

THE TAXONOMIC GAZE: LOOKING AT WHITENESS FROM EAST TO WEST

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Abstract

In this article I consider representations of whiteness which emanate from outside the Euro-American centres. I argue that it is necessary to understand how whiteness has been seen by non-white observers, and that we need to be sensitive to local taxonomies of difference which are not always reducible to the white/non-white distinction which is hegemonic in the Euro-American centres. I consider the works of some artists and writers from early twentieth century Japan who are sensitive to their positioning in international hierarchies and who attempt to place themselves in a position of power in these gendered, classed, ethnicised and racialised hierarchies through their deployment of what I call the "taxonomic gaze". I argue that the concept of whiteness needs to be historicised and provincialised, and that the field of whiteness studies itself also needs to be historicised.

Introduction

In 1921, I left Japan and headed for France. The ship had hardly docked in Shanghai before my fellow passengers, from curiosity to know a Western woman, went to visit the white-walled western building with the red light. There they were taken by the golden hair of the Polish Jewish women and the Russian refugee women, enchanted by the charm of blue eyes, and

returned to the ship singing paeans. I was the only one who celebrated the beauty of the slender bamboo-like figures of the Chinese women, and did not listen to their stories. It was the same when we docked in Hong Kong. To them, the Malay and Indian women just seemed like *sauvages*. For me, however, they gave me a sense of *aesthetiquement beauté* (Fujita 1984: 57).ⁱ

This account comes from Fujita [Foujita] Tsuguharu's essay on the "Women of the World", and provides a relatively rare example of a man from outside the Euro-American centres exercising a powerful gaze on the peoples of the world. Foujita is an artist who travelled from Japan to Paris in the 1920s, where he was also able to exercise the powerful gaze of a painter.ⁱⁱ The passage above reflects a taxonomic attitude which places all of the peoples in the world in hierarchies of value, in this case in gendered hierarchies of beauty. In this article I will explore manifestations of this attitude in the writings of selected cultural producers from Japan in the 1920s. However, in order to situate this particular taxonomic gaze, we first need to locate this study within recent developments in the field of whiteness studies.

Provincialising Whiteness

In his pioneering book, *White*, Richard Dyer commented that the study of "race" had hitherto meant the study of "any racial imagery other than that of

white people" (1997: 1). Dyer conceptualised his own project as being about

the racial imagery of white people – not the images of other races in white cultural production, but the latter's imagery of white people themselves. This is not done merely to fill a gap in the analytic literature, but because there is something at stake in looking at, or continuing to ignore, white racial imagery. As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people (Dyer 1997: 1).

Over a decade later, Dyer's comments about the racialisation of white people probably seem quite self-evident. Dyer first commented on representations of racialised others by those who spoke from a dominant and unmarked position. He then extended this discussion to consider how these "white" people had represented themselves, and produced their own "whiteness" in opposition to a series of racialised others. It is also, however, necessary to consider how those positioned outside that sphere have critiqued the self-representations of those positioned as "white". (Lake 2007; hooks 1981; Gates 1981; Fujikawa 2005). A further development might involve readings of how "whiteness" has appeared in the texts of those who have been positioned as "non-white". We need to historicise whiteness and to provincialise it;ⁱⁱⁱ that is, to demonstrate that the concept of whiteness has a specific history in particular localised cultural and social contexts, and that the concept cannot easily be generalised beyond those contexts. Similarly, the field of whiteness

studies itself needs to be historicised and placed in its specific academic and intellectual context in the (mainly) Anglophone Euro-American academy at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In reading texts which have been produced outside the Euro-American sphere where whiteness acts as a privileged signifier of difference, we can not assume that the concepts, discourses and debates around racialisation can simply be translated into another sphere. The dynamics of difference will be expressed in very specific terms in particular local contexts. For example, in South Asia, there has apparently been a valuing of paler skin which was quite independent of the encounter with Europe (Robb 1995: 1–76). Or, in Japan, there is a form of white facial make-up which is associated with specific professions or theatrical performances, with nothing to do with racialisation (Kazami 1997).

In specific contexts, racialised meanings may be attributed according to the shape of facial features, the relative presence or absence of body hair, specific bodily odours, or the proportions of the body, rather than just skin colour. These features interact with dress, adornment, deportment, the dressing of hair, and the modification of bodies through such practices as shaving, piercing, or tattooing. Similarly, the semantic field encompassed by the signifier "white" cannot be expected to translate neatly across languages. In each language, the local equivalent of the colour "white" will have specific associations and connotations.

In this article, I consider some representations of whiteness from the early decades of the twentieth century in Japan. By this time, intellectuals in Japan had been exposed to the ideologies of racial hierarchy which

emanated from Europe and the United States. These had particular relevance in Japan, which had faced the threat of colonisation by Europe and the United States. By the 1920s, the Japanese government had managed to renegotiate the unequal treaties with the United States, Britain and other European powers; had forged an alliance with Britain; and had acquired its own colonies in East Asia. In the First World War, Japan had been allied with the Anglophone powers, but nevertheless was unsuccessful in its campaign for a racial equality clause in the Charter of the newly-formed League of Nations. Japanese national identity was always, then, defined with reference to both the Euro-American powers and other Asian countries. These international geopolitical hierarchies were naturalised according to the discourses of racialisation, and ideologies of racial hierarchy were given local inflections in Japan (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Oguma 2002). As Dyer has commented, with respect to more recent manifestations of hierarchical thought, race was "never not a factor, never not in play" (Dyer 1997: 1).

In early twentieth century East Asia, cultural representations were integrated into international circuits which referenced the circulation of signs, products, practices, finance and capital which have been associated with the condition of "colonial modernity". Tani Barlow has emphasised the "interrelatedness of colonizing powers and colonial regimes" and has drawn our attention to the "colonial commodities (e.g. opium, tea, labour), reordered styles of governmentality, juridical norms (e.g. international laws and treaties), administrative innovations (e.g. customs, extraterritoriality, treaty ports), and colonial trade in ideas that characterize colonizers ... as well as

colonial regimes" (Barlow 2004: 7; see also Barlow 1997: 1–20).

In this article I explore some cultural representations whereby artists and writers trained in early-twentieth century Japan gazed on whiteness and thereby constituted their own gendered, classed, sexualised, racialised, and ethnicised positionings in the taxonomies of difference in East Asia and beyond. The three case studies involve male artists whose work ranged across the literary and the visual: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965), a novelist with an intense interest in visuality (See Lamarre 2005); Koide Narashige (1887–1931), an artist and essayist who collaborated with Tanizaki; and Fujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968), another painter who used the essay form to reflect on his artistic practice. In the works of these artists, the themes of gender, visuality and racialisation intersect. Their works are characterised by what I call a "taxonomic gaze", a gaze which classifies, categorises, and produces hierarchies.

Naomi, the Modern Girl

Novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō published an essay some time after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. In this essay Tanizaki set out his hopes for the renewal of Tokyo, which included the rebuilding of the physical infrastructure of the city, and a vision for the wholesale renovation of Japanese culture, with a particular focus on the figure of the Japanese woman.

The change will be so great it will be almost as if they belonged to a different race. Their figures, the color of their skin and of their eyes will become like those of Western people, and even the Japanese they speak will have the ring of a European language (Tanizaki 1934; trans. in Keene 1984: 751).

This faith in the power of culture to transform the very bodies of the people seems surprising to modern readers. Notwithstanding the scientific and sociological debunking of the category of "race", we are used to thinking of "race" as a property of bodies, something which cannot easily be modified by culture. It is implicitly assumed that the meanings attached to bodies are infinitely malleable, albeit within specific regimes of power, but that the bodies themselves cannot so easily be transformed. Tanizaki's statement, is, of course, the rhetorical flourish of a novelist-turned-essayist, and does not stand up to excessive scrutiny. Nevertheless, when read in conjunction with his novel, *Chijin no Ai* (*A Fool's Love*, 1985[1925]), it does suggest an engagement with some more fluid and unstable discourses of racialisation.

A Fool's Love focuses on a white-collar salaried worker, Jôji, and his relationship with the café waitress Naomi. Jôji marries Naomi in the expectation that she can be trained as a suitable companion, and he provides her with lessons, in English conversation, singing and social dancing. They live together in the former studio of an artist and his model. Naomi has been described as the archetypal example of the *moga*, or "modern girl". The *moga*, in turn, has been seen as one of the symbols of artistic modernism and of early twentieth century Japanese modernity (Sato 2003, *passim*; Mackie 2007; Mackie in press). In the first half of the twentieth century in disparate places around the world, attention was focused on modern girls like "Naomi". They challenged mainstream representations of domesticity and femininity; were characterised by distinctive dress and commodities; experimented with alternative romantic relationships outside the sphere of the marital home and the nuclear family; and ventured

into the public spaces of the city, where they could be seen by others and return the gaze (Conor 2002: 53–4; Conor 2004; see also Barlow 2006: 26–8).

Naomi wears a bricolage of Japanese *kimono*, western dress and Indian fabrics. Her style is reminiscent of the women described by the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, women who "occupied the liminal space conjoining the indigenous and the imperial, the national and the international", and who "combined and reconfigured aesthetic elements drawn from disparate national, colonial and racial regimes to create a 'cosmopolitan look'" (2005: 246). In a similar vein, Thomas Lamarre has described such women in Tanizaki's novels as "an overdetermined image of transgressive intercourse ... a site where so many different tensions or contradictions are condensed and materialized ... a literal place of intercourse between different races, cultures and nations" (2005: 135).

One of the attractions of Naomi is that she cannot be placed comfortably either inside or outside the category of Japanese. This starts with her very name. Although the name "Naomi" is well-formed as a given name for a Japanese woman, particularly when written in Sino-Japanese characters, it is also a common-enough name in the English-speaking world. This suggestion of indeterminate linguistic genealogy is emphasised in the narrator's choice to write Naomi's name in the *katakana* script reserved for foreign words rather than any of the other choices available (Tanizaki 1984[1925]: 8).

Vernacular Taxonomies

Naomi is placed in a shifting hierarchy shaped by class, gender and racialisation. There is a taxonomy of

different types of women in the novel, from the most refined of middle-class Japanese women, to the Russian countess and dance teacher, Madame Shlemskaya. There is also a more localised taxonomy of women in the theatres and dance halls of urban Tokyo. Naomi is a long way from the refined middle-class ladies and the "white countess" Madame Shlemskaya, but may be placed precisely in a hierarchical relationship with the other women in the dance halls. The actress, Kirako, for example, seems a charismatic and refined figure in the world of the dance hall, but as an actress, she would be beyond the pale for respectable middle-class families. Kirako's beauty references elite consumer products, appropriate for a woman who is herself a commodity, a spectacle to be consumed by the patrons of the theatre.

Kirako ... gave the impression of a precious object that's been scrupulously polished with the highest art ... when she sat down at the table and picked up her cocktail glass, her hand, from the palm to the wrist, looked wonderfully slender, so light it could barely support the weight of her softly draping sleeve ... If they'd been flowers, Naomi would have bloomed in a field, and Kirako indoors. How thin, almost transparent was that little nose on her firm, round face! Not even a baby – only a doll made by the greatest master – could have such a delicate nose! Last of all, I noticed her teeth; Naomi had always been proud of hers but Kirako's were rows of pearls (Tanizaki 1986: 92).

Naomi can, however, look down on another woman, Mâ-chan, who presents the spectacle of an unsuccessful racialised masquerade, a monstrous and carnivalesque image of mismatched colours.

Her cheeks were red, her eyes large, and her lips thick, but the oval outline of her face, with its long, thin nose, was in the pure Japanese style of the ukiyoe prints. I pay close attention to women's faces, and I'd never seen such an ill-assorted face as this. It occurred to me that the woman was probably distressed by her Japanese face and had worked overtime to look like a Westerner [*Seiyô-kusaku*]. She'd whitened [*o-shiroi ga nutte ari*] every bit of exposed skin until she looked like she'd been dusted with rice flour, and applied shiny, blue-green pigment around her eyes. The bright red on her cheeks was obviously rouge. Unfortunately, with that ribbon twisted around her head, she looked like a monster (Tanizaki 1986: 83-4).

Naomi suffers, however, in comparison with Madame Shlemskaya, who is associated with the whiteness of fabrics such as georgette and precious stones such as diamonds.

She had the grave dignity and firm features of a born aristocrat; and her dignity was enhanced by her pale, limpid complexion – so white [*sôhaku o obita*] it was a little frightening. Seeing her authoritative expression, her tasteful clothes, and the jewels glittering on her breast and fingers, I found it hard to believe she was as poor as I had been told (Tanizaki 1986: 60-1).

A meeting between Madame Shlemskaya and Naomi allows for further comparisons and further refinement of the taxonomy.

Naomi flushed bright red and shook hands furtively without saying a word. I was even worse when my turn came. To tell the truth, I couldn't look at the

countess's pale [aojiroi],
sculptured face. Her hand
glittered with countless tiny
diamonds as I touched it silently.
I didn't raise my eyes (Tanizaki
1986: 66).

The narrator's comments on Madame Shlemskaya's body odour reflect commonly-held views of racialisation at this time. Non-Japanese bodies were thought to have a distinctive smell, due to the consumption of animal products, such as milk, butter and meat. Indeed, one epithet used to describe Europeans and Americans was *batā-kusai*, "smelling of butter". In addition, the application of perfume directly to the body, rather than the use of incense to perfume clothing, was a cultural practice which distinguished Japanese and non-Japanese (Adachi 2006: 19-38). We can also see the closely linked attitudes of anxiety and fascination, fear and desire, which are evoked by whiteness in the novel.^{iv}

What's more, [the countess's] body had a certain sweet fragrance ... I'm told that Westerners do have strong body odor, but to me, the faint, sweet-sour combination of perfume and perspiration was not at all displeasing – to the contrary, I found it deeply alluring. It made me think of lands across the sea I'd never seen, of exquisite, exotic flower gardens.

"This is the fragrance exuded by the countess's white body [*shiroi karada*!]" I told myself, enraptured, as I inhaled the aroma greedily (Tanizaki 1986: 69).

The most interesting feature of the novel, however, is the shifting racialisation of Naomi herself. She is said to look like someone of "mixed blood", although there is no specific question raised in the

novel about her parentage (Tanizaki 1986: 10).^v Rather, her body shifts in categorisation through her skilled manipulation of dress, deportment, demeanour, gesture and cosmetics. After a trip to the beach, the narrator watches the progress of sunburn, suntan, peeling and finally once again the paling of the skin as the effects of the sun wear off. Naomi's appearance on the beach in her swimsuit causes a lyrical reflection on the beauty of her body. The narrator expresses delight at the physical proportions of her body, the straightness of her limbs, the deportment which she has learned from watching Hollywood movies, and the added aura of the Hollywood-style swimsuit, purchased on the Ginza, the place most closely associated with the gendered and commodified modernity of the modern girl:

my heart cried out, "Naomi, Naomi, my Mary Pickford! What a fine, well-proportioned body you have. Your graceful arms! Your legs, straight and streamlined like a boy's!" And I couldn't help thinking of Mack Sennett's lively "bathing beauties", whom I'd seen in the movies (Tanizaki 1986: 28).

The following passage not only suggests the importance of deportment in racialised categorisations, but also a process of training to achieve specific forms of deportment.

Apparently she studied the actresses' movements when we went to the movies, because she was very good at imitating them. In an instant she could capture the mood and idiosyncrasies of an actress. Pickford laughs like this, she'd say; Pina Menicheli moves her eyes like this; Geraldine Farrar does her hair up this way. Loosening her hair, she'd push it

into this shape and that
(Tanizaki 1986: 37).

At times, Naomi wears Japanese dress – *kimono* – with the particular form of white make-up which was applied at that time by women. This make-up (*o-shiroi*, or “white”) is sometimes translated as “powder”, but is, in fact, a paste. Furthermore, the meaning of this white make-up shifts according to context. When Mâ-chan, above, wore such make-up with western dress, it was seen as an unsuccessful attempt to masquerade as “white”. When Naomi wears this make-up with her *kimono*, it takes on different connotations, for this white make-up is perfectly appropriate with Japanese dress.

“Well? A good choice don't you think?” Dissolving white powder [*o-shiroi*] in her hands, [Naomi] patted it vigorously on her steaming shoulders and nape as she spoke.

To tell the truth, the soft flowing material [of the *kimono*] wasn't very becoming on her full shoulders, large hips, and prominent bust. Muslin or common silk cloth gave her the exotic beauty of a Eurasian girl [*ainoko*], but a more formal kimono, like this one, only made her look vulgar. And when she wore a bold pattern, she looked like a chophouse woman in one of those places in Yokohama that cater to foreign sailors (Tanizaki 1986: 80–1).

It is rather Naomi's classed positioning which is the source of incongruity. For a vulgar woman like Naomi to wear the *kimono* of a respectable woman results in a dissonance which, nevertheless, has racialised connotations. Here, racialised anxiety is a matter of contagion rather than an essential property of the body. There is an anxiety about Japanese women who provide sexual services to

non-Japanese customers in former treaty ports like Yokohama. Naomi can also be connected with the former treaty port of Yokohama through her consumption of imported goods. At home, she dresses her body in exotic imported fabrics, and their house is decorated in bohemian style with cheap Indian cotton and calico.

White Nights

Most fascinating and challenging, however, is that Naomi's very body is transformed in the course of the novel. The narrator keeps a diary where he records the transformations of her body from adolescence to adulthood, as they share their life in the “culture house”.^{vi} The diary and photographs seem like a parody, or perhaps a vernacularisation, of the scientific and medical discourses whereby the truth of racial difference is thought to be something that can be defined and captured through testing, measuring and documentation (Anderson 2002: *passim*). However, the very transmutability of Naomi's body provides a challenge to these discourses of racialisation.

At 8 p.m. I bathed her in the washtub. She still has her tan from the beach. She's very dark, except under the bathing suit. I'm dark, too, but Naomi has such a light complexion, the contrast is sharper. Even when she has nothing on, you'd think she was wearing a suit. "You look like a Zebra," I said. She laughed.

About a month later, on October 17, I wrote:

Her tan is fading and her skin doesn't peel any more. It's even smoother and lovelier than before (Tanizaki 1986: 33).

In a pivotal scene, the narrator contemplates Naomi's sleeping body. This is no longer the suntanned body of the bathing beauty, but a wholly new vision of whiteness.

Taking care not to waken her, I sat by her sleeping pillow, and stealthily gazed at her sleeping form ... A book lay open at her nose ... My eyes moved back and forth between the pure white Western paper [*junpaku na seiyōshi*] in the book and the whiteness [*shirosa*] of her breast (Tanizaki 1986: 120).

The reference to the whiteness of paper is perhaps unsurprising for a literary figure who grew up in a household of printers. The association with paper might also suggest, however, the literary reference points for Tanizaki's explorations of whiteness.^{vii} The chimerical and chameleonic nature of Naomi's body reaches its ultimate expression in this scene. Naomi's skin shifts from yellow (*kiroi*) to white (*shiroi*), but this whiteness has a distinctive quality. Naomi's whiteness is displaced from discourses of racialisation, but also problematises the association of whiteness with purity. Her whiteness is "wrapped in tatters, amid soiled, dusty quilts", a necrophiliac whiteness associated with death and melancholy, a paradoxical whiteness which is associated with the darkness of night-time rather than the light of day.

Naomi's skin looked yellow [*kiroku*] one day and white [*shiroku*] another; but it was extraordinary limpid when she was fast asleep, or had just awakened, as though all the fat in her body had melted away. *Night* is usually associated with *darkness*; but to me, night always brought thoughts of the whiteness [*shirosa*] of Naomi's skin. Unlike the bright, shadowless whiteness of noon, it was a whiteness wrapped in

tatters, amid soiled, dusty quilts; and that drew it to me all the more ... her face, too, radiant and kaleidoscopic by day, now wore a mysterious cast, a melancholy frown, like that of one who's just swallowed bitter medicine, or of one who's been strangled. I loved her sleeping face ... "Her death-face would be beautiful, too", I often told myself (Tanizaki 1986: 120-121).^{viii}

Under Western Eyes

Thus far I have explored the shifting, chimerical and chameleonic properties of the body of Naomi in the eyes of the narrator. The narrator's view of the shifting racial categorisation of Naomi's body suggests a fluid, non-essentialist view of racialisation. There is, however, a limit to this fluidity. In the end, Naomi is a Japanese woman. The narrator's relationship with Naomi is a way of managing his fascination with and fear of whiteness.

Though I had no sense for such things, my tastes ran to the chic and up-to-date, and I imitated the Western style in everything. My readers already know so much. If I'd had enough money to do whatever I pleased, I might have gone to live in the West and married a Western woman, but my circumstances wouldn't permit that, and I married Naomi, a Japanese woman with a Western flavour. Even if I had been rich, I would have had no confidence in my looks. I'm only five feet two inches tall; I have a dark complexion, and my teeth are snaggly. I'd be forgetting my place if I hoped for a wife with the majestic physique of a Westerner. A Japanese should marry a Japanese, I concluded, and Naomi came closest to meeting my needs. I was satisfied (Tanizaki 1986: 67).

For most of the novel, the narrator and protagonist, Jôji, has been the bearer of the gaze, casting his powerful taxonomic eye over a series of women, and placing them in a strict hierarchy according to racialised standards of beauty. In a scene reminiscent of John Berger's (1977) discussion of women who constantly imagine themselves under the gaze of a man, Jôji imagines himself under the gaze of a Western woman. In the taxonomy of difference, his masculine gaze cannot quite meet the European gaze on equal terms.^{ix} He is conscious of his height, his skin colour, and his teeth.

The Taxonomic Gaze

The character of Jôji in *A Fool's Love* is constantly classifying women into categories according to class, according to racialised gradations and according to physical beauty (Tanizaki 1984[1925]: 92; 102; 105–6; 127–8; 142). In his essays, too, Tanizaki repeatedly reflected on the different kinds of beauty to be found in women of different countries.^x Tanizaki's close contemporary, the artist Koide Narashige, also reflected on different kinds of beauty in his essay "Rafu Mandan" (Idle Thoughts on the Nude Woman, 1987[1926]: 9–14).^{xi} Koide, like Tanizaki, has a taxonomic gaze, and constantly makes connections between the act of painting a woman, and taking such a woman as a lover.

Japanese women do not have beautiful bodies, and no matter what you say, everyone agrees that only a Western woman will do for a nude; moreover, when you look at the shape of the women who appear in Japanese oil paintings, you just want to laugh at their lack of shape. But if you were to ask the one laughing whether he had made love to a Western

woman, the answer would be no. They would, after all, be walking out with a broad-faced Japanese woman (Koide 1987 [1926]: 9).

Koide's essay is populated by waitresses, models, and inaccessible European women. He also reflects on the spaces which are the most suitable settings for the depiction of the nude. In a similar fashion to Tanizaki's fictional musings, Koide finds Western-style rooms to be superior to Japanese-style rooms for this purpose:

in Western art, there are paintings of women connected with various natural scenes from everyday life: bathing scenes, seated women, scenes of women at their toilette, and so on. In Japan, however, even if one attempts to find motifs of nudity in everyday life, it's rather difficult. Even if one were to find such a scene, it would be the site of things which one would hesitate to introduce. For example, if one were to paint a scene of a woman standing by a bed and translate it into a Japanese context, it would not be a very pleasing composition ... Beds look right in Western-style rooms. There's nothing uncomfortable about the sight. Often, beds are more of a decorative element in such rooms. In Japan, there is something suggestive about seeing a bed in broad daylight (Koide 1987 [1926]: 8–9).

Koide's essay is symptomatic of some prevalent attitudes in the art world of early twentieth century Japan. He clearly makes connections between "Westernised" spaces, artistic spaces, and sexualised spaces, in a manner similar to the logic of Tanizaki's novels. He goes on to describe the "dressing" of artist's studios with Indian cloth and Western furniture, in a manner similar to

Tanizaki's novel. These scenes suggest the international dissemination of the bohemian style (Koide 1987 [1926]: 9; Tanizaki 1984 [1925]: 30; Nicholson 2003: *passim*).

Koide can be placed in a lineage of artists who engaged with European styles of painting. By the time Koide was writing, the art world in Japan was polarised into two styles known as 'Nihonga' (Japanese-style painting) and 'Yōga' (Western style painting). From the 1890s, artists in Japan travelled to Paris to experience the art schools of Montmartre and Montparnasse (Bryson 2003: 101–118). Those who could not travel to Paris studied with college art teachers who had returned from Europe. They learned the practices of drawing and painting from live models, the practices which are referred to in Tanizaki's novelistic references to studios and art schools. They also learned a series of gendered, classed and racialised power relations.

Tanizaki's novel suggests that the constitution of racialised difference is not an inherent property of bodies. Rather, racialisation involves the reading of bodies for evidence provided by dress, deportment, gesture, cosmetics, adornment and a whole range of embodied practices. Racialised positionings are constituted through a series of gazes between actors in the modern scene, embedded in complex relations of power amid the circulation of signs, symbols, bodies, commodities, finance and capital.

Gazing on Whiteness in the Metropolis

While Tanizaki and Koide were gazing on and classifying various types of women in the urban areas of Japan, Fujita [Foujita] Tsuguharu took his brush, paints and inks to the centre of the visual arts –

Paris. Foujita lived in the Paris of Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, Amedeo Modigliani and Chaim Soutine, Man Ray and Jean Cocteau, Colette and Kiki de Montparnasse. It was the town of bohemians, writers, artists and models, new women, modern girls and *garçonnes*.^{xii}

Foujita has become known for a particular technique for rendering white skin. Although using oil paints, he adapted techniques from Japanese brush painting to achieve a profound, milky whiteness in his paintings. He first covered the canvas in a special white paint of his own recipe, then produced outlines with a fine, dark brush, before finally filling in with paint (Birnbbaum 2006: 5–6; 96–98). While drawing on the techniques of Japanese brush painting, Foujita also achieved effects which had not been attempted by his forebears in Japan.

I suddenly realised one day that there are very few paintings of nudes in Japan. In the paintings of Harunobu or Utamaro, there are merely glimpses of part of an arm or a small area around the knee. I realized that they conveyed the sensation of skin only in those places. For the first time I decided to try and represent that most beautiful of materials – human skin (Fujita 1984, trans. Birnbbaum 2006: 6).

As an artist in Paris, Foujita could literally gaze on the women of the world, and, through his paintings, make the spectacle of these women available to other viewers. His paintings have come to be hung in major international galleries, and thus could be said to express a gaze of power, contributing to the artistic culture of Paris and the world. In focusing on the beauty of "human skin", however, he was touching on one of the privileged signifiers of racialised difference. It is also, of course, important

to note that it was the skin of the woman's body which most interested him, thus placing him in the position of powerful masculine observer. A similar positioning has been described with reference to Foujita's predecessors.

It is through a focus on the bodies of women rather than men that proximity to and intimacy with the West are evoked. Such a high degree of assimilation into European visuality cannot have been easy for any of the Meiji artists to achieve. Yet in a sense there was always a place carved out for them in advance, by virtue of the fact that the European visual regime they were embarked on entering was centered squarely on the masculine subject of vision – one had only, so to speak, to step into his shoes (Byson 2003:108).

One of Foujita's celebrated paintings of whiteness is "Nude with Jouy Fabric" from 1922, a portrait of Kiki de Montparnasse reclining on a pale brocade fabric.^{xiii} Foujita's third wife, and one of his models, was Lucie Badoud. He called her "Youki" (Snow) in honour of her milky white skin. In this act of naming, he demonstrates a fascination with whiteness, but also assimilates whiteness into his own cultural sphere by giving her a Japanese name. Foujita and Youki were photographed lounging in his studio, both wearing Japanese *kimono*. His painting, "Youki, Goddess of the Snow" was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1924 (Birnbaum 118–126; Klüver and Martin 1989: 100–101).

Skin colour also took on gendered meanings in Foujita's paintings. In the 1920s, Foujita completed two massive and rather fanciful murals. They have only recently been restored and put on public display (Satō et al 2008: 70–89).

One is called *Lutteurs* (Fighters, 1928) and the other takes the form of two *Compositions: Composition au lion* (Composition with Lion) and *Composition au chien* (Composition with Dog, 1928). Both wall-sized paintings are composed of a series of carefully arranged naked male and female bodies, some in repose, some embracing, and some in combat. In the *Compositions*, the human bodies are interspersed with animals. What is interesting about the male and female bodies is the gradation of colour. Generally, the female bodies are paler than the male bodies, unless they are specifically racialised as Indian or African. The figures in the murals are largely divorced from a specific place and time, and thus the use of colour to delineate gendered and racialised differences is all the more striking.

In Foujita's essays, the impulse to classify and categorise appears, just as strongly as in the writings of Tanizaki and Koide. In one essay, on "Women and Cats", he describes the experience of having been a judge at a cat show in Paris. In fact, the essay has little mention of women at all, but the title prompts the reader to wonder what analogies are being drawn between cats and women. He explains at the end of the essay that when he did not have access to a woman as model, he would draw and paint cats. Indeed, Foujita became famous for paintings which feature cats, which finally became equivalent to the artist's signature (Fujita 2005: 54–56).

In the abovementioned essay on the "Women of the World", Foujita recounts his experiences with women from various countries. Travel, it seems, provided Foujita and other tourists with an excuse to purchase the sexual services of women from all over the world. Let us take another look at Foujita's account.

In 1921, I left Japan and headed for France. The ship had hardly docked in Shanghai before my fellow passengers, from curiosity to know a Western woman, went to visit the white-walled western building with the red light. There they were taken by the golden hair of the Polish Jewish women and the Russian refugee women, enchanted by the charm of blue eyes, and returned to the ship singing paeans. I was the only one who celebrated the beauty of the slender bamboo-like figures of the Chinese women, and did not listen to their stories. It was the same when we docked in Hong Kong. To them, the Malay and Indian women just seemed like *sauvages*. For me, however, they gave me a sense of *aesthetiquement beauté* (Fujita 1984: 57).

Fujita displays none of the anxiety about European women which we can discern in the writings of Tanizaki and Koide. He places himself in a position of power which allows him to categorise the women of the world. He appears to privilege women from Asia, his own part of the world. However, he displays his access to European cultural capital through the sprinkling of French words through his text. He goes on in other essays to provide anecdotes of the various women he came to know in the bohemian circles of Paris.^{xiv} While in Paris, Fujita was able to access the privileges of the male artist, and exercise a gaze of power on the women who posed as models for himself and other artists.

Nevertheless, Fujita himself was also subject to the taxonomic gaze, and could not always transcend his positioning as an exotic “oriental”. In English language accounts of the artistic world of early twentieth century Paris, he comes across as something of a

curiosity. He provided judo demonstrations; performed Japanese folk songs and dances; and dressed in idiosyncratic costumes of his own design and fabrication (Birnbaum 2006: 63–71; 95; 128–129). Phyllis Birnbaum has commented on the popular view of Fujita, that “he was simply seen as a Japanese artist without nuances, reaching toward caricature, always effervescent and sociable, with endless silly costumes at the ready” (2006: x). While it is true that Fujita often played on this exoticism and was a tireless self-promoter and manipulator of his own image, a somewhat more sophisticated picture emerges from his writings (Fujita 1984). His essays reveal someone who was disciplined in his work habits, thoughtful about his art, and able to conjure a picture in words just as skilfully as he does with his brush on canvas or silk.

Conclusion

All of these case studies demonstrate that those who grew up in the cultural milieu of early twentieth century Japan had been exposed to hierarchical notions of “race”. European racial taxonomies interacted with local taxonomies which depended on much more than just skin colour. Bodies were “read”, not only for physical differences (skin colour, hair colour, body size and proportion, body hair, bodily odours) but also for clues based on deportment, dress, gestures, posture and voice which could be used to make judgments about class, gender, ethnicity, racialised positioning and sexuality. Local taxonomies interacted with, but were not identical to, Eurocentric categorisations. Writers and artists explored these racialised taxonomies and at times were able to subvert them. These racialised hierarchies also interacted with gender in interesting ways. These male artists could exercise a

dominating, masculine gaze on the women of their own and other countries. However, in the racialising gazes which emanated from Europe, the Japanese male was often positioned as exotic "other", an otherness which sometimes trumped his ability to exercise a powerful gendered gaze.

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Notes

ⁱ Translations my own unless indicated otherwise. In this passage, the italicised words appear in the original passage in Sino-Japanese characters, with a French reading provided alongside. I have tried to convey this in the translation with the use of French words in italics. As in the original, the French words may not integrate smoothly into the grammar of the sentence.

ⁱⁱ Fojjita's family name was variously spelt as "Fujita" or "Foujita", and his given name was sometimes read as "Tsuguharu" and sometimes "Tsuguji". He also adopted the name "Léonard". As he is most well-known in European languages as "Foujita", I will use this spelling hereafter, except where citing Japanese language sources. On Fojjita's life, see Birnbaum, 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Here, I am drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) discussion of "provincialising" Europe.

^{iv} Hamilton (1990: 14–35) has characterized this structure of feeling, when faced with racialised difference, as "fear and desire".

^v Tanizaki uses the word, "Ainoko", which refers to someone of mixed parentage, and in the novel is written with Sino-Japanese characters which specifically mean "mixed-blood-child".

^{vi} On the "culture house" (*bunka jûtaku*), see Sand 2005. The artist's studio figures as a particularly sexualised space in the popular culture of the time, and performs a similar

function as a sexualised space in Tanizaki's novel, *Manji* (1947[1926–8])

^{vii} In another work, *Ningyo no Nageki* (A Mermaid's Lament) for example, Tanizaki tells the fantastical story of a white mermaid figure which clearly draws on European mythology and fairy tales. See Tanizaki 1917, trans. in Lamarre 2005: 45–6.

^{viii} See also Tanizaki's (1917) story, *Ningyo no Nageki* (A Mermaid's Lament), where the mermaid's skin "was of such whiteness that it recalled the glow of moonlight" (trans. in Lamarre 2005: 45–46). Readers of Kawabata Yasunari's (1972[1952]) novel *Yukiguni* (Snow Country) may also think back to the white nights of Tanizaki's novel. The opening sentence of *Snow Country* is: "The train emerged from the long tunnel into Snow Country. The depth of the night turned white" (1972: 5, my translation).

^{ix} See also the anxiety about comparisons between Japanese men and European men expressed in Tanizaki's essay "On Love and Sexual Desire": "Questioning the prostitutes in the ports open to foreigners in the Yokohama and Kobe areas supports this fact; according to these women, relatively few Japanese have such appetites, in comparison with Westerners" (Tanizaki 1931; trans. in Lamarre 2005: 333).

^x See, for example, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's essays, "Tokyo o Omou" (Thinking of Tokyo, 1934); "Onna no Kao" (A Woman's Face, 1922, trans. Lamarre 2005: 264); and "Ren'ai oyobi Shikijō" (Love and Sexual Desire, 1931, trans. Lamarre 2005: 331; 345).

^{xi} Koide provided illustrations and book design for one of Tanizaki's novels (see Koide Ryūtarō 2006).

^{xii} See Foujita's ink and watercolour drawing of a woman doing the Charleston, from the album "Le Journal de Youki", reproduced in Selz (1981: 19).

^{xiii} Kiki de Montparnasse was one of the names by which Alice Prin (1901–1953) was known. She was a painter, actor and artist's model, who appears in many of Man Ray's photographs, and is featured in the surrealist film, *Ballet Mécanique* (see Klüver and Martin 1996).

^{xiv} See also Foujita's (1929) essay in the *Paris-Montparnasse Review* (trans. Selz 1981: 21).