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The Relationship between Beliefs concerning Academic Elitism and Perceptions of Academic Groups in Japan

Tomoko Ikegami

The present study aims to investigate how the beliefs about academic elitism endorsed by university students influence their perception of academic groups (i.e., universities). Japanese university students were asked to list and evaluate stereotypical characteristics of the students of their own (ingroup) and three other (outgroup) universities. They also responded to questionnaire asking to what extent they would agree with various kinds of statements regarding academic elitism in Japan. A factor analysis revealed that the attitude toward the academic elitism consisted of three subcomponents; that is, beliefs in the legitimacy, illegitimacy and persistence of academic elitism. The results showed that participants who held stronger beliefs in the legitimacy of academic elitism tended to express less favorable views toward the university of equal status. On the other hand, participants who believed in the illegitimacy of academic elitism and not in its persistence exhibited the most favorable views for the superior university. These findings suggest that intergroup perceptions are greatly influenced by the perceived nature of the societal system that surrounds a specific group context.

Introduction

The central contention of the Social Identity Theory is that group membership plays a critical role in the way people react in intergroup contexts. In principle, group members exhibit more or less ingroup favoritism (i.e., outgroup derogation) to maintain positive social identity, thereby enhancing their self-esteem. The ingroup favoritism refers, in general, to differential favorability in evaluations (measured by point allocations, monetary rewards, and trait ratings) of one's ingroup compared to a relevant outgroup (c.f., Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Numerical empirical studies have been conducted in attempts to demonstrate this central contention, but findings have proved rather inconsistent (Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). The failure to find a consistent pattern of results is partly due to the fact that most empirical studies so far have not paid much attention to the importance of socio-structural variables for group members' responses to specific salient intergroup contexts (though the social identity theory presumes

effects of these variables), as was implied by some theorists (Turner, 1999; Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). In the real world, it is often the case that people who belong to one category are perceived to be more socially worthy and competent than people who belong to another category. Moreover, the social categories that organize social relations are also status-valued categories in almost all societies (Ridgeway, 2001). Under such circumstances, intergroup comparison readily translates into status comparison. Needless to say, it is possible to predict that socio-structural variables such as status legitimacy, status stability, and permeability of group boundaries influence the relationship between group status differences and group-related attitudes. Actually, studies using real groups as well as those using artificial groups have shown that these variables play a critical role as moderators of the ingroup bias among groups of different status (Bettencourt et al. 2001; Ellemers, 1993; Mummendy, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel, & Blanz, 1999).

One should note, however, that these variables do not necessarily reflect the objective characteristics of social stratification in question. What matters is whether or not the stratification or status system is "perceived" as legitimate, stable, and permeable by group members. In other words, beliefs or ideologies endorsed by individuals about the social stratification determine the ways in which they respond to intergroup comparisons. For example, some researchers have demonstrated that members of a lower-status group will be challenging to the alleged superiority of a higher-status outgroup when the status relations are perceived as "insecure": that is, both illegitimate and unstable (Caddick, 1982; Turner & Brown, 1978). On the other hand, it has been suggested that members of a higher-status group are chronically motivated to maintain their superiority to a lower-status group and this tendency will be increased when the existing status relations are at stake; that is, perceived as illegitimate and unstable (Sachdev, & Bourthis, 1987; Mullen, et al., 1992). Although there have been few studies that addressed the relations between those socio-structural variables and attitudes toward an equal-status outgroup, it is possible to predict that the intergroup bias will be increased when the status relations are perceived as legitimate and stable. This is because social identity theory traditionally contends that the more similar or comparable to one's ingroup a rival outgroup is, the more likely group members are engaged in social comparison (Turner, 1978). The perceived legitimacy and stability of the status system leads group members to regard an equal-status outgroup as a real opponent in the focal dimension. In fact, some researches on

the effects of socio-structural variables provides empirical evidence that is in principle consistent with these predictions (Turner & Brown, 1978; Bettencourt et al. 2001 for extensive review), but others are rather puzzling and inconclusive because these socio-structural variables interact with each other in a complex manner in the real world (e.g., Mummendey et al. 1999). It is still necessary to accumulate more empirical data to formulate the relations between socio-structural variables and group-related attitudes.

Thus the present research aims to provide new data supporting the above assertions by investigating how beliefs about Japanese "academic elitism" endorsed by Japanese university students influence their evaluation of ingroup and outgroup university members. As is well known, Japanese schools, universities in particular, are hierarchically ranked very uni-dimensionally and given social prestige according to the academic standards for entry. Moreover, it is widely believed that one's academic career is the best predictor for success in social life in Japan because it is regarded as very important in every stage of a person's lifetime (e.g., employment, promotion, and marriage partner choice). Graduating from a top-ranked university will actually give Japanese people very high prestige and a sense of pride. On the other hand, most Japanese people who enter a second- or third-class school will suffer, sometimes excessively, from an inferiority complex and a feeling of jealousy or envy (Takeuchi, 1995; Ikegami, 1999). In the present study, such social status system in Japan is conceptualized as "academic elitism".

Nowadays, there exist several views among Japanese people on academic elitism in Japan (c.f., Kariya, Hamana, Kimura and Sakai, 2000). One is the belief in the legitimacy of academic elitism, such as "Your academic record is largely determined by individual initiative and ability, so the academic-pedigree society is a fair society." Another is the belief in the illegitimacy of academic elitism, such as "It doesn't make sense the way in Japan today a person's future is determined by his academic credentials." These two views represent the extremes of a legitimacy-illegitimacy dimension regarding the status hierarchy of Japanese schools. A third view is the belief in the persistence of academic elitism, such as "It is doubtful that the education-based elitism in Japan is going to disappear anytime soon," and a fourth one is the belief in the decline of academic elitism, such as "Things are changing now so it's harder for people to just get by on academic credentials alone." These latter two relate to the perceived stability vs. instability of the status hierarchy of Japanese schools.

From these arguments, one could assume that the degree of endorsement of each of the beliefs influence the way university students evaluate other higher-, lower-, and equal-status outgroup university students.

Based on the social identity literature described above, it is possible to predict that it is more likely that lower-status university students will feel resentment and hence show outgroup derogation (i.e., less favorable attitudes) toward higher-status university students when the status system (i.e. academic elitism) are perceived as more illegitimate (less legitimate). Moreover, if the illegitimate status hierarchy is perceived as unstable, such a tendency will be accelerated. On the other hand, the perceived legitimacy and stability of the status system may possibly make students feel threatened by comparison with university students of equal status, leading to a less favorable view of them, because they become worthy opponents in a real sense. One could also predict that higher-status university students will be most likely to derogate lower-status university students particularly when the status system is perceived as illegitimate or unstable, or both, because they feel their superiority is being threatened in such circumstances.

Accordingly, the present research proposes the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Students who endorse beliefs in both the illegitimacy and decline of academic elitism are most likely to derogate higher-status universities.

Hypothesis 2: Students who endorse beliefs in both the legitimacy and persistence of academic elitism are most likely to derogate equal-status universities.

Hypothesis 3: Students who believe in the illegitimacy and decline of academic elitism are most likely to derogate lower-status universities.

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixteen undergraduates (36 men and 80 women) from one national university in the Tokai region of Japan participated in the present research. The university in which the participants were enrolled was roughly ranked in the middle level in terms of academic standards in Japan. We decided to choose a middle-level university as an ingroup target because it enabled us to collect data regarding

perceptions of higher-, equal-, and lower-status outgroup universities simultaneously. All the participants were students enrolled in an introductory psychology class and participated on a voluntary basis.

Procedure

The semi-experimental study was conducted in sessions involving approximately 30 to 40 participants. Each session lasted about 20 minutes. Participants received an experimental booklet that contained two critical measures (or scales) as follows and engaged in a series of tasks in a group during class time at their university¹².

Measure

Scale of academic elitism. Participants completed a scale of 20 items regarding beliefs in legitimacy, illegitimacy, persistence, and decline of academic elitism in Japanese society today. The items were originally constructed for use in the present research based on the descriptions of various views on Japanese academic elitism in the literature so far (e.g., Kariya, 2001; Kariya et al. 2000). See Appendix 1 for details of the items. Participants were required to indicate the extent to which they either agree or disagree with each statement on a seven-point scale from "1", indicating "strongly disagree" to "7", indicating "strongly agree".

Stereotyping task. Participants were asked to perform the same stereotyping task that had been constructed for use in the previous studies by Ikegami (2002a, 2004b). The basic procedure of this task was modeled on the one developed by Esses, Haddock and Zanna (1993) for measuring idiosyncratic stereotypes. All of the participants were presented with the names of four universities including their own (University A). Three other universities (Universities B, C, and D) could be ranked according to the academic standard for entry as equal, superior, and inferior, respectively, to their own in this dimension. These three outgroup target universities were selected based on data collected in a preliminary study, where 36 undergraduates (19 men and 17 women) from the university in which the current participants were enrolled rated eight universities including their own for the level of academic standard on a six-point scale (between "1", indicating "very low" and "6", indicating "very high"). Since University C received higher ratings ($M=4.78$ $SD=1.53$) and University D received lower ratings ($M=3.17$ $SD=1.18$) than University A ($M=4.08$ $SD=2.02$), these are chosen as a "superior" and "inferior" target university, respectively. University B was rated as

high ($M=4.11$ $SD=1.24$) as University A, so it was chosen as an "equal" target university. These three were the same that had been used in the previous studies (Ikegami, 2002a; 2004b). Participants were first instructed to list as many characteristic attributes as possible within 90 seconds, using single adjectives or short phrases to describe a typical student of each university. They were then asked to make a goodness rating for each attribute listed on a seven-point scale (from +3 "extremely good" to -3 "extremely bad"). The presentation order of target universities was randomized across participants.

Results

Analysis of the academic elitism scale

Since one female participant did not complete the academic elitism scale, her data was deleted from the subsequent analyses. The ratings on 20 items by 115 participants were submitted to a factor analysis with principal axis factoring and *Varimax* rotation to examine the inter-correlational structure of beliefs regarding Japanese academic elitism. Considering the balance between the parsimony of the factor structure and interpretability of the factors, a three-factor solution was found to be the best model, with a 39.4% cumulative explanatory variance. The pattern of factor loading is presented in Table 1. Seven items loaded high on Factor 1 (ranging from .52 to .71), which could be labeled as "beliefs in the legitimacy of academic elitism ('legitimacy' for short). Six items loaded high on Factor 2 (ranging from .45 to .65), which could be labeled as "beliefs in the illegitimacy of academic elitism ('illegitimacy' for short)." Four items loaded high on Factor 3 (ranging from .56 to .69), which could be labeled as "beliefs in the persistence/decline of academic elitism ('persistence' for short)." This factorial structure was basically the same as the one found in the previous research (Ikegami, 2004a).

Therefore, the ratings of the seven relevant items for Factor 1 were summed to yield a legitimacy score, and the ratings of the six relevant items for Factor 2 were summed to yield an illegitimacy score. In addition, the ratings of the four items relevant to Factor 3 were summed to yield a persistence score. Please note that the subscale of persistence was constructed in such a way that a higher score indicates a stronger belief in the persistence of academic elitism. *Cronbach's* alpha coefficients of these scales were .801 for legitimacy, .692 for illegitimacy and .719 for persistence,

indicating that each of the subscales had satisfactorily high internal consistency. Subsequently, inter-correlations among these three scores were analyzed. The results revealed that there was a weak but significant negative correlation between the legitimacy and illegitimacy scores ($r=-.218$, $p<.05$), but that the score of either legitimacy or illegitimacy was not correlated with the score of persistence (r 's=.061, .118).

Taken together, one may conclude that the beliefs in the legitimacy and illegitimacy of academic elitism do not necessarily represent extremes of a single attitudinal dimension, nor do they necessarily contradict each other within an individual. The belief in legitimacy emphasizes the rationality of competing in scholastic ability whereas the belief in illegitimacy represents the irrationality or absurdity of being excessively preoccupied with academic background (In the present scale, denial of illegitimacy implies granting that students of higher-status universities deserve admiration for their worthiness as a human being as well as their excellent academic achievements). People may endorse both types of beliefs simultaneously. The dimension of persistence indeed appears to be independent of either the legitimacy or illegitimacy dimensions. Namely, people may hold beliefs in the persistence of academic elitism whether they believe in its legitimacy or illegitimacy.

Composition of stereotyping measures

In the present research, an outgroup positivity (i.e., outgroup favoritism) score was devised and used for analysis. This was because students of University A exhibited a general tendency toward ingroup derogation (i.e., outgroup favoritism) in the previous studies (Ikegami, 2002a; 2004b) for any of the three universities (Universities B, C, and D) used as targets here. Each of the characteristic attributes listed was classified into one of three categories (positive, negative, or neutral) according to the value assigned by participants themselves: if the assigned value was +3, +2, or +1, it was classified as positive; if -3, -2, or -1, it was classified as negative; if it was zero, it was classified as neutral. A score of evaluative positivity was computed for each of the four universities by adding up the assigned values of all items listed and then dividing this sum by the total number of listed attributes for each participant. An intergroup differentiation score was then devised by subtracting the positivity score of participants' own university from that of each of the other three universities, so that a higher score indicates a greater extent to which participants exhibited outgroup

favoritism (i.e., outgroup positivity).

Correlational analyses

We examined how each component of attitudes toward academic elitism (beliefs in legitimacy, illegitimacy, and persistence) would relate to the perceptions of superior, equal, and inferior outgroup universities. Again, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed between each of the three academic elitism measures and outgroup positivity scores for each of the three target universities. As a result, only the correlation between the score of legitimacy and positivity score of equal outgroup target was significant, $r = -.311$, $p < .05$, indicating that the more strongly students believe in the legitimacy of academic elitism in Japan, the less positively they view the outgroup university of equal status. Unfortunately, no other appreciable correlations emerged at all. Nevertheless, since our primary interest was in the joint effects of the subcomponents of attitudes toward academic elitism on the outgroup perception, we analyzed the data in an analysis of variance as follows.

Analysis of Variance

Classification of participants:

Taking into account the fact that the scores of legitimacy and illegitimacy slightly but significantly correlated with each other but that neither of them correlated with the score of persistence, participants were grouped by these scores in two ways as follows. In both cases, the participants were divided by median into two groups for each of the scores.

First, participants were divided into four categories based on the scores of legitimacy (high vs. low) and persistence (high vs. low). Specifically, the first category comprised participants who scored high in both legitimacy and persistence (HL-HP $N = 35$) while the second category included those who scored high in legitimacy but low in persistence (HL-LP $N = 30$). Participants in the third category scored low in legitimacy but high in persistence (LL-HP $N = 30$) while those of the fourth were low in both legitimacy and persistence (LL-LP $N = 20$).

Likewise, participants were also divided into four categories based on the scores of illegitimacy (high vs. low) and persistence (high vs. low). The first category comprised participants who scored high in both illegitimacy and persistence (HI-HP $N = 41$), and the second category included those who were high in illegitimacy but low in

persistence (HI-LP $N=20$). Participants in the third category scored low in illegitimacy but high in persistence (LI-HP $N=24$) while those of the fourth were low in both illegitimacy and persistence (LI-LP $N=30$).

Effects of beliefs about academic elitism on stereotyping:

We conducted a three-way analysis of covariance separately for each of the two types of breakdown mentioned above. Mean scores of outgroup positivity (i.e., the score of outgroup favoritism) as a function of the level of beliefs in legitimacy and persistence for each of the three outgroup targets (i.e., superior, equal, and inferior universities) are graphically represented in Figure 1. Those of outgroup positivity as a function of the level of beliefs in illegitimacy and persistence for each of the three outgroup targets (i.e., superior, equal, and inferior university) are graphically displayed in Figure 2. One should note that mean scores of all the cells but one revealed a positive result, indicating that participants in general exhibited an outgroup favoritism. The effect of the intercept, however, was not significant ($F(1, 110) < 1$) in the former breakdown while significant in the latter ($F(1, 110) = 7.63, p < .01$).

First, a three-way analysis of covariance was performed on these scores with the strength of belief in legitimacy (high vs. low) as a first between-subjects factor, the strength of beliefs in persistence (high vs. low) as a second between-subjects factor, and the status of outgroup target (superior, equal, and inferior) as a within-subjects factor, with the scores of belief in illegitimacy as a covariate because the scores of legitimacy and illegitimacy were weakly but significantly correlated. As a result, it was found that a two-way interaction between the strength of belief in legitimacy and outgroup target was statistically significant ($F(2, 220) = 3.26, p < .05$). Multivariate tests also revealed a significant interaction effect of belief in legitimacy x outgroup target (*Wilks' Lambda* = .916, $F(2, 109) = 4.98, p < .01$). Further analyses revealed that the simple effect of legitimacy approached a significant level for the equal outgroup target ($F(1, 330) = 3.87, p = .05$) but not for either the superior or inferior outgroup target (F 's(1, 330) < 1). Thus we again obtained strong evidence for the tendency that the more strongly students believe in the legitimacy of academic elitism, the less positively they view the outgroup university of equal status.

Although an omnibus three-way interaction of legitimacy x persistence x outgroup status was not significant ($F(2, 220) < 1$), planned comparisons were conducted because we initially predicted that a different pattern of interactions between legitimacy and persistence would emerge according to the relative status of the outgroup target

universities. Specifically, based on Hypothesis 1 we predicted that students who do not believe in the legitimacy of academic elitism but believe in its decline would be most likely to derogate the superior outgroup university. Namely, the effect of legitimacy would be more pronounced when the level of persistence is low relative to high for the superior target. On the other hand, based on Hypothesis 2, we predicted that students who believe in the legitimacy of academic elitism and also believe in its persistence would be most likely to derogate the equal outgroup university. Namely, the effect of legitimacy would be more pronounced when the level of persistence is high relative to low for the equal target. Moreover, based on Hypothesis 3, we predicted that students who believe in neither the legitimacy nor the persistence of academic elitism would be most likely to derogate the inferior outgroup target. Namely, the effect of legitimacy would be more pronounced when the level of persistence is low relative to high for the inferior target. In brief, the effect of legitimacy will vary accordingly to the relative level of persistence for any of the three target groups.

Therefore, a two-way analysis of covariance was first conducted separately for each of the three outgroup targets with the strength of belief in legitimacy as a first between-subjects factor and the strength of belief in persistence as a second between-subjects factor, controlled for the effects of the belief in illegitimacy. As a result, a simple interaction effect between legitimacy and persistence was found to be marginally significant for the superior outgroup university ($F(1, 330)=3.22, p<.10$), but not significant for the equal and inferior outgroup university ($F(1, 330)=1.02; F(1, 330)<1$).

Consequently, we examined a difference between the categories of HL-HP and LL-HP and a difference between the categories of HL-LP and LL-LP for each outgroup target separately. As a result, neither a difference between HL-HP ($M=1.27$) and LL-HP ($M=0.79$) nor a difference between HL-LP ($M=0.82$) and LL-LP ($M=1.28$) reached a significant level for the superior outgroup university ($F(1, 330)=1.56; F(1, 330)<1$), while a difference between HL-HP ($M=0.90$) and LL-HP ($M=1.48$) and a difference between HL-LP ($M=0.62$) and LL-LP ($M=1.70$) did reach a marginal and a conventional significant level, respectively, for the equal outgroup university ($F(1, 330)=3.83, p<.10; F(1, 330)=4.99, p<.05$). Neither a difference between HL-HP ($M=-0.07$) and LL-HP ($M=0.09$) nor a difference between HL-LP ($M=0.27$) and LL-LP ($M=0.62$) was found to be significant for the inferior outgroup university (F 's(1, 330)<1). After all, the results suggest that students who believe in the legitimacy of academic elitism are likely to

derogate the equal outgroup university regardless of their level of belief in its persistence. No empirical evidence was found for the predicted joint effects of legitimacy by persistence on the perception of the equal outgroup target. In other words, the more strongly participants believed in the legitimacy of academic elitism, the less positively they viewed members of the equal outgroup university, regardless of whether they believed in its persistence. Also, no clear empirical evidence was uncovered for the predicted joint effects of legitimacy by persistence on the perception of either the superior outgroup university (implied by a marginally significant two-way interaction though) or the inferior outgroup one (see Figure 1).

Likewise, a three-way analysis of covariance was performed on these scores with the strength of belief in illegitimacy (high vs. low) as a first between-subjects factor, the strength of belief in persistence (high vs. low) as a second between-subjects factor, and the status of the outgroup target (superior, equal, and inferior) as a within-subjects factor, with the scores of legitimacy given as a covariate. The result was that a main effect of the outgroup target was found to be reliably significant ($F(2, 220)=6.81, p < .01$). Multivariate tests also revealed a significant main effect of the outgroup target (*Wilks' Lambda*=.836, $F(2, 109)=10.69, p < .01$). It was shown in multiple comparison tests (using a *Bonferroni's test*) that the positivity score was significantly smaller for the inferior outgroup target than for both the superior and equal outgroup targets at $p's < .05$, indicating that students exhibited less outgroup favoritism for the inferior outgroup university compared with the superior and equal ones. More important, an interaction effect between the belief in illegitimacy and that in persistence was found to be marginally significant ($F(1, 110)=2.94, p < .10$).

Although an overall three-way interaction of illegitimacy x persistence x outgroup status was not significant ($F(2, 220)=1.38$), our primary prediction was that the interactions between illegitimacy and persistence would vary across the outgroup target universities. Specifically, based on Hypothesis 1, we predicted that students who believe in both illegitimacy and decline (no persistence) of academic elitism would be most likely to derogate the superior outgroup university. Namely, a stronger belief in the illegitimacy of academic elitism is more likely to be associated with disdain for the superior target when the level of beliefs in its persistence is low relative to high. On the other hand, based on Hypothesis 2, we predicted that students who do not believe in the illegitimacy but believe in its persistence would be most likely to derogate the equal outgroup university. Namely, a weaker belief in the illegitimacy of academic

elitism would be more likely to be associated with derogation of the equal target when the level of beliefs in its persistence is high relative to low. Finally, based on Hypothesis 3, we predicted that students who believe in the illegitimacy of academic elitism and not believe in its persistence would be most likely to derogate the inferior outgroup university. Namely, a stronger belief in illegitimacy would be more likely to be associated with disdain of the inferior target when the level of persistence is low to relative to high.

Therefore, a two-way analysis of covariance was performed separately for each of the three outgroup target universities with the strength of belief in illegitimacy as a first between-subjects factor and the strength of belief in persistence as a second between-subjects factor, controlled for the effects of belief in legitimacy. For the superior outgroup university, a simple effect of the belief in illegitimacy was significant ($F(1, 330)=4.65, p<.05$), indicating that students exhibited more outgroup favoritism for the superior university when they strongly believed in the illegitimacy of academic elitism ($M=1.40$) than otherwise ($M=0.82$). This finding, however, contradicted our prediction. More important, a simple interaction effect between the belief in illegitimacy and that in persistence was also reliably significant ($F(1, 330)=5.11, p<.01$).

We then looked at a difference between the categories of HI-HP and LI-HP and between the categories of HI-LP and LI-LP for the superior outgroup target. As a result, the difference between HI-HP ($M=0.96$) and LI-HP ($M=1.19$) did not reach a significant level ($F(1, 330)<1$), whereas the difference between HI-LP ($M=1.77$) and LI-LP ($M=0.50$) was found to be significant ($F(1, 330)=10.65, p<.01$). These suggest that the belief in the illegitimacy of academic elitism will generally lead students to view the superior outgroup university more positively, and moreover that this tendency becomes particularly conspicuous among students who did not believe in the persistence of academic elitism (i.e., did believe in the decline or desistence of academic elitism) in Japan. In other words, for the superior outgroup university, students who believed in the illegitimacy and decline of academic elitism displayed the most pronounced outgroup favoritism, and students who did not believe in the illegitimacy and did believe in decline of academic elitism by contrast displayed the least outgroup favoritism (see Figure 2). For the equal and inferior outgroup universities, there were no appreciable effects at all. Thus our hypotheses that the combination of belief in illegitimacy and that in persistence of academic elitism would be predictive of

derogation of the equal and inferior outgroup universities received no support (see Figure 2).

Table 1 Factorial structure of attitudes toward academic elitism in Japan (N=115)

Factors	No.	Abbreviation of items	I	II	III
I Legitimacy	9	Academic pedigree society is a fair society	0.705	-0.085	0.705
	15	Academic society is an equal-opportunity society	0.692	0.081	-0.124
	11	Basic scholastic ability is important	0.691	-0.025	0.197
	13	it is only natural to receive special recognition	0.677	-0.103	0.161
	5	reflect your actual capabilities	0.666	-0.159	-0.000
	3	they deserve our admiration	0.593	0.012	0.374
	6	better than determined by family status	0.527	0.188	-0.058
	19	difficult to surpass somebody from a top university	0.318	0.128	0.157
II Illegitimacy	20	ridiculous to be obsessed with academic background	0.053	0.646	-0.015
	12	it is quite a problem measure your worth	-0.144	0.627	0.141
	1	it doesn't make sense the way future is determined	-0.107	0.592	0.054
	4	various ways to succeed in society	0.167	0.544	0.020
	17	judging character does not make sense	0.033	0.501	0.057
	8	it takes more in the real world	-0.107	0.458	0.144
	2	it is harder to get by on academic credentials	-0.001	0.347	-0.138
	14	not much rational basis for university ranking	0.117	0.318	0.121
II Persistence	16	it is doubtful educational elitism will disappear	0.178	-0.016	0.680
	10	still preoccupied with academic pedigree	0.110	0.312	0.624
	7	still academic credentials really mean something	0.199	0.349	0.600
	18	academic background doesn't have as much weight	0.424	0.316	-0.565
		Eigenvalue	3.44	2.56	1.87
		Explanatory variance (%)	17.21	12.84	9.33
		Cumulative explanatory variance (%)	17.21	30.05	39.37

Note 1: Principal axis factoring with *Varimax* rotation.

Note 2: See Appendix 1 for full description of items.

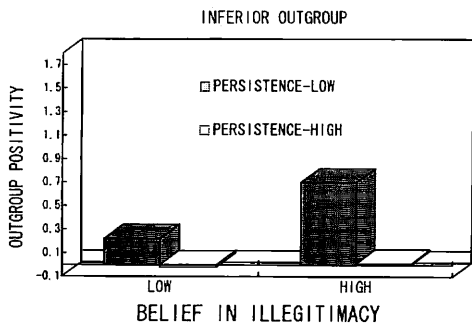
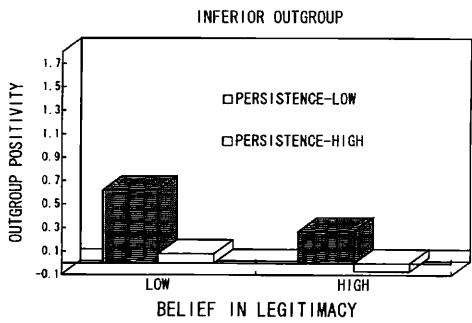
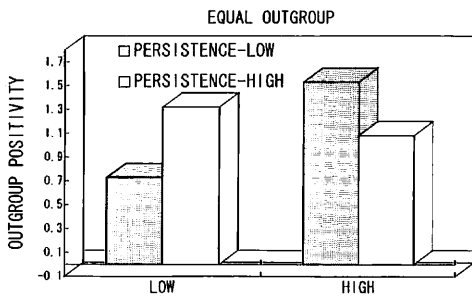
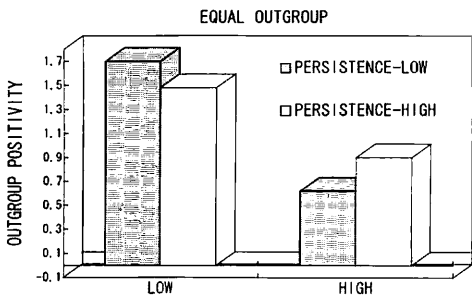
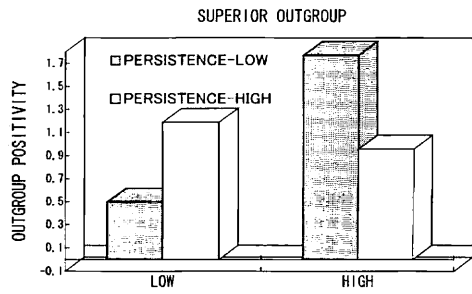
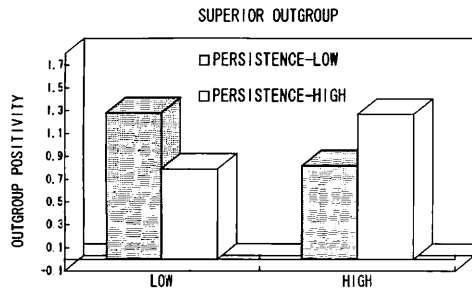


Figure 1 Means of outgroup positivity as a function of the legitimacy and persistence for each target university.

Figure 2 Means of outgroup positivity as a function of the illegitimacy and persistence for each target university.

Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating how the perceived legitimacy or illegitimacy of academic elitism and its persistence would influence the way Japanese university students view higher- equal- and lower-status university students. We proposed three hypotheses, each regarding the perception of three outgroup universities that were superior, equal, and inferior to the participants' own university in the dimension of academic standards. However, most of the predictions derived from our hypotheses were not supported by the current results. Far from that, some of the results were quite inconsistent with them.

Let us first examine Hypothesis 1, which was concerned with the perception of the superior outgroup university. Hypothesis 1 predicted that students who believed in the illegitimacy of academic elitism and not believe in its persistence would be most likely to view the superior outgroup university unfavorably. It was reasoned that the more illegitimate (the less legitimate) the perceived status differences, the more likely it would be that lower-status group members would feel uncomfortable or resentful, and so would be motivated to derogate higher-status group members. This tendency would be accelerated if they believed that such an illegitimate status system would no longer persist. In the present research, however, it was found that the more illegitimate students think the academic elitism is, the more positively they view the superior target. This tendency was more pronounced if students also believed that the current academic elitism would disappear in the near future. Though it would be difficult to provide a persuasive explanation for this, nevertheless one could possibly argue that students who regard academic elitism as illegitimate (or absurd) are less likely to be threatened by the comparison with higher-status universities because the existing status difference does not matter for such students.

Moreover, if these students also perceive the academic elitism as disappearing as well, they think it is meaningless and hence less threatening all the more. If students do not feel threatened by comparison with students of a higher status university, they need not denigrate them. This is probably the reason why students who were regarding academic elitism as both illegitimate and disappearing exhibited the highest amount of outgroup favoritism for the superior target. One should note, however, that this argument was qualified only in the analyses focusing on the illegitimacy scores but not qualified in the analyses on the legitimacy scores. Since the legitimacy

and illegitimacy, as was described earlier, do not necessarily represent extremes of a single attitudinal dimension in the present research, it is not surprising that these two have differential effects on the outgroup perceptions. From the current results, one may conclude that the perception of a higher-status university was more likely to be affected by the level of belief in illegitimacy (irrationality or absurdness of being preoccupied with academic background) than in legitimacy (rationality of competition in scholastic ability).

On the other hand, Hypothesis 2, which was concerned with the perception of the equal target university, received partial support. Hypothesis 2 predicted that the more strongly students believed in the legitimacy of academic elitism, the less positively they would view students of the equal outgroup university, and moreover this tendency would become conspicuous if students also believed in the persistence of academic elitism. Our reasoning was that the perceived legitimacy of the status difference existing between universities in academic standards would make students feel the equal status university would be a real opponent due to their being on the same level of this dimension. This would pose a threat to them and so necessitate them to devaluate students of the equal-status university in an alternative dimension (i.e., dimensions of personality and etc.) in order to maintain positive social identity. It was also assumed that the threat posed by the comparison with the equal status university would be exacerbated if students believed that the current status system would continue, leading to an increased tendency of denigrating the equal-status target for self-protection. However, the current results indicated that the perceived legitimacy would lead students to view the equal target university less positively regardless of whether they thought that the current system would or would not persist in the future. Thus the former part of the hypothesis was supported but the latter part was not.

There could be several reasons why the level of belief in persistence did not affect the perceptions of the equal-status target. One plausible explanation could be that students had less concern about whether the current status difference would be influential in the future (i.e., after graduating from one's university) when comparing with the equal target university, than when comparing with the superior target. This is because students of an equal-status university are less likely than those of a higher-status university to be perceived and anticipated as threatening to them in actuality at various phases of social life in the future (e.g., employment, promotion,

and partner choice). One should also note that this argument was qualified in the analyses with the legitimacy scores but not in the analysis with the illegitimacy scores, suggesting that the perception of the equal target university was more sensitive to the level of belief in legitimacy. In other words, the rationality of competing in the dimension of academic competence, rather than the irrationality of being preoccupied with academic elitism will become more salient when comparing with the target university of equal-status.

There was unfortunately no supportive evidence for the predictions regarding perceptions of the inferior outgroup university stated in Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 predicted that students perceiving the current academic elitism as illegitimate and disappearing would be most likely to derogate the inferior target. It was reasoned that the perceived illegitimacy and instability of the status differences between universities would threaten the superiority of the participants' university to the inferior one, leading to an increased derogation of the inferior target as a reaction to the threat. However, the current results indicated that the way of viewing the inferior university was not affected by levels of any beliefs about academic elitism. One possible reason for this is that participants did not care about the inferior target university. More generally, students of a lower-status university are least likely to be perceived as threatening to them for the present and also in the future, thus they are basically not concerned with the status difference between their own and other inferior universities. Moreover, considering the fact that the overall scores for persistence was relatively high ($M = 5.50$), one could argue that most of the current participants might not have worried about the possibility that their superiority to the inferior target might be overthrown. Such indifference toward a lower-status university may account for the result that the perception of the inferior target was immune to the beliefs about academic elitism.

Although most of our initial hypotheses were not verified, the present research at least provided some evidence for the contentions that the beliefs regarding legitimacy (or illegitimacy) and persistence/decline of academic elitism will attenuate or accentuate the threat caused by comparison with equal and superior academic outgroups, leading to a more favorable or unfavorable view of the members of these groups. The pattern of results was somewhat puzzling but intriguing. The most important and interesting finding in the present research is concerned with the perception of a higher-status group. Contrary to our predictions which had been made

based on existing literature (Caddick, 1982; Turner & Brown, 1978), the results suggest that the perceived illegitimacy of status differences attenuate the threat evoked by the comparison with a higher-status outgroup, resulting in increased outgroup favoritism. This implies that the perceived illegitimacy do not always lead people to feel resentment and to challenge against the existing status difference as was implied by the traditional social identity theory (e.g., Turner & Brown, 1978). In some situations, the perceived illegitimacy will function quite differently such that it will release people from a feeling of envy and of an inferiority complex being experienced in the comparison with a higher-status outgroup. Besides, the same reasoning can be drawn regarding the perception of an equal-status outgroup. The present findings suggest that the perceived legitimacy will increase the threat arising from the comparison with the equal-status outgroup, but this can be restated whereby the less legitimate the status system is perceived to be, the less threatened by the intergroup comparison group members will be.

These converge to suggest that perceiving the status system as illegitimate (less legitimate) can be beneficial to self-esteem and subjective well-being in the sense that the perceived illegitimacy leads group members to psychologically disengage themselves from painful or strained intergroup comparisons. More important, this also results in attenuation of intergroup conflicts. Similar assertions have been proposed in a series of studies on stigma conducted by Major and her colleagues (Crocker, Major, & Steel, 1998; Major & Schmader, 2001; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). They also argued that perceiving social outcomes (e.g., the performance of intelligence tests) as illegitimate (because of test bias) may lead stigmatized people to psychologically disengage their self-esteem from those outcomes. These studies, however, focused on the psychological well being at an individual level particularly among members of disadvantaged groups in society and not expanded its implications for the intergroup relations. A number of group theorists, on the other hand, have addressed the question of how members of a lower-status group respond to threatened identity because negative emotions stemming from their position in the hierarchy would cause not only serious mental problems at an individual level, but also keen or deep-rooted conflicts at a group level (Turner & Brown, 1978; Jost, Burgess, & Mosso 2001; Glick & Fiske, 2001). In this vein, one may say that the present research will contribute to the literature in a broader way such that it elucidates the moderating role of perceived illegitimacy in intergroup perceptions.

Finally, one should point out one limitation stemming from the methodology of the present research. In the present research, a free description task was employed as a dependent measure because it was thought to be sensitive to the evaluative implications of idiosyncratic stereotyping. It turned out, however, to be difficult to determine whether the obtained effects were due to status-relevant or status-irrelevant dimensions. Since it has been demonstrated that group members react to identity threats differently across status-relevant and status-irrelevant dimensions (e.g., Reichl, 1997), we need to conduct further investigations using a different type of stereotyping task that enables us to distinguish between responses in status-relevant and -irrelevant dimensions, in order to examine the generality of the current findings.

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[Note]

1) Actually we administered a university identification scale as well because a weak but significant positive correlation was found between beliefs in legitimacy and levels of group identification in validation research (Ikegami, 2002b), though neither belief in illegitimacy nor in persistence correlated with university identification. However, no appreciable correlations between scores of the university identification and other critical measures were found in the present research, so the analyses of this scale were omitted from the present article.

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Appendix 1 Means and SD (standard deviation) for items of the academic elitism scale.

Items	Mean	SD
1. It doesn't make sense the way in Japan today a person's future is determined by his academic credentials. (ILL)	4.58	1.68
2. Things are changing now so it's harder for people to just get by on academic credentials alone. (ILL)	5.23	1.48
3. People who get into the better schools had to work hard to get there, so they deserve our admiration. (LEG)	4.60	1.60
4. Even if you don't graduate from a prestigious university, there are still various ways to succeed in society. (ILL)	5.90	1.35
5. To some extent your academic background does reflect your actual capabilities. (LEG)	4.55	1.48
6. Certainly, a society where your future prospects are determined by your academic record is better than one where your future is determined by family status. (LEG)	5.35	1.38
7. Japan is still a society where one's academic credentials really mean something. (PER)	5.38	1.18
8. It takes a lot more than just graduating from a good school to make it in the real world. (ILL)	6.22	0.98
9. Your academic record is largely determined by individual initiative and ability, so the academic-pedigree society is a fair society. (LEG)	3.40	1.54
10. You frequently hear that merit should count for more than schooling, but most Japanese are still preoccupied with academic pedigree. (PER)	6.05	1.05
11. After all, basic scholastic ability is important, so there is some validity in judging people based on their academic background. (LEG)	5.02	1.29
12. It's quite a problem today the way people measure your worth or value based on your academic background. (ILL)	5.52	1.34
13. Students making it into the top universities got there through a fierce competitive entrance examination selection process, so it is only natural that these people should receive special recognition by society. (LEG)	3.52	1.52
14. There is really not much rational basis for the pyramid-shaped university ranking system that exists in Japan. (ILL)	4.20	1.27
15. The academic-credential society is an equal-opportunity society because everyone has a chance at success if they study really hard. (LEG)	3.42	1.57
16. It is doubtful that the education-based elitism in Japan is going to disappear anytime soon. (PER)	5.20	1.36
17. Judging somebody's character just based on their academic background doesn't make sense. (ILL)	6.12	1.33
18. In Japan, one's academic background doesn't have nearly as much weight and significance as it once did. (PER)(R)	2.77	1.42
19. It is actually very difficult for somebody with mediocre academic credentials to surpass somebody from a top university. (LEG)	3.31	1.84
20. In this day and age of continuing education, it is ridiculous to be so obsessed with academic background, because people can go back to school to learn new skills anytime. (ILL)	4.15	1.48

Note 1: LEG = belief in legitimacy ILL = belief in illegitimacy PER = belief in persistence

Note 2: "R" indicates a reversed item.