

Endo Shusaku and Racial Identity

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遠藤周作と人種のアイデンティティ

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遠藤周作の初期の作品では日本人の主人公を描写するのに「黄色い男」という言葉がよく使われている。アジア人を卑しめるのに使われる「黄色」という言葉を遠藤周作は何故彼の作品の日本人に使ったのであろうか？遠藤は日本人が欧米人とはまったく異なることを強調しなかったと考えられる。

Endo Shusaku's writings grapple with being both a Christian and a Japanese person. Endo's themes often revolve around the difficulty of a Japanese person to be true to Christian faith and also to be true to the customs of Japanese culture.

Endo was baptized in 1933 at 10 years old at the behest of his mother and aunt and would find himself out of step with the extreme Japanese nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s, when Christianity was considered a religion of the enemy. After entering Keio University in 1943 and graduating in 1948 with a degree in French Literature, Endo wished to continue his study of French Catholic writers and do more research in Catholic Christianity. In 1950 he had the chance as one of the first post-war Japanese foreign students to go to France, where he

enrolled in Lyon University to study such twentieth century French Catholic writers as Francois Mauriac and Georges Bernanos.

In France, Endo faced not only racial discrimination as an Asian, but also discriminatory attitudes as a member of a defeated nation which had allied itself with Nazi Germany and occupied French colonial Indochina. He also saw the racial discrimination that black Africans faced, even though they were considered French citizens, as members of French colonies were considered equal to French-born white people.

Endo wrote articles and short stories while in France and began publishing them in Japanese magazines. His first book *Shiroi Hito/Kiroi Hito* was published in 1955, comprising the novella *Shiroi Hito*, which had first been published in a magazine, winning the Akutagawa Prize in 1955, and a newly written novella *Kiroi Hito*.

The first page of *Kiroi Hito* quotes an anonymous fairy story about God creating man. God creates a man in his image and puts him in the oven to bake. God takes him out too soon and produces a white man. God tries again, but falls asleep and burns the second creation, a black man. God tries a third time, and bakes for just the right amount of time and creates a yellow man and says with approval "All things in moderation."

This story is followed by a quotation from the Bible about how God will spew out lukewarm believers, who are neither hot nor cold.⁽¹⁾

Endo's novella, which is set in Japan, does not mention black people, so one might come to the conclusion that Endo is positioning Japanese in the middle of some sort of hierarchy of white people and

black people. The quotation from Revelation may be Endo's belief that Japanese are cooler, calmer, or blander than other races, but at the same time uninterested in or indifferent to religion compared to white people and black people.

Endo does not refer to either of these two quotations in his story of a young Japanese man named Minoru Chiba, who is writing a letter about a French priest named Father Durand to a French priest named Father Breau during the waning years of the Second World War when American bombers are attacking the Kobe area nightly.

Chiba recalls learning about Christianity from Father Breau when he looked at the priest's illustrated Bible showing God as a white man, with blond hair and blue eyes. Father Breau tells Chiba that God has no nationality, but doesn't address the issue of the Eurocentric illustrations. Chiba goes on to criticize Father Breau's typical "white man's way of thinking" about sin and guilt. Chiba says he is not writing to Father Breau to repent of any particular sense of sinfulness or emptiness.

"As a yellow man, I know nothing so grave, or so dramatic, as your sense of sin, or your "emptiness." All I know is fatigue. Deep fatigue. A fatigue as cloudy as my yellowish skin, and as dank and sunken." ⁽²⁾

Chiba mentions his yellowish skin because he is suffering from tuberculosis, and compares it to his loss of faith in Christianity. However, most of Chiba's story is about how Father Durand had been failing to do his priestly duties through personal weakness. He goes on to say that Father Durand has tried to deflect the attention

of the Japanese military and police authorities away from himself by implicating Father Breau in anti-Japanese enemy activities. Although Chiba doesn't give Father Durand's Judas-like betrayal as a reason for his loss of faith, we can see that Chiba feels God doesn't help believers like himself, much less give strength and moral purpose to priests like Father Durand, who should be fully dedicated to his faith.

On the last page of the novella, Chiba writes to Father Breau on Christmas Eve, which should have a special significance and hope to Christians:

For you, Father Breau, I imagine that this is the night on which God gave Light to all this darkness. But for us yellow men, there is neither darkness nor light, nor any distinction between them. ⁽³⁾

Why Chiba would continue to refer to himself and the Japanese people as “yellow” seems to be a bit odd, as the Japanese media at the time made sure the public knew that American and European propaganda referred to the Japanese as a yellow race, different and less civilized than the white people of America and Europe. Educated Japanese would also know that Europeans and Americans had justified their colonialism and racial discrimination on the “Yellow Peril” of Chinese and other Asian people. As John Dower writes:

The Hearst newspapers declared the war in Asia totally different from that in Europe, for Japan was a “racial menace” as well as a cultural and religious one, and if it proved victorious in the Pacific there would be “perpetual war between Oriental ideals and Occidental.” Popular writers described the war against Japan as “a holy war, a racial war of greater significance than any the world has heretofore seen.” ⁽⁴⁾

Does Chiba continue to call himself a “yellow man” to needle Father Breau, who as a European missionary to Japan refuses to deal honestly with the Japanese about the European bias of the Catholic Church? Father Breau’s brusque dismissal of Chiba’s query about why his illustrated Bible shows God as a white man may lead to this conclusion.

Endo’s first full-length novel *Aoi Chisana Budo* was serialized in the magazine *Bungakukai* in 1956. Endo’s main character is Ihara, a Japanese foreign student in France. Ihara mentions the discrimination he suffers in France because of his yellow skin. In the French language the word for yellow has some negative connotations, as for example, French strikebreakers are called yellow. Yellow is also a slang word for cowardliness in English. In this novel Ihara complains about not being accepted equally with white people in France and bitterly remarks that the color white symbolizes justice, goodness, love, truth, and beauty, but through learning about the large number of war crimes committed in France during the Second World War, he sees the truly ugly character of Europeans in their proud superiority over yellow people, even though they are equal to Japan in the scope of committing atrocities during the War.

Professor Sumie Okada of Immaculate Heart University in Kagoshima notes this point in her discussion of Ihara and the story contained in this novel:

For Shusaku Endo, however, it was far more significant to take note of the yellowness of his skin when he was in France than to focus on the impact of cultural differences in Franco-Japanese relationships.

Indeed, the physical factor was for him the clearest indication of his national identity, a symbol of his Japaneseness, and is mentioned as such in *Blue and Small Grapes*.⁽⁵⁾

Professor Okada goes on to say that Endo has an inferiority complex about the West when it comes to morality:

Endo's gaijin (foreigners) complex is revealed in its utmost strength when the protagonist mentions that even the white race represented by the Westerners committed similar atrocities in the war—such as the incident at a well in France where innocent civilians were massacred—to those inflicted by the Japanese military on Chinese civilians in Nanking. The tone of his remark seems to echo the defiant discovery by a yellow-skinned man, the protagonist, that he can be the equal of the supposedly superior white people, even in the sharing of a horrendous sin.⁽⁶⁾

In Endo's novella *Aden Made*, published in the literary journal *Mita Bungaku* in 1954, a Japanese student named Chiba leaves France for home by ship. Travelling from Marseille through the Suez Canal and past Aden on the Arabian Peninsula, Chiba reflects on his time in France with his French girlfriend, Maggie. Chiba describes his feeling of physical inferiority in terms of skin color when they made love:

She was pure white, and my body sank into the light of the room in a dark yellow shade unlike the brightness of her shoulder and breast. From my waist to stomach was not so bad, but around my chest and neck the luster of my yellow skin was dull. And the two colors of our entangled bodies had no beauty, no harmony. Rather it was ugly. It was like a yellow ground beetle clinging on to a pure white flower.⁽⁷⁾

Chiba recalls a house party where he thought all of his fellow French students were silently condemning him for having a white girlfriend. He had felt so self-conscious about the experience that he had tried to explain his feeling to Maggie, who couldn't understand why he felt the way he did.

"I love you, Chiba. Isn't that enough. You aren't the only one who feels pain."

"It's not enough. It's really not enough. You can love me. You are white. However, the pains that I feel as a yellow man do not torment you. You cannot know what I feel." ⁽⁸⁾

Dr. Emi Mase-Hasegawa of Nanzan University quotes from an essay in which Endo described his actual voyage from France to Aden as a depressing journey away from the center of Christianity to a dry miserable desert area far from Christianity:

Two years ago, on my way back from the West, I was on the ship crossing the Red Sea. Standing on the corner of the Arabian desert that was on the point that divides the West and Asia, I felt pain inside. This is no longer the World of White that represents clarity and extremes. I had to return from them to the World of Yellow that is the color of chaos, dim, and without clear division. Yet, my skin is yellow, never white. Thus, I thought I should start everything not from mixing but confronting this yellow world and the white world. ⁽⁹⁾

Seisen Women's University Professor Takeda Tomoju points out that *Aden Made* contains all the concerns that appear in Endo's literary works: a sense of isolation from Japan, racial discrimination, and the problems of love and sin. Takeda points out

that along with the obvious inferiority complex that Chiba exhibits in describing his “ugly” yellow skin compared to the pure white skin of his lover Maggie, Chiba also makes a point of contrasting France’s pure white winter snow with Egypt’s dull yellow brown sand. This adds to Chiba’s feeling that white is good and beautiful while yellow and brown are ugly and bad. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Professor Takeda Hidemi of Seibigakuin Junior College mentions that Endo wrote in a 1956 article about colored people and white people that French people on the ship he took to France called him a dirty yellow man. ⁽¹¹⁾

Why did Endo accept the idea that the Japanese people actually have yellow skin? While it continues to be acceptable to use the word “black” for Africans and those of African descent and “white” for Caucasians, the word “yellow” has fallen out of use for Asians, particularly as it is clear that the skin color of Asians runs the gamut between white and brown, but not yellow.

Michael Keevak, a professor in the Department of Foreign Languages of National Taiwan University, points out in his book *Becoming Yellow: a Short History of Racial Thinking* that the idea of yellow skin coloring did not exist before the nineteenth century:

The idea that East Asian people were colored yellow cannot be traced back before the nineteenth century, and it does not come from any sort of eyewitness description or from Western readings of East Asian cultural symbols. We will see that it originates in a different realm, not in travel or missionary texts but in scientific discourse. For what occurred during the nineteenth century was that yellow

had become a racial designation. East Asians did not, in other words, become yellow until they were lumped together as a yellow race, which beginning at the end of the eighteenth century would be called “Mongolian.” ⁽¹²⁾

Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, published the first scientific writings on racial categories. In the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* published in 1758, Linnaeus divided humanity into five races: the Wild Man, the American, the European, the Asiatic, and the African. Linnaeus distinguished each race by skin color, shape of eyes and other facial features, and character. ⁽¹³⁾

The Wild Man was a catch-all category for primitive people and freaks of nature. The American category was for the Native American people (particularly of North America) who were described as red-skinned. Europeans were described as white and Africans as black. The Asiatic was described as having yellow skin.

The color yellow, aside from its association with cowardice, also was associated with jaundice (from the French word *jaune* meaning yellow) a disease noted for causing the skin to turn yellowish. Thus Asians were being considered as weak and sickly in character as well as physically.

Johann Blumenbach, a German anthropologist at the University of Gottingen, published *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775) and in its 1795 edition, used the terms Caucasian (the Caucasus Mountains being the border between Europe and Asia), Mongolian (Asian), Ethiopian (African), and Caribbean (Native Americans) and added the Malayan category for Southeast Asians and Polynesians

as well. Blumenbach based his classification system on skull size and physical characteristics as well as skin color. Blumenbach claimed that European skulls had a high forehead, while Asians and Africans had a low forehead, giving rise to the phrases “high brow” and “low brow.” ⁽¹⁴⁾

European scientists continued to build on these racial classifications, placing white people at the top in intelligence, diligence, kindness and cultural advancement, with black people placed at the bottom and Asians and Native Americans somewhere in the middle of this hierarchy. This racial attitude provided Europeans and Americans with justifications for their continuing paternalistic colonialism and racial segregation.

Asian Americans generally only refer to the word “yellow” in criticizing racism and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans. One example is the concept of “yellow face,” which borrows from the concept of “black face.” This refers to European and American white people pretending to be of either Asian or African descent in entertainment, first as singers or comedians in the nineteenth century and in movies and television in the twentieth century. Part of pretending to be of another race would include changing the color of one’s skin along with some facial features. The purpose of “black face” and “yellow face” was to make fun of black and Asian people for the entertainment of white people.

Why did Endo call his Japanese characters “yellow men” considering how negative the term has always been? People who face discrimination will sometimes use the discriminatory words they are

called in an ironic or sarcastic way. Some people have claimed that using discriminatory words about themselves will take the sting out of the intended racial insult.

Endo's literary themes often include the idea that the Japanese are too different from other people to accept foreign ideas like Christianity. Perhaps Endo used the pejorative term to agree with racist Westerners who felt Japanese were not like them. This feeling would allow Endo to feel that there was no point in trying to gain the approval of white people, including the people who control Christianity and set its agendas. Endo seems to have felt that Japanese Christians should find their own Japanese version of Christianity based on Japanese cultural and religious needs rather than trying to accept and fit into European ideas about Christianity. Endo's sympathy and reluctance to criticize Japan's Kyushu-based Hidden Christians, in the face of the Catholic Church's disapproval of these Hidden Christians as a misguided sect, seems to show that Endo doesn't think Christianity is a universal, one-size-fits-all faith.

Endo would go on to use his last book, *Deep River*, much of which is set in India, to explore his views on Christianity in terms of other religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. The main character in this novel, Otsu mentions that his "Japanese sensibilities" made him feel out of harmony with European Christianity. He goes on to explain his feelings:

God has many different faces. I don't think God exists exclusively in the churches and chapels of Europe. I think he is also among the Jews and the Buddhists and the Hindus. ⁽¹⁵⁾

- (1) Endo Shusaku, trans. Teruyo Shimizu, *White Man, Yellow Man*. Paulist Press. 2014, page 70.
- (2) Endo, page 73.
- (3) Endo, page 133.
- (4) Tchen, John Kuo Wei and Dylan Yeats, ed. *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*. Verso. 2014, page 285.
- (5) Okada Sumie. *Japanese Writers and the West*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2003, page 95.
- (6) Okada, page 96.
- (7) Endo Shusaku. *Aden Made in Shiroy Hito, kiroy Hito, Hoka Nihen*, Kodansha Bunko. 1971, page 160.
- (8) Endo, page 168.
- (9) Endo Shusaku, “*Kirisuto-kyo to Nihon Bungaku*”, The Tokyo 4.13. CSEL 12:205–208, quoted in Mase-Hasegawa Emi, *Christ in Japanese Culture: Theological Themes in Shusaku Endo's Literary Works*, Brill, 2008, page 71.
- (10) Takeda Tomoju. *kaisetsu in Shiroy Hito, kiroy Hito, Hoka Nihen*, Kodansha Bunko. 1971, page 199.
- (11) Takeda Hidemi. *Aden Made: Futatsu no Shiten in Sakuhinron: Endo Shusaku*, edited by Kasai Akio and Tamaki Kunio. Sobunsha. 2000, page 11.
- (12) Keevak, Michael. *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking*. Princeton University Press. 2011, page 2.
- (13) Tchen, page 129-30.
- (14) Tchen, page 130.
- (15) Endo Shusaku. Trans. Van Gessel. *Deep River*. New Directions.

1994, pages 117, 121.