Japaneseness in Immigrant Education: Toward Culturally Responsive Teaching in Japan

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This article considers the academic and practical implications of culturally responsive teaching and whiteness studies for the studies and practice of immigrant education in Japan. By reviewing what has been found and discussed about the teachers' roles and their privileges in the studies of immigrant education in Japan, I argue that Japaneseness has been unnamed and made invisible, as well as culturally neutralized by the majority in the educational system. As the population becomes more diverse, I suggest that it is required to study how the image of "Japanese" and "Japanese culture" have been imagined and constructed in education, to deconstruct them and to put them into practice in teacher training.

Keywords: culturally responsive teaching; multicultural education; Japaneseness; whiteness; teacher

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine whiteness and Japaneseness in the field of immigrant education studies. By reviewing the studies of whiteness in education and those of immigrant education in Japan focusing on teachers, I argue that the ethnic majority in Japanese society is not named, that is "Japanese" and "Japanese culture" are unmarked and made invisible (Matsuo, 1995; 2012; 2013), and suggest that there is a need to study how they are imagined and constructed in education and to put it into practice by deconstructing "Japaneseness" to establish culturally responsive teaching in Japan.

Japan is host to nearly 0.43 million migrants staying for more than 3 months, and the country is ranked fourth in terms of the number of incoming foreigners among the OECD member countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). Although the myth of a homogenous nation was widely pervasive for a long time in Japan (Oguma, 1995), the population now indicates otherwise, with the country becoming increas-

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ingly diverse.

Japan is home to approximately 2.7 million foreigners with resident status, constituting 2% of the population (Ministry of Justice, Japan, 2018). Among the Japanese, the proportion of people over 60 is 35%, substantially higher than that of other age groups (ex. People in their 20s and 30s form 20%), indicative of a rapidly aging population (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan, 2018). Conversely, the population of non-Japanese in Japan is not aging; people in their 20s and 30s form 50% of foreign nationals (Ministry of Justice, Japan, 2018).

Focusing on children of compulsory education age, about 65,000 foreign pupils attend public elementary school and 24,000 foreign students to junior high school (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan, 2019). Among them, more than 40% are found to be in need of Japanese language instruction.[1] The first languages of the pupils with foreign nationalities who require Japanese instruction are Portuguese (28%), Chinese (22%), and Filipino (18%), followed by Others, Spanish, and Vietnamese (Chart 1). Recent immigrants to Japan since the 1970s include refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and migrants from China, Thailand, the Philippines, and various other countries, apart from people of Japanese descent from South America (*Nikkei*). There are also groups from the ex-colonies, called "oldcomers," including Korean descendants and returnees from China. Their third and fourth generations are now of school age. Therefore, the population in Japan has become increasingly diverse in recent times, and schools need to respond to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the students[2].
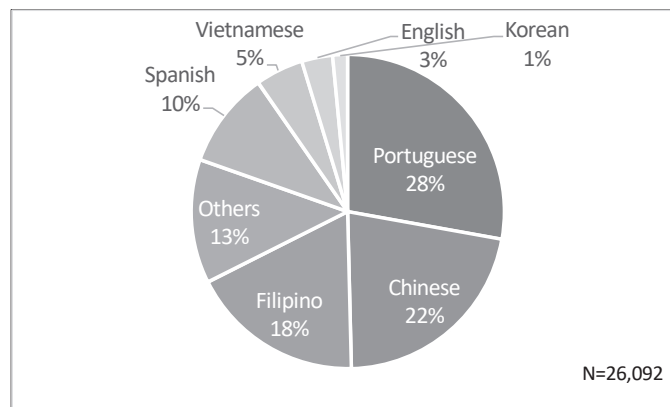
Source: MEXT, 2018

Chart 1: Proportion of the First Language of the Foreign Children in Elementary Schools in Japan (2018)

Based on Howe (1993)'s definition of "opportunity of education" as equal access, compensatory interpretation, and participatory interpretation, Takahashi (2019b) examined education for immigrants in Japan and concluded that immigrant education is not guaranteed in terms of opportunity in Japanese schools because (a) receiving education is legally recognized as a right and obligation unique to Japanese nationals and not to foreign nationalities[3] (denoting lack of equal access); (b) the school un-enrollment rate of non-Japanese children is much higher than that of Japanese children[4] (denoting lack of compensatory interpretation); and (c) the curriculum does not reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population, or the ethnic minorities do not participate in the process of making the school curriculum (de-

noting lack of participatory interpretation). Besides, the quality of education is not guaranteed either because there is a huge gap in the academic achievement of Japanese and non-Japanese students[5]. Therefore, the current public education system in Japan is not responding sufficiently to the diversity of the children's ethnic cultural background.

Focusing on the teachers, most of the schoolteachers in public schools are Japanese nationals. According to Yabuta et al. (2015), there are only 257 teachers of foreign nationalities, which is substantially low compared to the proportion of foreign residents in the total population[6]. In addition, the teachers of foreign nationalities are not treated equally with Japanese-national teachers (Nakajima, 2017). For example, they are not entitled to take the exam for promotion to senior positions. Since the Japanese educational system has not introduced multicultural education, teacher training does not require pre-service teachers to learn how to respond to students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, such as those of immigrant children[7]. The system has been criticized for essentially promoting cultural assimilation into the Japanese ethnic majority (Tsuneyoshi, 1995; 2001), ignoring cultural differences without multicultural perspectives – understanding of newcomer families' backgrounds and reconsideration of themselves and school culture (Ito and Nishimura, 2012; Sugihara, 2016)

The next section provides an overview of the aim and concept of culturally responsive teaching and a review of the studies on whiteness in education. Then, in the following sections, I expand Matsuo (2013)'s discussion on whiteness and Japaneseness, reviewing the studies and practices of immigrant education in Japan with a focus on teachers, and discuss them from a perspective of Japaneseness and culturally responsive teaching.

2. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Whiteness in Education

2.1 Culturally Responsive Teaching

Multicultural education aims to create equal educational opportunities for students from different backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. (Banks, 2004). Banks (2004) argues that there are 5 dimensions to the practice of multicultural education: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure.

With respect to equity pedagogy, the theories and practices of culturally responsive teaching have been developed based on the assumption that knowledge and school are linked to the society and can never be politically neutral. Based on sociological studies of education, such as Apple (1990), Bowles & Gintis (1976), and Bourdieu (1986), the advocates of culturally responsive teaching criticize the maintenance of racial, ethnic, class, and gender inequality, and their reproduction through the school system, and put this criticism into practice by making a shift in teachers' roles, from transmitters of knowledge to reflective decision makers (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

It is pointed out that a school system is centered on the majority or the dominant and marginalizes the others. For example, Villegas & Lucas (2002) argue that "first, everyone entering the teaching profession—regardless of background—must be prepared to teach a racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically diverse student population, [and] [s]econd, teacher education programs must find ways to increase the number of minority teachers."

(p.xii). Culturally responsive teachers are defined as those who (i) have sociocultural consciousness, (ii) recognize students' cultural backgrounds as an educational resource, not as a problem to be solved, (iii) are responsible and capable of bringing about change to make schools more responsive to students' diversity, (iv) see the process of learning and teaching as a process of actively constructing knowledge and beliefs, (v) are familiar with their students' knowledge and beliefs derived from personal and cultural experiences, and (vi) design teaching based on what the students already know, so that they can offer students of various cultural backgrounds equal access to the knowledge (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p.xiv).

However, studies discussing the experiences of pre-service teachers have found that white teacher candidates often deny such criticisms of the school system (Gonsalves, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). They tend not to acknowledge the institutionalized racism within the educational system because many of them have benefited from the current school system and believe in a meritocratic ideology (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

This denial goes so far as to show us that these teachers can never be politically neutral. Educational practices, for example the roles of teachers in multicultural schools and society, and the interactions between white teachers and minority students, can never be performed within a politically neutral context.

2.2 Whiteness in Education

Bell (2002) stated that the beliefs regarding teachers being ethnically neutral and their ignorance about racial issues prohibit them from preventing racial discrimination and recognizing diversity. Thus, recognizing the inequality embedded within the educational system and not reproducing the inequality between the majority and the minority in the society are crucial elements of culturally responsive teaching. The relevant studies refer to this as whiteness studies in education. Sleeter (1992) revealed White teachers' race-blind identities, identified as the starting point of critical White studies in educational research (Jupp et al, 2016).

McIntyre (1997) defined "White talk" as "talk that serves to insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective roles in the perpetuation of racism" (McIntyre, 1997; 45), because when White people are not seen or named, it implies that they are the norm, whereas people of other races are racialized "others" (Dyer, 2005).

3. Studies on Immigrant Education in Japan: Focus on Teachers and Japaneseness

3.1 Whiteness and Japaneseness

Matsuo (2005) reviewed whiteness studies in the US and derived four primary characteristics: (i) Whiteness is unmarked and made invisible, (ii) it is defined by non-whites, (iii) it refers to constructive privileges, and (iv) it is derived from imperialism and is historically constructed. He also suggested "Japaneseness" as a concept to explore what it means to be Japanese and what privileges being Japanese confers to. He discussed its implications on intercultural education studies in Japan.

Whiteness and Japaneseness have common characteristics, as Matsuo (2005) summarized. There are also differences, for example their relationship with ethnicity and nationalism. Whiteness is a racial concept constructed and imagined as the racial majority and their privi-

leges in the US. Japaneseness indicates the imagined ethnic majority of "Japanese" and their privileges in Japan. The myth of monoethnicity and monoculturalism (Oguma, 1995) complicates the situation. Most people have an ethnic concept of national identity, thus they imagine "Japanese" as people of one ethnic and cultural background, sharing ancestry and history (e.g. Igarashi, 2015; Ishida, 2007; Tanabe, 2011; Takahashi, 2019a, and Yoshino, 2005). There is no consensus about what to call Japan's ethnic majority in immigrant studies and intercultural education studies. In these fields of study, expressions such as "Japanese," "the majority," "mainstream students" or "Japanese as the majority" are used to denote people without an immigration background, the natives, the people of Japanese nationality, and the so-called majority, depending on the research interest of the article. "Japanese" in a sense of people with Japanese nationality includes people with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, for example a first-generation Vietnamese refugee, a third-generation Korean descendant who has been granted Japanese nationality, and so on. Thus, Japaneseness as a concept implies the ethnic majority within a context where ethnicity and nationalism are understood as very close to each other. This indicates the different relationships with ethnicity and nationalism of Whiteness and Japaneseness.

3.2 Research on Immigrant Education in Japan: Focus on "Japanese" Teachers

Japaneseness or being Japanese is constructed by the politics of difference between Japanese and non-Japanese, consisting of invisible cultural practices, perspectives of oneself, others and society, and structured privileges (Matsuo, 2012; 2013). I will review the previous immigrant education studies with a focus on teachers along with the characteristics of Whiteness that Matsuo (2005; 2012; 2013) summarized, expanding them and analyzing their relationships.

3.2.1 Historically Constructed and Defined by "Otherness"

Like Whiteness, Japaneseness is historically constructed, being derived from the nation's imperialist past (the people from ex-colonies and their descendants) and defined by the ethnic minorities (such as *Ainu*), and underclass (*buraku*) minorities. More recently, Japanese returnees from other countries, newcomer immigrants, and refugees recognized as "different" in the era of globalization also affect the construction of Japaneseness. In intercultural education studies in Japan, returnees, foreigners living in Japan, international students, and foreign children are recognized as "others", and the objectives of the studies. "To be Japanese" has remained intentionally unquestioned (Matsuo, 2005; 23). Some groups of people are recognized as "different" from the majority or those who see themselves as the majority "Japanese," drawing on the unquestioned image of "Japanese," which is taken for granted.

This implies an inequal power balance. For example, "[t]he terms 'oldcomer' and 'newcomer', where people of the same ethnic group can be divided into two, or combining Japanese returnees and foreigners under the umbrella category of internationalization, for example, might be seen as majority attempts to map out the Different". The majority has the subjectivity to categorize the minority, though "(t)he majority has yet to find the 'right' term for the Different, and the minority voice has yet to be discovered" (Tsuneyoshi, 2004; 77-78).

3.2.2 Structured Privilege

Being unquestioned, the imagined majority practice their power on the minority by being the subject, while seeing the minority as the object. In a school setting, teachers in Japan consider only visible cultural differences such as Japanese language ability in daily conversations, behavioral differences in schools and different dietary customs based on religions, and these differences are translated into instructional differences such as differences in students' academic progress in their awareness. Thus, it becomes difficult to recognize that the differences experienced by immigrant children in schooling are derived from cultural differences. (Kanai, 2001)

Kojima (2006) argued that teachers have two strategies to respond to children's cultural differences: "unification of differences"and "stabilization of differences". The former means that teachers understand that the differences among the students in the degree of adaptation to school culture and academic achievement are derived from their individual differences in attitude and effort. The latter means that when the deviancies by immigrant children are salient, teachers tolerate them by understanding that they are due to cultural differences and cannot be helped, although they normally think that it is necessary for the children to obey the Japanese rules. Teachers take these two contrary strategies in order to treat them "equally", eventually avoiding claims of "unfairness" from the majority students.

Therefore, Japanese teachers practice their power on immigrant students, a decision made naturally by them due to their perspectives that centralize their own culture derived from unconscious Japaneseness. Whether they hypostatize the differences as cultural or ignore them as personal depends on their perspectives and ideology (Matsuo, 2013; 67).

Intentionally or not, it is often discouraging that the majority of Japanese teachers change the way they treat the cultural differences of minority students according to the teachers' or the schools' convenience: for example, emphasizing the individual efforts of the "model minorities," who succeed socioeconomically in Japan disregarding the disadvantages they face in society and school, while recognizing them as "different" groups in other situations, often in a discriminative way. A similar example is reported by Takenoshita (1999), who analyzed Human Rights Education (HRE) in the areas where many Korean descendants live. He found that it has as positive effect for the self-identification of students with Korean backgrounds on condition that they have friends with the same ethnic identities in the same school, while the fixed idealistic image of the Korean minority constrains some students.

3.2.3 Neutrality in Disguise and Invisibility

Though the social and educational systems work for the ethnic and cultural majority in ways that benefit them over the minorities, this is often unrecognized or unacknowledged by the majority. To be Japanese is perceived similarly to being a human, with norms believed to be universal. Some parts of the Japanese culture, customs, and norms do exist differently from those of other ethnic or cultural groups. However, the former are taken for granted and not recognized, as if they were invisible (Matsuo, 2012).

Indifference to cultural difference among the students affects teaching. Compared to teachers in the US and Japan, Nukaga (2003) found that teachers in Japan try to redistribute relational resources more than physical or cultural resources to newcomer immigrant children. "Both the indifference of teachers toward the needs of newcomer children and an implicit consensus on "relationship-building teaching" encouraged the teachers to provide the new-

comer children with only the resources that seemed to enhance friendship in the classroom" (Nukaga, 2003; 83).

Takahashi (2016) interviewed schoolteachers who taught immigrant children and found that most of them answered that it is good for minorities to maintain their distinct customs and traditions, rather than adapting into the larger society. They actually see the customs and norms in the schools and the wider society as "rules," and expect the minority students to maintain their language and cultural customs as long as they do not break these "rules." Though the expression "rules" sounds culturally and politically neutral, many of these may be embedded within the Japanese majority's culture or the school culture, potentially seen as "different" from the minorities' perspectives. Noiri (2005) also argues that the schools continue to offer education based on the assumption of the homogeneity of the "Japanese," and the students learn the perspectives and norms as if there were only "Japanese" in the Japanese society as a "hidden curriculum" (p.54).

These studies imply that Japanese majority's culture is seen as general and universal and has become the standardized norm. Thus, the standard of what is normal, right, and important is formed through the perspectives of the invisible "Japaneseness." Particularly between majority teachers and minority students, the teacher's role is not culturally or politically neutral, either. In a multicultural setting, it is important for teachers to acknowledge the potential discouragement of minorities (Takahashi, 2004).

3.2.4 Homogenized "Japanese"

Education regarding Korean descendants has been criticized on grounds that while it aims at changing the Japanese students' attitudes and understandings, it does not focus on the diversity within the Japanese. Japanese children have been described as burying the cultural differences of the Korean descendants or supporting them. Seeing Japanese as homogeneous, children from different cultural backgrounds are recognized as non-Japanese, based on a dichotomy, ignoring the diversity, complexity, and hybridity within and between the Japanese and non-Japanese (Noiri, 2005).

Although only a few studies on immigrant children education have focused on Japaneseness and teachers, its characteristics might be explored by reviewing how teachers describe and how studies (un)recognize Japaneseness. In particular, the fact that the ethnic majority is unnamed and recognized as synonymous to people with Japanese nationality in general and in educational studies tells us that it is unmarked and made invisible. This eventually hides the structured privileges of power in society, as well as the diversity within the "Japanese".

3.3 Lessons from Multicultural Educational Initiatives

In Japanese language class, or the "international class" —the name of the class depends on the school—immigrant children learn not only Japanese, but also the rules and customs of Japanese society and schools. They study the curriculum to catch up with the "home" class to which they belong. Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) is now supported, developed, and encouraged by MEXT, though there is still a wide gap in educational resources depending on areas and schools.

In addition to this linguistic educational initiative, in some areas and schools where many oldcomer and newcomer immigrants live, multicultural education is partly introduced and practiced. As pioneering cases, I examine the roles of teachers in these practices, because

they strike a good contrast with those in mainstream classes and help us discover embedded Japaneseness.

3.3.1 Ethnic class for Korean descendants .

The first example is an ethnic class by and for Korean descendants in a public elementary school in Osaka Prefecture, where historically many Korean descendants have resided and where the *Buraku* liberation movement has been active since the 1960s,.

The students of Korean descent take this class once a week and learn the Korean language, history, and culture, and also use their Korean names while referring to each other. A Korean descendant comes to the school to teach them as an adjunct lecturer. They also present what they have learned in the ethnic class to all the students in the school once a year, in order to raise the awareness of the other students and to create an integrated school culture that fights discrimination and respects diversity.

This educational initiative encourages the students of Korean descent to have a positive ethnic identity, by recognizing their culture as well as providing social networks and role models of the same ethnic background (Takahashi, 2019c). The teacher recognizes the students' cultural background as educational resources, makes the school responsible for responding to the students' diversity, and is familiar with the students' knowledge derived from cultural experiences, as Villegas and Lucas (2002) argued in their study.

It implies that the mainstream classes are developed and practiced on the assumption that students are homogeneous, in terms of curriculum and teacher- student relationship, giving the privileges to the majority.

3.3.2 Multicultural education for newcomer students.

The other example is an optional course titled "International (studies)," which has been introduced in a junior high school in an area where there are many refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as immigrants from South America.

Japanese teachers, academics, and local volunteers collaboratively started a class where refugee students can learn geography and history based on the question of how and why they have come to Japan. They learn these subjects by doing research by themselves and by listening to their parents and guest speakers (Shimizu and Kojima, 2006). In this class, the Japanese teachers are not transmitting knowledge, but setting up an environment in which the students can learn by themselves; the teachers also learn with the students. The Japanese teachers even came to feel guilty after learning how and to what extent the refugee children are experiencing assimilative pressures, having been placed in a disadvantageous position (Shimizu and Kojima, 2006).

This educational practice indicates that the teachers must recognize that an inequal power balance is practiced and reproduced within the school, as well as that the curriculum is culturally biased.

These two practices empower minority students whose ethnic identity, home language, and culture are almost ignored in mainstream classes. The teachers work as coordinators, recognizing the students' ethnic and cultural background as a resource to be studied, linking them with resources outside the school, helping them to build social networks including their role models, and raising the awareness of other Japanese majority students and teachers.

I would like to stress here that these pioneering educational practices are very important in terms of empowering the minority students; however, it is also important that we carefully consider whether these multicultural education practices continuously play a role to supplement the mainstream class. If the division of roles between the multicultural and mainstream class remains set, the mainstream class will not change. Importantly, the multicultural class keeps affecting the Japanese majority students, teachers, and the entire school culture, and will hopefully have an impact on the wider society eventually. Otherwise, as Noiri (2005) warns, the students learn a "hidden curriculum" or receive a contradicting message that there are different norms practiced in the multicultural education and the mainstream classes, thereby being encouraged to be "different" in the former, while they are expected to be the "same" in the latter.

4. Conclusion: The Deconstruction of "Japaneseness" in Education

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the importance of introducing multicultural perspectives and culturally responsive teaching into pre-service and in-service teacher training by deconstructing Japaneseness in education. As the proportion of immigrants and ethnic minorities varies across regions and schools, and as the sociocultural context varies from school to school, it is desirable that teachers make a decision based on their understanding of the local context and the students' educational needs.

In introducing the multicultural perspective into the teacher training, it is important (a) to increase the number of minority teachers, and (b) for Japanese majority teachers to be reflective about "Japaneseness" and be aware of the privileges of being Japanese.

To this end, we must acknowledge that the Japanese majority is unnamed, and explore how it is constructed in education. We must be careful in that it may not be meaningful to spend time considering what we name things or judging who is in the majority and who is not. It bears the risk of being discriminative and exclusive by once again recognizing differences, both individually and collectively, according to the majority's convenience. What is more important is to be aware of the structural inequality embedded in the educational system, in other words, the fact that Japaneseness is unnamed, meaning that it has been unquestioned and excludes others who are different (Matsuo, 2005).

Exploring how Japaneseness is constructed, trying to deconstruct it in practice, and recognizing that society consists of culturally diverse people, will lead us a step further in creating more equitable schools.

Notes
 1) The schoolteachers evaluate whether a student needs to take Japanese language lessons. Usually, after two years of learning Japanese, most students become comfortable using the language in daily conversation and stop taking Japanese lessons; however, they are often found lacking in academic Japanese.
 2) Although I focused on the foreign children in need of Japanese language instruction, there are also Japanese students who are in need of Japanese instruction. Roughly 10 thousand pupils and students of Japanese nationalities, most of them are children of interethnic marriages. About 30% of them speak Filipino as their first language.

3) The constitution states that Japanese nationals have the right and obligation to basic education; however, to encourage enrollment, in 2012, MEXT sent notices to local governments requesting them to provide information about the enrollment of foreign children, and in 2019, the current status of enrollment of foreign children was requested to get an overall picture of the number of children enrolled (MEXT, 2012; 2019).

4) The school non-attendance rate among the children of foreign nationals is high. Nearly 1.1% of foreign students do not go to school, in areas where people of Japanese descent from South America live (MEXT, 2006). Compared to the 0.1% of non-attendance of Japanese students, the rate of non-attendance of children of foreign nationals is high.

5) The academic performance of immigrant children was lower than that of majority children according to PISA data in 2006 (Nagayoshi and Nakamuro, 2006).

6) There is no national survey about the nationalities of the teachers in public schools. Yabuta et al. (2015) sent questionnaires to the local educational authorities and found 257 teachers with foreign nationalities working at public schools (the response rate was 91%). Since the proportion of foreign population among the total population in Japan was 1.6% in 2014, there should be 18,000 teachers of foreign nationalities and 3,600 teachers who are special permanent residents to reflect the diversity of the population (Yabuta et al, 2015; 60). Special permanent residents are people who moved to Japan before 1945 from the ex-colonies, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan, and their descendants.

7) In some areas where there are many immigrant children, the local education authorities sometimes invite academics or NPO staff who provide the immigrant children with the educational support and set up seminars for in-service teachers to learn the educational need of immigrant children. Apart from those events, the teachers do not have opportunities of being trained to respond to cultural diversity.

Acknowledgement

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