

Race and World Views

Hoyt Long

*Textual Optics Lab
University of Chicago*

@hoytlong

Illustration by Daniel Bejar

Guiding Questions

1) How can we study the impact of racial identity on literary accounts of the world without reifying the identities these accounts often try to question or destabilize?

“*Race, Writing, and Computation: Racial Difference and the US Novel, 1880-2000*” (2019)

-- Divergent attitudes toward the Bible in fiction by black and white authors in the US.

2) What can we learn about such acts of questioning by studying racial representation (and particularly racial stereotypes) at scale?

“*The Semantics of Race Under Japanese Empire*” (forthcoming)

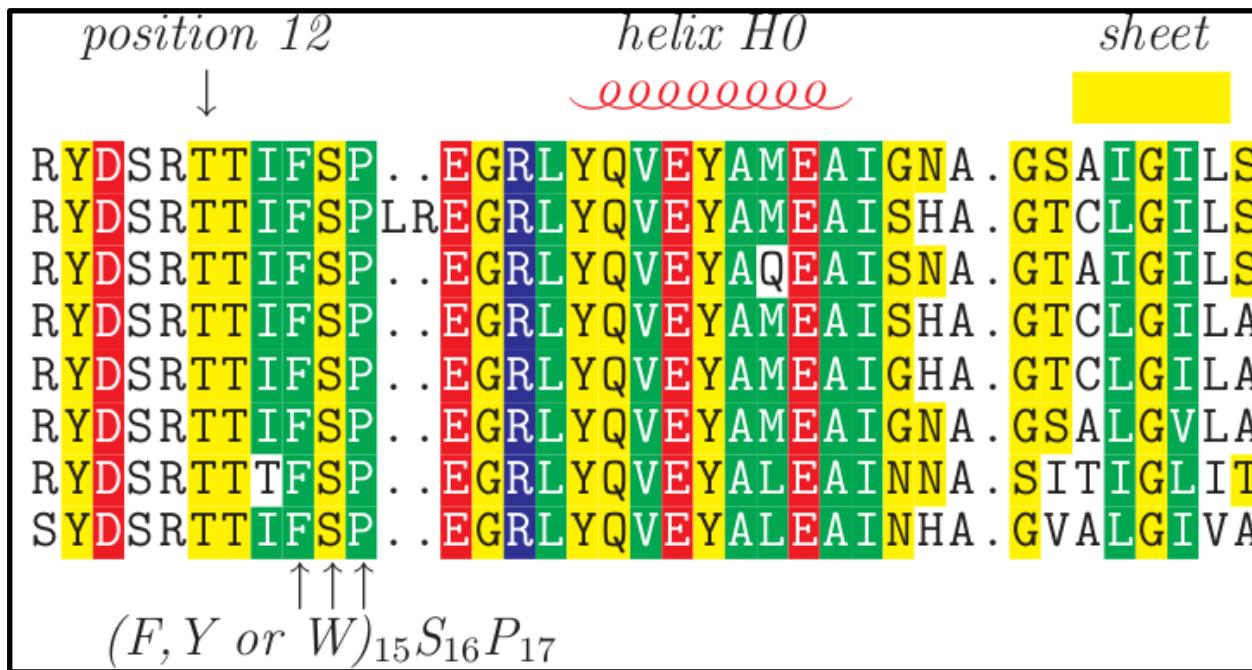
-- The semantics of racial difference in Japanese fiction written during its age of empire.

Black-White Literary Relations

“Black” Writers Corpus	137 Novels	~50% Male
“White” Writers Corpus	490 Novels	~80% Male

- Sampled from a larger corpus of nearly 10,000 Anglophone novels
- Novels skew heavily toward canonical works
- Corpora span 1880-2000
- Corpora split evenly between pre-1945 and post-1945
- 4-to-1 class imbalance is deliberate, and is an attempt to represent the imbalance in literary production in 20th century

Sequence Alignment



Category	Proportion	Example
Religious	11%	Father Which art in Heaven hallowed be thy Name
Lyric	10%	Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch
Self-Citation	4%	asked: "Did I snore?" "Terribly," he said, "you sounded like a chain saw
Juridical	4%	find this defendant guilty of murder in the first degree
Quotation	6%	Patrick Henry said 'Give me liberty or give me death'
Aphorism/Saying	2%	to make a long story short
Onomatopoeia	2%	Kitty-kitty-kitty, here kitty-kitty-kitty

Bible as Universal Code

- Did either category of writer cite the Bible at different rates?

NO

- Did either category of writer cite the Bible at different rates over time?

NO

- Did either category of writer cite more of one part of Bible than another?

NO

- Looking at “context” around each Bible citation, was the language different?

NO

Bible as Contested Code

Bible Context	Label	Novel	Author
<p>While Davis chanted a traditional prayer-poem with his own variations, Joe mounted the box that had been placed for the purpose and opened the brazen door of the lamp. As the word Amen was said, he touched the lighted match to the wick, and Mrs. Bogle's alto burst out in: We'll ##<i>walk in de light, de beautiful light Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright Shine all around us by day and by night Jesus, the light of the world##</i>. They, all of them, all of the people took it up and sung it over and over until it was wrung dry, and no further innovations of tone and tempo were conceivable. Then they hushed and ate barbecue. When it was all over that night in bed Jody asked Janie, "Well, honey, how yuh</p>	Social	Their Eyes were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston
<p>of course. But in the end there returned the poignant yearning from the Sunday world. As she went down in the morning from Cossethay and saw Ilkeston smoking blue and tender upon its hill, then her heart surged with far-off words: "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem-how ##<i>often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings##</i>, and ye would not—" The passion rose in her for Christ, for the gathering under the wings of security and warmth. But how did it apply to the weekday world? What could it mean, but that Christ should clasp her to his breast, as a mother clasps her child? And oh, for Christ, for him</p>	Non Social	The Rainbow	D.H. Lawrence

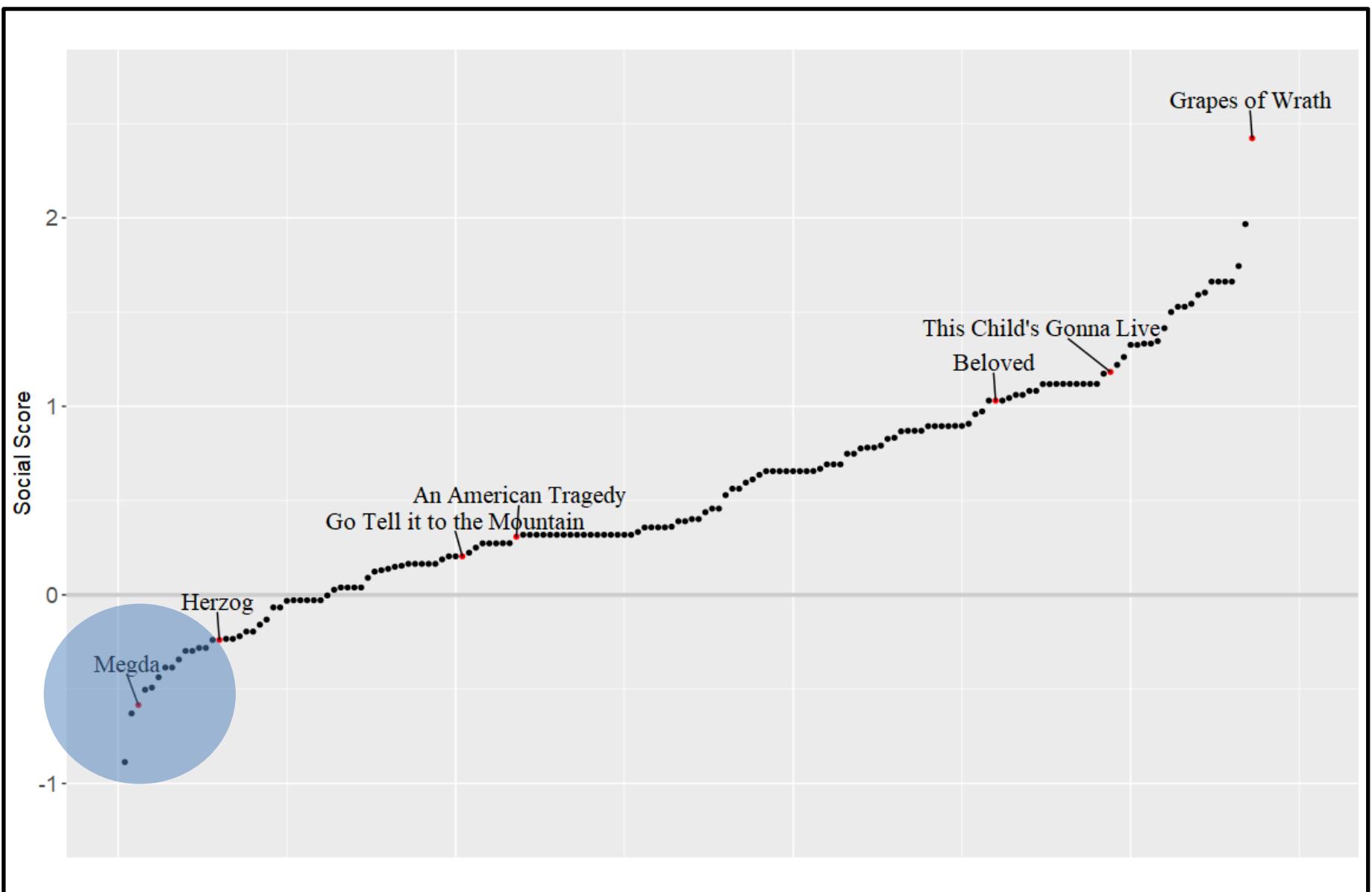
$$Y_i \sim \text{Bernoulli}(p_i)$$

$$\log \frac{p_i}{1 - p_i} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{gender}_i + \beta_2 \cdot \text{race}_i + \beta_3 \cdot \text{bible}_i + \beta_{23} \cdot \text{race}_i : \text{bible}_i + \gamma_{\text{novel}_i}$$

		Estimate	Std. Error	<i>z</i> score	<i>p</i> value
$\hat{\beta}_0$	(intercept)	0.520	0.265	1.966	0.0494
$\hat{\beta}_1$	(gender)	-0.313	0.237	-1.322	0.1863
$\hat{\beta}_2$	(race)	-0.220	0.252	-0.871	0.3837
$\hat{\beta}_3$	(bible)	-1.328	0.222	-5.994	2.05e-09
$\hat{\beta}_{23}$	(race : bible)	1.742	0.355	4.904	9.41e-07

Key Finding: When a white writer quotes the Bible it is less likely that she/he quotes it in a social context. The odds of being “social” decreases by a factor of 3.8, compared to when she/he writes about non-Bible related topics. When a black writer quotes the Bible, it is more likely that she/he quotes it in a social context. The odds of being “social” increases by a factor of 1.5 compared to when she/he writes about non-Bible related topics.

Between Categorical and Relational Thinking





Emma Dunham-Kelley

Guiding Questions

1) How can we study the impact of racial identity on literary accounts of the world without reifying the identities these accounts often try to question or destabilize?

“Race, Writing, and Computation: Racial Difference and the US Novel, 1880-2000” (2019)

-- Divergent attitudes toward the Bible in fiction by black and white authors in the US.

2) What can we learn about such acts of questioning by studying racial representation (and particularly racial stereotypes) at scale?

“The Semantics of Race Under Japanese Empire” (forthcoming)

-- The semantics of racial difference in Japanese fiction written during its age of empire.

Orientalism as World View

- Edward Said (*Orientalism*, 1978):

“A representation or image of an Other not directly drawn (or not only drawn) from the author's experience, but from a '**huge library**' of concepts, ideas, and experiences built up over time.”

“...is what matters in Orientalism the **general group of ideas overriding the mass of material**...dogmatic views of "the Oriental" as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction? -- or the much more varied work produced by almost uncountable individual writers...**individual instances of authors** dealing with the Orient.”

“In a sense the two alternatives, **general and particular**, are really two perspectives on the same material...And why would it not be possible to employ both perspectives together, or one after the other? Isn't there an obvious danger of distortion...if either too general or too specific a level of description is maintained systematically?”

Reading the “Library” of Racial Discourse

- Defining the Units of Analysis:

Vocabulary: *The specific words employed when the Orient is either spoken or written about.*

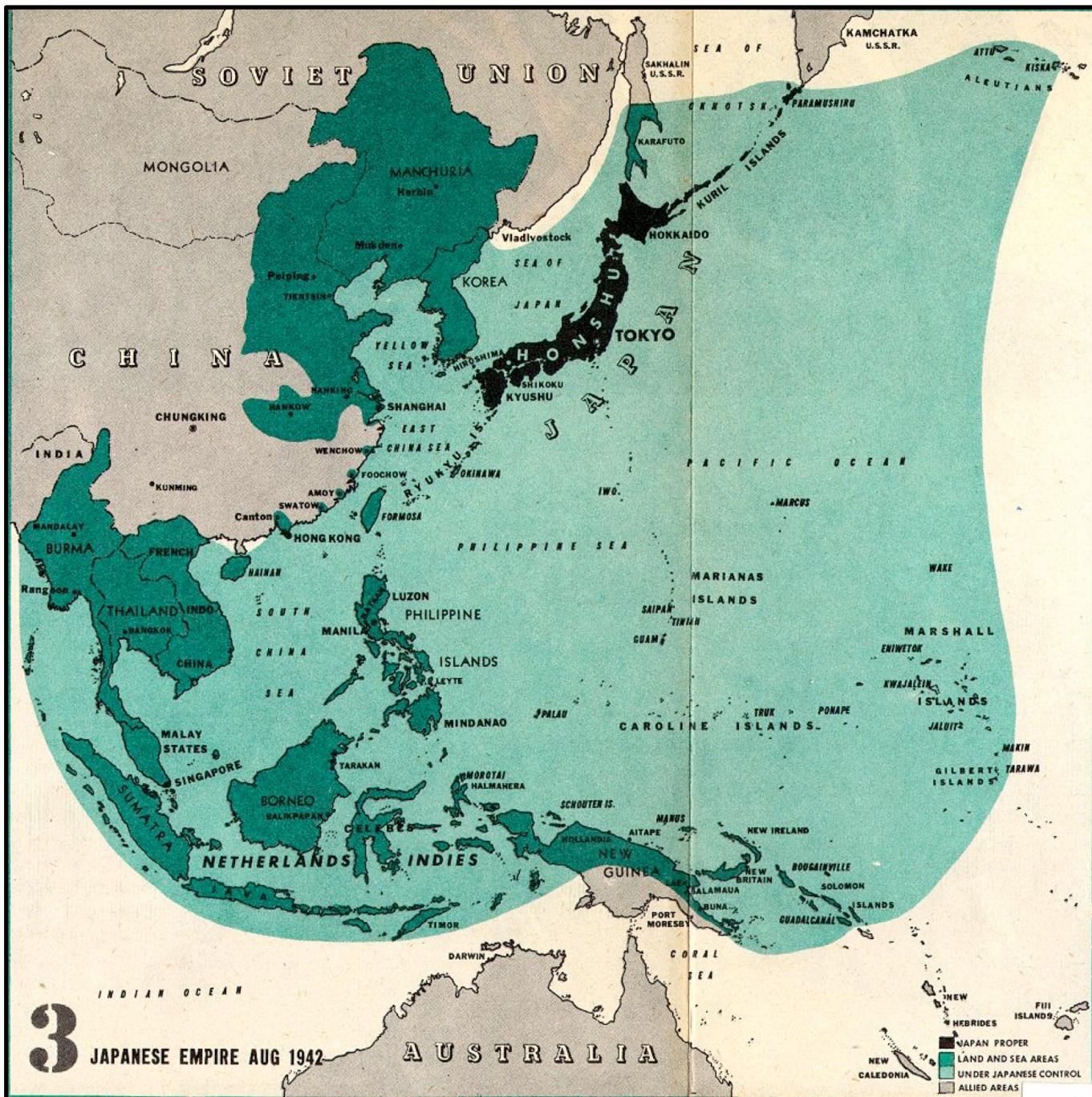
*Underlying this vocabulary is a “set of representative figures or tropes...[which] are to the actual Orient...as **stylized costumes are to characters in a play.**”*

- Extending the notion of “Vocabulary”:

Vocabulary (Said, Foucault) -- **Structures of Attitude and Reference** (Said) -- **Racial Lexicon and Racial Grammar** (Stoler) -- **Lists of Features** (Pratt) -- **Grids of Intelligibility** (Foucault) -- **Collections of Markers, Signifiers, Codes**

- Expanding the Library of Racial Discourse:

*Biology and physical traits are a crucial part, but these were increasingly buttressed (especially in contexts where such markers were less salient) by **linguistic, psychological, somatic, and cultural** markers in addition to gender and class-based ones.*





"...That's where **the Chinese** are clever. They've devised ways to make sure that all the money made here gets spent here. That they think of us as human at all is proof of the kindness of **the Chinese**."

"Are you saying that **the Chinese** aren't human? That they're gods?" asked Koya.

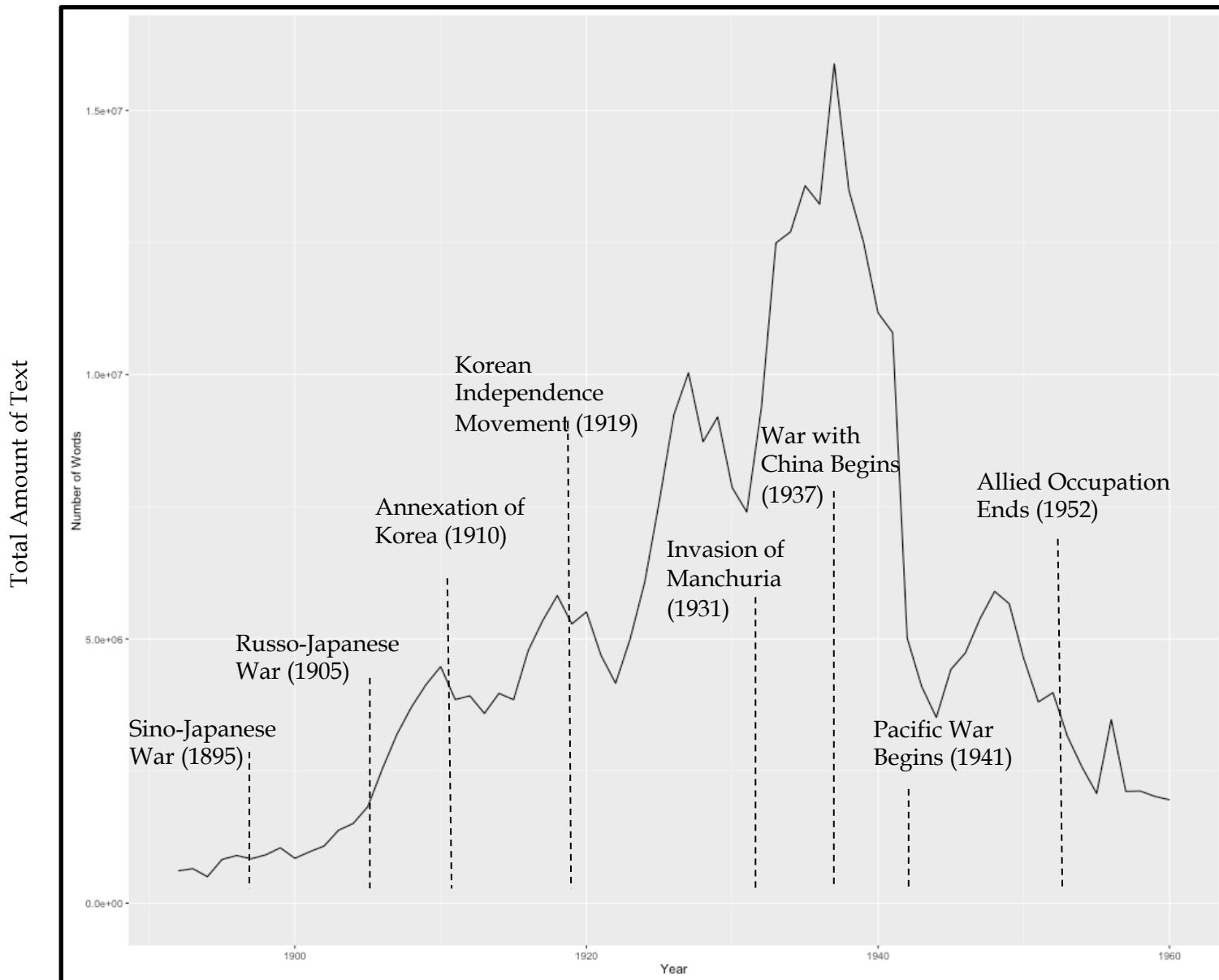
"They're avatars of men who aren't human. There's no place on earth where the people have mastered the art of lying as well as in China. But lies aren't just lies for **the Chinese**. They're a source of righteousness for them. If you don't understand **the Chinese**, then of course, you won't understand the future course of the human race."



- Yokomitsu Ri'ichi, *Shanghai* (1929)

Japanese Fiction Corpus (1889-1960)

1,900 Documents, 50 Million Words

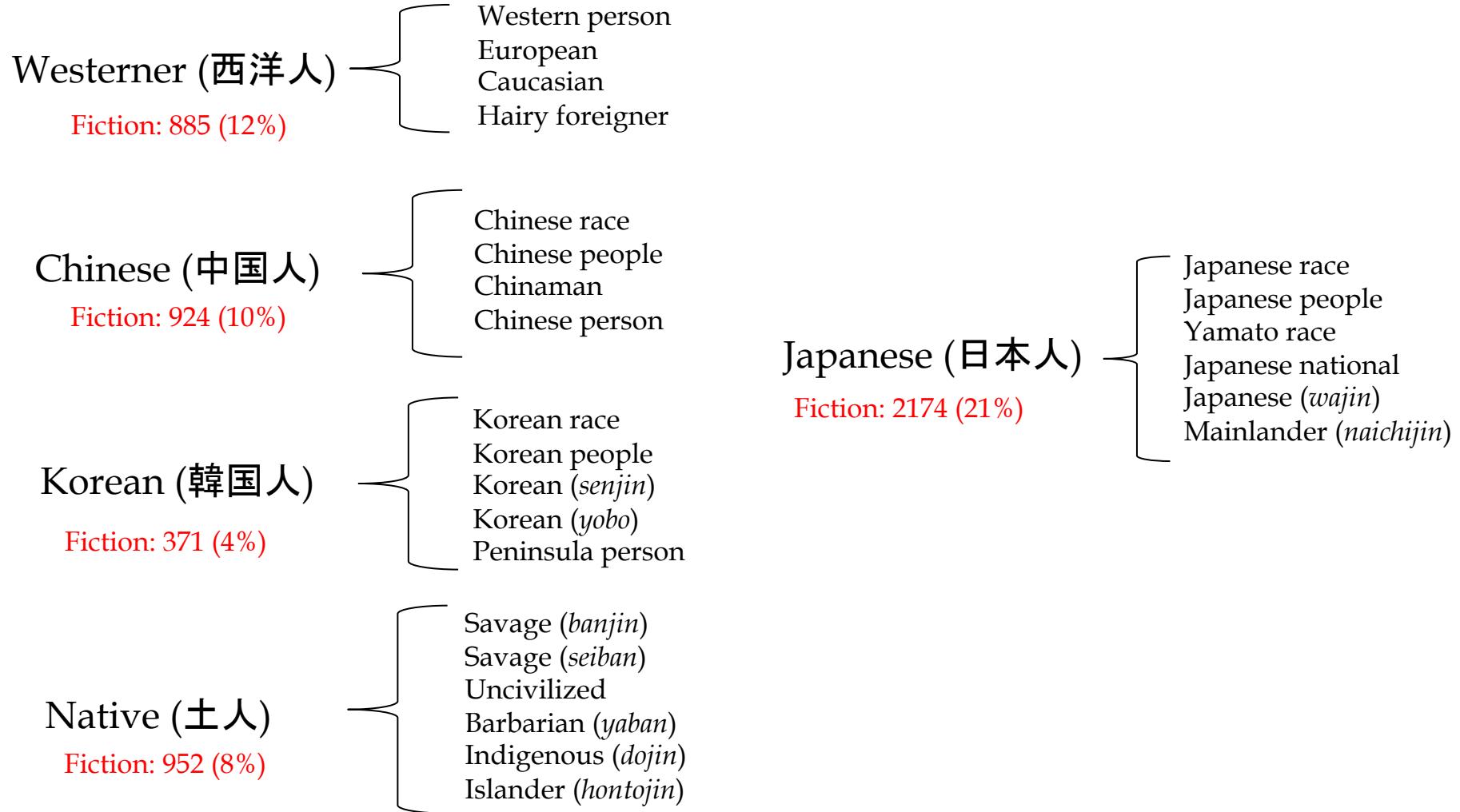


Context Vectors

thing things thing understand money Chinese clever they've devised ways make
spent think human proof kindness Chinese saying Chinese human they're gods
human proof kindness Chinese saying Chinese human they're gods asked avatars
art lying China lies lies Chinese they're source righteousness don't understand
they're source righteousness don't understand Chinese course understand future course human

Racial/Ethnic Identifiers

Corpus: Raw Count (Appears in % of all Texts)



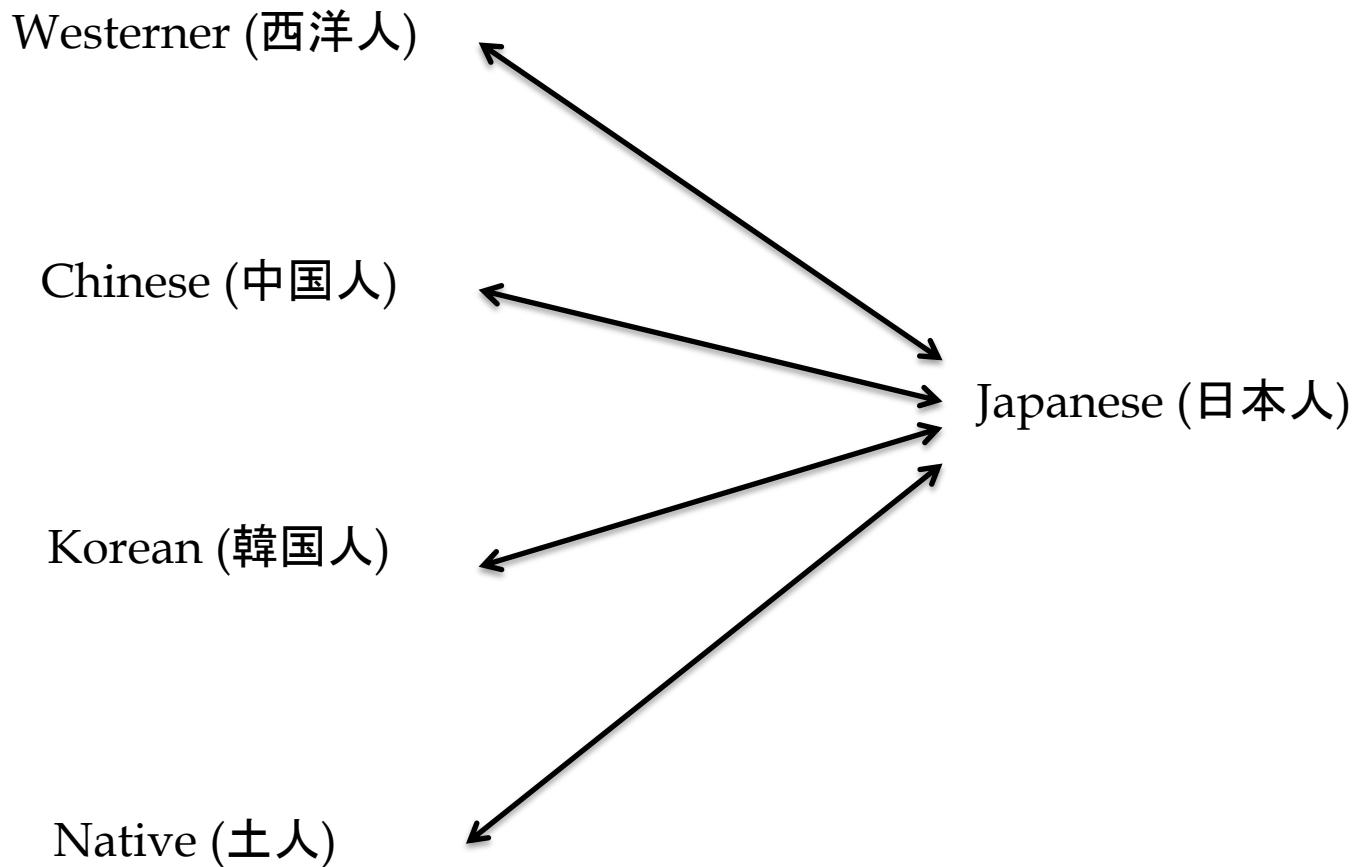
Context Vectors and Sparsity Problem

thing things thing understand money Chinese clever they've devised ways make
spent think human proof kindness Chinese saying Chinese human they're gods
human proof kindness Chinese saying Chinese human they're gods asked avatars
art lying China lies lies Chinese they're source righteousness don't understand
they're source righteousness don't understand Chinese course understand future course human

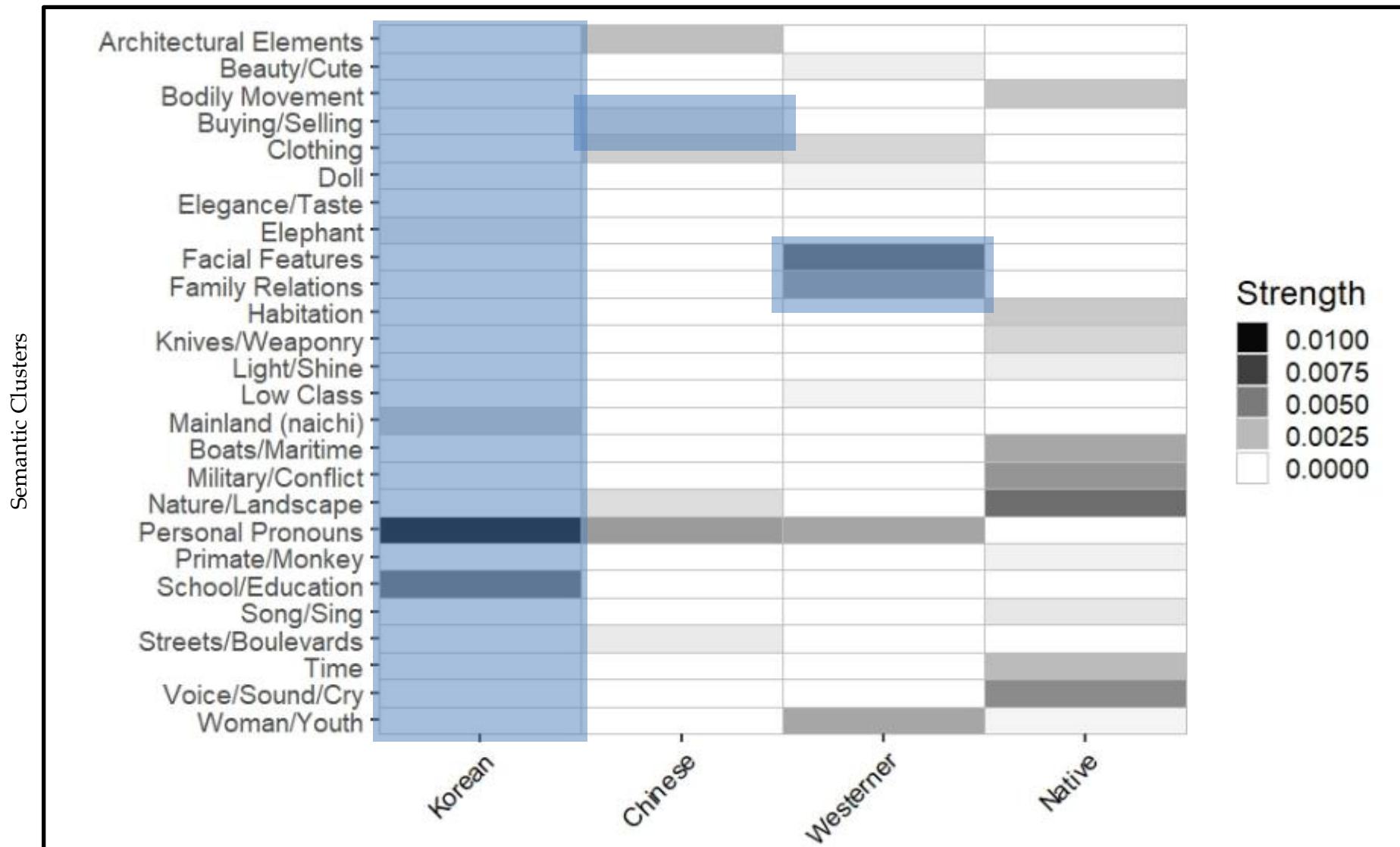
Count words as part of
single semantic cluster

* Maria Antoniak and David Mimno, “Evaluating the Stability of Embedding-based Word Similarities” (2018).

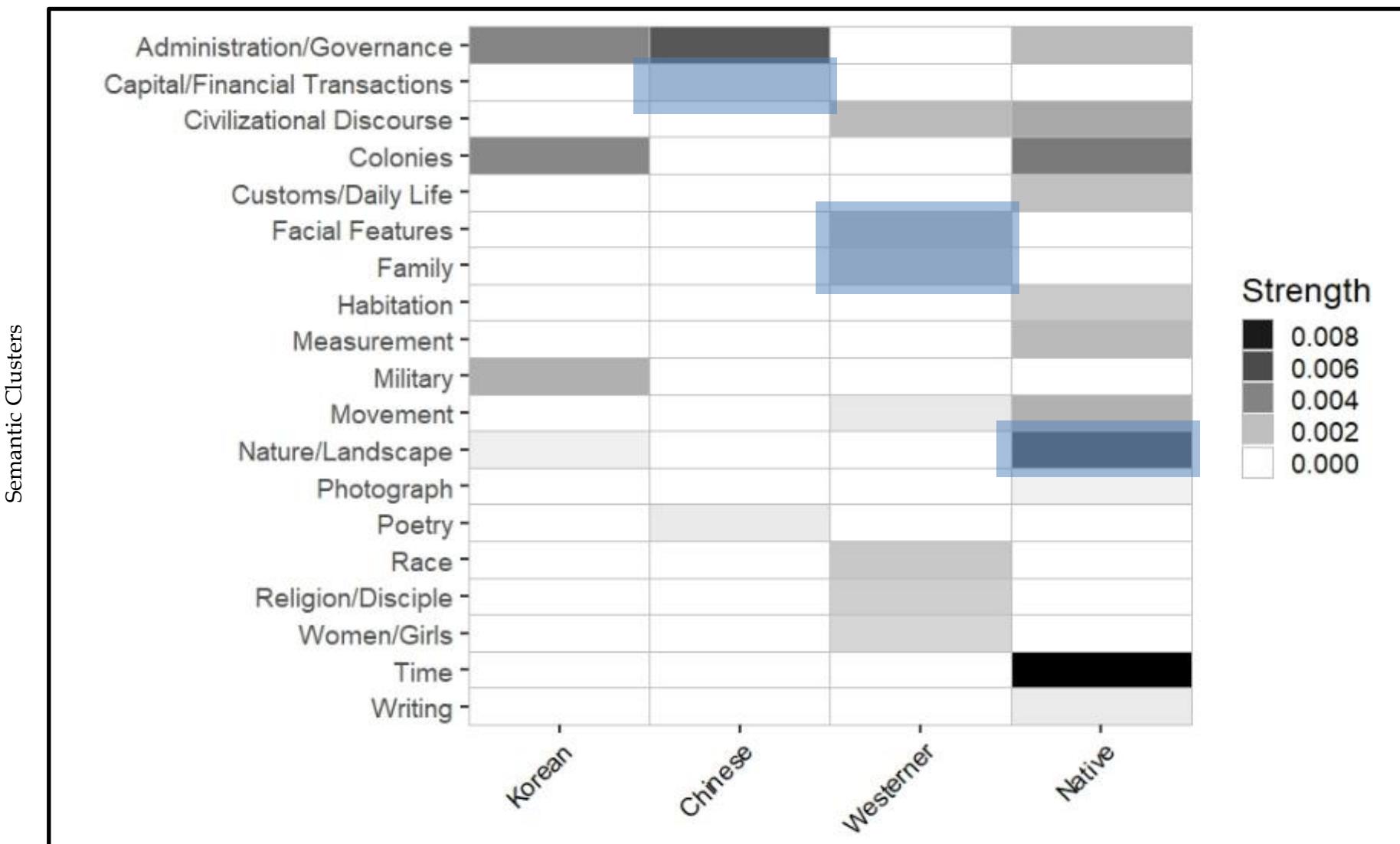
Pairwise Comparison



Racial Discourse as Semantic Grid (Fiction)



Racial Discourse as Semantic Grid (Non-Fiction)



Discourse on the “Native”



Discourse on the “Native”

- They quickly ran to the left so as to hide their location from the enemy. All of a sudden **a grotesque cry** welled up from somewhere behind them as poison arrows began to rain down. They saw the **native** army that had been guiding them quickly circle around behind. "Stop! Get down!" ordered Hawking in a brave voice. His soldiers fell to the ground. Thwack-thwack. (Kunieda Shiro, 1925)
- The lovable obsceneness of our port of call! "Galla! Galla! Galla! Galla! Galla! Galla! Brrrrr!" A **voice rang out**. Of course it was the **native**. He was a magician. The young black man sat cross-legged on the deck of the boat, arranging and flipping over what appeared to be two brass cups, all the while **shouting in a loud voice**. (Tani Joji, 1934)
- Then I would become restless and cease to enjoy the book I was reading; and I would suddenly stand up and start **shouting in a loud voice**. I was not content with such lukewarm responses as reciting a poem or singing a song. Instead, I just **screamed** like a **savage**. Once, I suddenly grabbed K's neck from behind. (Natsume Soseki, 1914)
- The man was naked and miserable in appearance, **screaming** with all his might. I'm certain he was spitting out words of some sort, in the manner of a Chinese or African **savage**, but I couldn't make heads or tails of it. It sounded like the **shrieks** of a crazed animal in its death throes, and I couldn't determine if he was calling for help or begging for pity. (Makino Shinichi, 1934)

The “Native” as Character

- Does the semantic cluster for “voice” adhere to characters that are expressly identified with a particular racial or ethnic group?
- If so, does it do so in ways that conform to, or else challenge, stereotypes?
- Procedure:
 - Manually identify all characters in a subset of fiction corpus
 - Isolate each character reference as a context window
 - Search context windows for words in the “voice” cluster
- Future Work:
 - What happens to vocabularies of bias as stereotypes become characters?
 - Is there a threshold at which point they become sufficiently washed out?
 - Do these thresholds vary by work, genre, medium?

Thank You!!