THE ISSUE OF DIVERSITY

AND MULTICULTURALISM IN JAPAN

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The purpose of this paper is to problematize that which has been taken for granted about the notion of multiculturalism in Japan. Multiculturalism is a novel issue in Japan. As the Japanese government started to promote "internationalization" since 1980's, slogans such as "international exchange," "cultural exchange," "understanding of other cultures," etc, have become the most popular hackneyed expressions among policy maker and educators. This paper demonstrates that the notion of multiculturalism in Japan is intricately and deeply embedded in Japanese society, Japanese culture and the Japanese educational system and that this type of multiculturalism excludes ethnic groups which have lived in Japan since old times.

Firstly, the intention in this study is to interrupt the assumptions about homogeneous nation in Japanese educational discourse as have been accepted since the end of World War II. I assert that Japan is not homogeneous nation rather a society with diverse cultural groups. Secondly, this paper traces the path of the past notion of multiculturalism as embodied in the Japanese political, social and cultural conditions. In undertaking this I first look at the way cultural studies emerged in the 1980's which created a new image of cultural studies. Such cultural studies have been called "*ibunkaron* (intercultural studies) in Japanese. I argue that this type of *"ibunnkaron"* has discursively constructed the notion that the Japanese culture is superior to other cultures. I next look at a second wave of cultural studies occurred in the late 1990's when Japanese scholars began to use the term, "*tabunkaron* (multiculturalism)."

Thirdly, this paper explores the way that the notion of the present multiculturalism in Japan has limited to such things as "cultural exchange" and "international exchange." The Japanese way of "cultural exchange" and "international exchange" tends to associated with new comers and foreign people and cultures. Ethnic groups, e.g., Ainu, Korean,

Chinese, that have been living form old time, are not included in such "cultural exchange" and "international exchange."

Furthermore, this paper is to demonstrate that the special Japanese class for the kids of new comers is to Japanize foreign students by introducing Japanese culture and norms although it has appeared to help kids with various cultural background succeed in the Japanese society. I argue that In the Japanese political context, "multiculturalism" employed by Japanese institutes has conceptualized the notions of "anti-multiculturalism." It is dangerous to be deluded by the literal sense of the words. We have to read the documents historically, and not only rhetorically.

Finally, skepticism is what we need when we read these institutional discourses of multiculturalism and multicultural education. I argue that what has conceptualized the notion of multiculturalism are not the ideological products but are the effects of multiple power relations. It is also important that this study indicates that discourses on multiculturalism and multicultural education engender inclusion and exclusion at the same moment, for example, the particular Japanese multicultural discourse of Japanese language education for immigrant children, inversely, promotes anti-multiculturalism. Through careful textual analysis, we are able to perceive that "multiculturalism" employed by the Ministry of Education of Japan has conceptualized the notions of "anti-multiculturalism."

The theoretical orientation of this study is Michel Foucault's conception of power and history. Foucault's notion of power is that a multiplicity of actions engenders power and power operates through discourses associated with the construction of knowledge. For, Foucault, power is neither an ideological concern, nor a domain dominated by one social group over others, but exists only as it is exercised (Foucault, 1984, 1986, 1988). Moreover, Foucault's conception of governmentality allows us to rethink the relationships among self, other, and institutional discourse (Foucault, 1991). Foucault's notion of history is genealogy. The objective of genealogy is to historicize the subject; that is, to demonstrate that events and circumstance are historically contingent. In Foucault's sense, genealogy is a method of problematizing the "nature" of what we have become and

exposing that which appears "nature" as a social and historical construct. Using Foucault's notions of power and history enables us to open up new spaces of possibility for understanding how "successful" Japanese language teachers and learners have been constructed socially, culturally and historically.

The major archives for this study are official and semi-official documents on educational reform. The official documents are issued by the Ministry of Education, and the semi-official documents include the ones proposed by educational reform consultative bodies. We consider all of them discursive technologies that constitute educational reform in Japan.

Cultural and Linguistic Studies: Inclusion / Exclusion

In 1980's a new wave of cultural studies emerged. Such cultural studies have been called "*ibunkaron* (intercultural studies) in Japanese. I argue that this type of *"ibunnkaron"* has discursively constructed the notion that the Japanese culture is superior to other cultures. The Japanese word "*i*" contains negative means, i.e., "different" "odd" "strange." It locates Japanese culture as the center and other cultures are inferior to it. In the late 1990's a second wave of cultural studies occurred. Japanese scholars began to use the term, "*tabunkaron* (multiculturalism)." However, the notion of the present multiculturalism in Japan has limited to such things as "cultural exchange" and "international exchange." The Japanese way of "cultural exchange" and "international exchange" tends to associated with new comers (foreigners who come to Japan recently). Ethnic groups, e.g., Ainu, Korean, Chinese, that have been living form old time, are not included in such "cultural exchange" and "international exchange."

Generally speaking, it is believed that Japan is a racially homogeneous nation and *Yamato* is the only ethnic group in Japan. However, there are some other ethnic groups. For example, the *Ainu* people have been living in Japan since ancient times and have their own *Ainu* language. Also, many Koreans and Chinese started to live in Japan since the end of the nineteenth century.

Japanese language has been labeled two different names —"*Kokugo*," which is for natives, and "*Nihongo*" which is for foreigners. Such two names for the same Japanese language have completely different concepts. *Kokugo* can be associated with the Japanese conception of nationalism. Japanese nationalism emerged after the Meiji Restoration. Values central to Japanese nationalism include civilization and enlightenment, which became the means to elevate national prestige. As nationalism wielded influence, building up military power became the supreme ambition. Japan was quickly moving toward militarism in the earlier twentieth century. The zenith of this development was World War II. Consequently, Japanese teachers were discursively constructed by the nationalism and militarism. Although the Japanese started to adopt some Western thoughts after the Meiji Restoration, it was not until after World War II that the Japanese began to concentrate on learning Western philosophy and theories. Much of what was learned came from the USA. In the field of education, under the name of democracy, many American philosophical positions and theories of psychology, learning and human development blossomed in Japan. Among many of them, John Dewey's theory on teaching and learning was acknowledged by Japanese educators enthusiastically. Dewey has been admired as the father of liberalism and democracy. Dewey's philosophy of education has served as an opponent to nationalism and militarism.

Many scholars of Japanese linguistics in Japan have asserted that *Kokugo* is the national language for native Japanese people and such national language education has to conform with Japanese society and culture in order to build up among learners a Japanese patriotic sprit (Kurasawa, 1994; Himeno, Kobayashi, Kaneko, Komiya & Murata, 1998). For example, Himeno, Kobayashi, Kaneko, Komiya and Murata (1998) have stated:

> Before the first grade, Japanese children already have basic Japanese communication skills. [They] are able to complain or make requests to their parents and argue with their friends. [They] know many words. Moreover, [they] have learned some social customs and values. Therefore, Japanese national

language education is building up among children a sprit of being "Japanese citizen" upon the already existing base. The principal objects are also to develop children's written language ability along with comprehension skills and communication skills and make children inherit and prosper Japanese traditional culture (p. 7, our translation).

In contrast, *Nihongo* is referred to as the Japanese language used by foreigners. The term *Nihongo* communicates a concept of the Japanese language as so particular that it is impossible for foreigners to acquire (Shibata, 1976). It also distinguishes foreigners from native Japanese people. Whether taught in Japan or overseas, the Japanese language class for Japanese children is called *Kokugo.* On the other hand, it is still called *Nihongo* if the Japanese class is for foreigners even at a school in Japan. Foreigners may become teachers of *Nihongo* but there has never been a case where a foreigner has become a teacher of *Kokugo*.

Kinsui (2003) has described the Japanese people's belief that foreigners are unable to learn "real" Japanese. Japanese language used by foreign characters in Japanese plays, novels and movies tends to have strange accent and grammatical mistakes. There are different stereotypes of Japanese used by English speakers, Chinese speakers, Portuguese speakers, etcetera. The following describes how Japanese think about foreigners.

The foreigner in Japan, so long as he is not thought to be a permanent immigrant, is treated very politely, but always as an outsider. If he speaks Japanese at all, no matter how badly, he is praised for this remarkable accomplishment, as though we were an idiot child who suddenly showed a streak of intelligence (Reischauer, quoted in Wolf, 1993, p.7).

At the same time, Japanese people do not believe that foreigners can ever truly master their culture either. In this way, teachers are expected to simultaneously transmit

Japanese language and culture, yet keep their students from full assimilation. Thus, Japanese educators are expected to use their language classes to impart an understanding of Japanese cultural beliefs in their classrooms and facilitate their students behaving in ways that embody Japanese values.

Japanizing New Comers by Introducing Japanese Culture and Norms

Many scholars believe that the most important aspect of teaching Japanese is introducing Japanese culture and norms to foreign students (Himeno, Kobayashi, Kaneko, Komiya & Murata, 1998; Tokui, 2002; Hosokawa, 2002). In a foreign language course, generally speaking, curricula are designed to develop four basic skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening. In Japan, however, the class, "Japanese Affairs," has been taught at Japanese universities since 1962 (Hosokawa, 2002). The object of this class is to accustom foreign students to Japanese society, culture and norms. This idea is deeply embedded in Japanese immigration policy. It is well-known that, for foreigners, it is more difficult to become a permanent resident than to be naturalized as a Japanese citizen since the Japanese government and society prefer foreigners to become Japanese rather than keep their own identity while living in Japan. It is a strategy of distributing the Japanese culture to the rest of the world. The Japanese government addresses below:

> Japan efforts have so far been focused on importing and transplanting science and technology from advanced industrialized countries in Europe and North America. It has not always made adequate efforts with regard to the international exchange and contribution in the fields of education, research, culture and sports. . . It will also become important for Japan to make international contributions in respective fields. . . The increased exchange of persons may cause what is called cultural frictions. Such friction, however, should be considered as normal phenomena in the international community. . . the distinctive characteristics, as well as the university, of the Japanese tradition and culture will be rediscovered and

recognized anew, and the Japanese culture will be able to contribute to the creation of the peaceful and prosperous international community based on coexistence and cooperation among diverse cultures and among pluralistic systems (NCER, 1987, pp. 465-466).

In the Japanese political context, the main approach to overcoming cultural frictions for Japanese is not to try to have better understanding of other cultures, but to spread the Japanese culture throughout the world. Striving to introduce Japanese culture into foreign countries is one aspect of the Japanese technologies of internationalization.

The Ministry of Education (1989) has also adopted this approach. In the *Course of Study*, the Ministry of Education places emphasis on how schools should teach "Japan's magnificent culture and traditions" and "seek to enhance educational content to focus on cultivating understanding and affection for the Japanese nation and its history and fostering the attributes of Japanese people living independently in the international community" (MESSC, 2000, p. 174). Thus, the "good" Japanese teachers' role is to Japanize foreigners and to distribute Japanese culture and norms to the rest of the world.

Another technology which influences the Japanizing of foreign students is writing class and writing assignments. In Japanese writing classes, generally speaking, students are expected to learn not only Japanese writing techniques but also Japanese culture, norms, way of thinking, etcetera. Foucault (1980) has explained: "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. . ." (p. 131).

"Free wring" is rarely applied by Japanese teachers. Instead, teachers tend to give themes of writing assignments. These themes are usually related to foreign students' understandings of Japan, e.g., Japanese society, culture, virtues, etcetera. "Virtuous" here is coded as "cooperation," "showing respect for authority," "having collective awareness," etc. Individualism, multiculturalism and feminism, generally speaking, are considered

"non-virtuous."

Given topics of writing assignments tend to be: a) Japanese annual events and seasonal phenomena; b) Japanese cultural activities; c) Japanese society and the life of the people; and d) characteristics of the Japanese economy. After students hand in their works, teachers usually give comments in order to make students familiar with those topics. Given topics of writing assignments, as a technology of disciplinary power and a technology of the self, has discursively constructed what it means to be a "successful" Japanese language learner – working hard, having better understanding of Japan, showing respect for Japanese culture, following Japanese traditions and so forth.

In the Japanese institutional context, the key of how to educate immigrates is not to try to have better understanding of their cultures, but is to spread understanding of Japanese culture. Striving to introduce Japanese culture into Japanese language education is one aspect of the Japanese government's technologies of Japanizing immigrates.

Conclusion

The Japanese version of multiculturalism is anti- multiculturalism. This type of multiculturalism is not for the cultural minorities but for the social and cultural majorities. Skepticism is what we need when we read these institutional discourses. It is dangerous to be deluded by the literal sense of the words. We have to read the documents historically, and not only rhetorically. Instead of what kind of knowledge is good or bad, we have to be aware that any knowledge can be dangerous; providing a new way or knowledge to make Japanese educational systems better can be also dangerous.

What has conceptualized the notion of multiculturalism are not the ideological products but are the effects of multiple power relations. It is also important that this study indicates that discourses on multiculturalism and multicultural education engender inclusion and exclusion at the same moment, for example, the particular Japanese multicultural discourse of Japanese language education for immigrant children, inversely, promotes anti-multiculturalism. Through careful textual analysis, we are able to perceive

that "multiculturalism" employed by the Ministry of Education of Japan has conceptualized the notions of "anti-multiculturalism." It is hoped that this paper will stimulate dialogue and debate about multicultural issues in Japan.

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