Embedded Racism: Japan's Visible Minorities and Racial Discrimination

Debito Arudou

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

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

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

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