans’ blood” (Yi 1933: 326–27). Even with his assertion about the yujŏnjŏk 遺傳的 (hereditary) nature of Korean homogeneity, Japanese racial scientists refuted the homogeneity claim by showing the biological heterogeneity of
the Korean *minzoku*. From the human biology viewpoint at the time, this colonial Korean intellectual had no scientific basis for his contention.

The gap between the nationalist conceptualization and scientific understanding of the biological characteristics of Koreans became an increasingly important scientific-political issue for postcolonial Korean scientists particularly at the point when postcolonial governments in both North and South Korea vigorously promoted the assertion of Korean ethnic homogeneity as an ideological basis for nation building (Shin 2006: 79–110). This was a particular problem for early-generation Korean biologists, who had been trained under the guidance of Japanese racial scientists during the colonial period and had themselves taken part in the knowledge production, learning the heterogeneity thesis as a scientific conclusion. Scientists in North Korea moved on more quickly and efficiently than South Koreans by following their government’s political resolution of pro-Japanese Koreans—the total denial of Japanese legacy: they dismissed the heterogeneity thesis as an unscientific and political fabrication serving Japanese colonialism. All research data on Korean bodies produced during the preliberation period was abandoned because the data was considered to have been polluted and distorted by Japanese colonialist motivations. With this conclusion, North Korea’s scientists pursued the collection of new biological data from (North) Koreans to support their Korean homogeneity conviction (Pack and Chang 1973). They promoted “*tanthyŏlsŏng-lon*” (*the theory of pure-blood Koreans*) using new anthropometric and blood-group data obtained from Northern Korean bodies and archaeological evidence dug up from North Korea’s territory from the 1960s onward.

The South’s biologists took a different route. They understood the pre-1945 data of the Korean bodies as being scientific and a starting point for their own research. In the 1950s and 1960s, biologists resolved the tension between the scientific conclusion and postcolonial doctrine, or the heterogeneity and homogeneity theses, respectively, by introducing new conceptual tools, mainly from the US scientific community. The “isolated population” and “endogamy” were the main concepts used for making the pre-1945 data fit into the postcolonial nationalist conceptualization. Geneticists and physical anthropologists defined Koreans as “the isolated gene pool” formed by the “long tradition of endogamy,” although they had never tested the isolated population argument or the endogamy thesis seriously (Kang and Cho 1957; Na 1964). At the same time, in contrast to their northern counterparts, they kept silent concerning Korean origins. Their work instead centered on collecting a new kind of biological data from Koreans—such as new blood-group systems and other biochemical phenotypes—and combining them with the colonial racial research data, culminating in the successful completion of the appropriate pre-1945 data for nationalist purposes around the mid-1970s.

Two decades later, the emergence of new DNA technologies, allowing geneticists to trace the migratory history of human populations, brought the genetic origin of Koreans to the fore in the field of population genetics. The economic liberalization of South Korea led to an increase in migratory laborers and the rise of multiculturalism and at last provoked questioning of the belief of Korean ethnic homogeneity. South Korean geneticists went into the new scientific-political enterprise and began to claim that

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10 Another pathway to convert colonial racial research’s conclusion to support the Korean biological homogeneity argument was cherry-picking colonial racial theories. For such a case concerning serological anthropology, see Hyun, forthcoming.
Koreans were *honhap minjok* (混合民族, a mixture of different minjok), not homogeneous.\(^{11}\) Their discovery of the dual origins of the Korean population in the early 2000s was a signal of the revitalization of the old heterogeneity thesis (Jin et al. 2003). Humanities scholars criticizing the Korean ethnic homogeneity belief adopted the terminology and relied on the heterogeneity thesis as a scientific basis for their criticism. It might not be surprising that this also shed new light on the research findings of racial scientists in colonial Korea. Historian Sekine Hideyuki (2015) claims that Ueda Tsunekichi and other racial scientists in colonial Korea had already discovered the biological relatedness between Koreans and the Japanese but that it had been dismissed because their research was unjustly labeled as political justification for the colonial assimilation policy.

The return of the heterogeneity thesis today in the South indicates the persistence of the framework of Japanese racial sciences over the last half-century. The two Koreas’ scientists in the early postcolonial period encountered the heterogeneity thesis and related biological data as a colonial legacy they had to overcome. The North chose to ignore it completely while the South tried to “recycle” its parts for nationalist purposes.\(^{12}\) Once able to carry out genetic origin studies, South Korean geneticists developed similar arguments about the biological characteristics of Koreans to the conclusion drawn by Japanese racial sciences decades earlier. Humanities scholars are now rediscovering the “scientific” value of racial sciences because their thesis is echoed by contemporary geneticists. In hindsight, colonial racial research seems more objective than contemporary North Korean scientists’ studies blinded by pure-blood nationalism: its heterogeneity thesis refutes the North’s theory of pure-blood Koreans—which among Southern Korean intellectuals is considered to be politically distorted. The binary framework of biological heterogeneity and homogeneity shapes the way scientific research on Koreans is conducted and shapes the entire Korean national identity debate in postcolonial Korea. The postcolonial history of biological research on Koreans is a chronicle of Korean scientists’ refutation, appropriation, and revitalization of colonial racial research. In this respect, not only are Japanese colonial racial sciences and contemporary biological research on Koreans inextricable from each other but colonial racial science is the very scaffolding on which contemporary biological research on Koreans and the politics of Korean national identity have been constructed.

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11 *Honhap minjok* is the Korean expression of the Japanese term *konwa minzoku*.

12 I borrowed the term from Kim Hoi-eun’s (2016: 459–69) observation on “the recycling of colonial physical anthropology in postcolonial Korea.”


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Racializing Chōsenjin


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