Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

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多文化主義と多文化教育
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Abstract

In this age of globalization, the argument concerning multiculturalism and multicultural education has become increasingly important. In such a context, this paper chronologically reviews multiculturalism and multicultural education in US, which have had a major influence on their counterparts in Japan. The relationship between multiculturalism and multicultural education is very interactive, and both of them are currently being fundamentally revised. Learning from these developments and problems in US would give us a significant insight, particularly in Japan where the issues in this field have been conventionally regarded as the model from which to learn but have been scarcely critically analysed.

Key words: Diversity, Integration, Liberal Multiculturalism, Multicultural education

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine some crucial aspects in the debate about multiculturalism and multicultural education. These are critical issues in the age of globalization as we consider the current social and educational environment and its future not only in the Japanese context but also throughout the world. It is also important to discuss multiculturalism and multicultural education together because the relationship between them is dynamic and interactive. In this paper, I will focus particularly on the debate between multiculturalism and anti-multiculturalism.

The arguments concerning multiculturalism and also multicultural education are examined chronologically. Although individual representations vary from country to country, examples in this paper will be taken primarily from the American context because the discourse on intercultural education in Japan has been significantly influenced by its American counterpart. The chronological flow is shown below.

Notion of assimilation → (Liberal) cultural pluralism → (Strategic) multiculturalism

One reason to examine the development of multiculturalism in a chronological sequence is that, as described below, cultural pluralism appeared in protest against assimilationist ideas. In the same way, multiculturalism is regarded as a response to the problems of cultural pluralism. In other words, the latter approach has been an attempt to critique and overcome the former approach. Another reason for examining the chronological sequence of the argument is that it leads to the underlying debate between multiculturalism and anti-multiculturalism.

These reasons are deeply related to another important aim in examining multiculturalism, and this is to examine the tension between two notions, integration and diversity. I argue that these two views have been the key notions in any form of discussion of multiculturalism. Scrutinizing multiculturalism in relation to these polarized notions should provide crucial insights for this study. Bearing this in mind, the following section presents the principle aspects of each chronological stage, indicating influential factors in the emergence of multiculturalism and its problems.

2. Assimilation

There is a wide range of definitions of the notion of assimilation (Sandberg, 1974, Liefer, 1981, Nielsen, 1985). In the context of assimilation, the phrase 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do' is often used. This expression reflects that there is a point in common among the many definitions. Assimilation is the process whereby minority groups merge
into the majority group. The process of assimilation, its speed and its degree may vary, but the process was believed to be irreversible and progressive (Park, 1928). Behind the commitment to assimilation was the belief that society would become more rational, more meritocratic, and more universalistic (Sekine, 1989). In other words, the concept of assimilation has been related to the concept of modernization (1989: 61). A liberal outlook, which believes in progress, human integrity and tolerance, is found in the idea of assimilation (Gordon, 1975: 118–119). This faith in assimilation can be expressed in the sentiment that it may take some time, but we can be integrated someday in the future.

Questions and doubts have emerged regarding this model that presents a one way process of minorities assimilating into the majority, because it has not worked in the way assimilationists expected. Does assimilation not equate with Anglo-conformity, for example, in the US and in Australia? From the point of view of assimilationists, however, those who fail to assimilate into the majority come to be labeled as people who are irrational or otherwise deviant (Marger, 1985: 57–59). When an entire group fails to “fall into line”, it comes to be labeled as maladjusted and as an ethnically residual phenomenon (Nielsen, 1980: 78). This approach to assimilation may become part of the logic and ideology of the dominant group in defense of ‘its’ society and assist nation-states to achieve integration.

As a number of ethnic conflicts throughout the world indicate, people in minority groups have rebelled against assimilation. Conflicts between majority and minority groups and also among minority groups have increased, including in developed countries. The ‘liberal’ assumptions held by assimilationists have come to be seen as invalid.

3. Liberal cultural pluralism

Kallen was the first to put forth the concept of cultural pluralism in 1915 (Newfield and Gordon 1996: 84). Kallen claimed that people must not aim for integration into a dominant culture such as the Anglo-Saxon culture under the concept of assimilation. Rather he advocated that they should develop a positive awareness of each ethnic group’s culture (Kallen 1956). According to him, people should not regard diversity among ethnic groups negatively but recognize it as a strength of a society and promote its maintenance. Kallen made it clear that cultural pluralism stood in opposition to assimilation.

While the idea of cultural pluralism developed, the idea of assimilation was criticized as a form of cultural oppression by a dominant group. Symbols of assimilation such as the ‘melting pot’ were replaced by the ‘salad bowl’ metaphor. The new metaphor suggested that many ethnic groups could coexist without sacrificing their original culture (Tai 1999: 43). This change from the ‘melting pot’ to the ‘salad bowl’ is particularly important when we consider the situation in Japan where the ‘salad bowl’ metaphor has become a popular
and convenient shorthand to designate an ideal approach to intercultural relations in the field of intercultural education. However, while cultural pluralists criticized assimilation as an approach to intercultural relations, they did not provide a strategy for integrating the various groups or achieving their co-existence (Tai 1999). This meant that ideas regarding the implementation of pluralistic policies were seldom spelled out and were characterized by a certain ambiguity.

Some pluralists such as Kimball (1990) and Schlesinger (1991) have regarded cultural pluralism as incorporating both integration and diversity. Ultimately, however, they emphasize assimilationist themes and downplay the importance of diversity, respecting it only in so far that it did not threaten the integration of society. They did not propose that the power relations between the dominant group and the minority group or groups be changed. This kind of cultural pluralism was amenable to most of those in dominant groups. In America, those groups consisted mainly of conservative Anglo-Saxon Americans (Newfield & Gordon 1996: 84). Emphasizing integration more than diversity, they adopted a concept of cultural pluralism approaching that of assimilation.

Others such as Tate (1997) and Nieto (2000) placed more weight on diversity and prioritized equality. They argued for affirmative action, claiming that an equal society could be achieved only by providing special rights for the members of minority groups and advocated that such rights should have legal status in society.

Affirmative action included the provision of bilingual education in public schools. Advocates of such education asserted that it was necessary to provide special consideration to members of certain racial or ethnic groups when making employment decisions or deciding who should be given entrance to higher education. Many movements promoting affirmative action in America emerged from the field of education. These movements began to be viewed as multicultural education particularly during the 1980s (Tai 1999: 51). Multicultural education has become a driving force of multiculturalism particularly in America.

Glazer (1976) was one of the early skeptics who criticized affirmative action. He argued that cultural pluralism which advocated affirmative action would split the nation if each minority group started to apply for special consideration. Gordon (1981) identified two types of cultural pluralism. The first type of cultural pluralism, supported by writers like Glazer, is called liberal pluralism and the other type is called corporate or progressive pluralism. The former respects individualism but is reluctant to support the actions officially designed to change the status of minority groups in society. The latter, on the other hand, support the notion that unless those subjugated groups are given some political rights to be able to change their status, problems such as inequality would never be solved. The notion of multiculturalism emerged from the latter concept.
4. Multiculturalism enacted through multicultural education

Multiculturalism, particularly in America, was a result of stretching the notion of corporate cultural pluralism to its full extent. Tai (1999: 48) writes that national culture is not a single culture with one set of norms but a “mosaic” of different cultures. Multiculturalism and corporate cultural pluralism were similar in their respect for diversity in society. However, within multiculturalism the idea of a single common culture was also challenged. Multiculturalism often does not accept one culture as a dominant or core culture within society. According to the notion of multiculturalism, different cultures are represented as equally important and coexisting (Tai: 49).

Multicultural education has played a significant role in promoting multiculturalism. Banks (1994: 10), a leading proponent of American multicultural education, defines “multicultural education as an educational reform movement designed to restructure schools and other educational institutions so that students from all social-class, racial, cultural and gender groups will have an equal opportunity to learn”. Banks has been an influential figure in the debate in Japan, for example, he was the invited keynote speaker at the twentieth anniversary conference of the Intercultural Education Society in Japan in 2000. Sleeter and Grand (1999) argue that multicultural education is socially reconstructionist. Nieto (2000: 314) sees multicultural education as an invitation to students and teachers to put their learning into action for social justice. These writers expressed two common notions. First, multicultural education has to be accompanied by educational or even political action to reform or reconstruct schooling, institutions and societies. Second, explicit in multicultural education is the goal of removing social inequality caused by economic, social and cultural differences.

However, those promoting multicultural education and multiculturalism have been criticized because they were seen as a threat to peace, social order and the integration of the nation state. The following section discusses some of the points raised by those critical of multiculturalism and through these considers the arguments surrounding diversity and integration.

5. The refutation of particularistic multiculturalism

While multicultural education and multiculturalism have received considerable attention, counterarguments have emerged and grown in popularity. Multicultural education is considered as too political, emphasizing too much the minority’s points of view in the curriculum. The main concern of those opposing multiculturalism was that such a focus would lead to the disintegration of society (Ravitch 1990, Schlesinger 1991).

Schlesinger (1991) argues that multiculturalism assaulted the common identity and
threatened the unity of American society. He criticizes Afrocentrism\(^{2}\) as a radical form of multiculturalism and opposes its tendency toward separationism.

Ravitch (1990) has divided multiculturalism into two types: plural multiculturalism and particularistic multiculturalism. She regards plural multiculturalism as the norm of a free society and as the principle behind integration in American society. Educational policy in America, according to her, has tried to accept diversity and is critical of racial discrimination. However, Ravitch concludes that these efforts have failed because of the extreme demands made by particularistic multiculturalism, which advocates minorities and denies there is any common culture. She recognizes the problems associated with Eurocentric perspectives, but claims that much effort has been made to correct them. However, she also notes that it is quite natural for education in America to be influenced by European cultures, considering that America was ‘discovered’ by Europeans and that more than eighty percent of the population today consists of the descendants of the founders. She criticizes particularistic multiculturalists because she regards them as attempting to improve the academic career of the minority children by encouraging them to have a false sense of self-esteem and to be overly proud of the accomplishments of their race in isolation. She opposes this kind of multiculturalism and argues that self-esteem must be born out of accomplishments attributable to one’s own effort, rather than ‘acquired’ from ancestors through a study of one’s cultural history (1990: 354).

Those critical of particularistic multiculturalism were also critical of affirmative action (Tai 1999: 63). They claimed that affirmative action intervened in market economies and that for this very reason, ironically the opportunity for minorities to compete economically was undermined rather than enhanced. As a result of affirmative action, the minority groups felt inferior and the dominant people reinforced their superiority. A refutation of these arguments follows.

6 . The counterarguments from multiculturalism

The debates surrounding multiculturalism in the USA have been important in Japan, in particular the argument by Ravitch and the counter-argument posed by Asante.\(^{3}\) Asante (1991: 267) argues that Ravitch’s version of multiculturalism is not multiculturalism at all, but rather a new form of Eurocentric hegemony. He disputes the notion of a common American culture and argues that there is a hegemonic culture, pushed as if it were a common culture. He declared that even Eurocentrism can find a place in multiculturalism as long as it does not parade as universal. Asante’s arguments against Ravitch express a response to anti-multiculturalism.

Those critical of the multiculturalist position have tended to over-emphasize the likelihood that society would fragment. Their fears were that multiculturalism would bring
political conflict into culture and academia. However, politics have always implicitly intruded into academic and cultural issues (Eller 1997). The real anxiety of anti-multiculturalists is of forfeiting the supremacy of the dominant culture and the collapse of their belief in its supremacy. The crucial problem in their argument is that what they claim to be a universal norm is actually a specific one, and often the norm of their own culture, that is, the dominant culture (Eller: 249–260). They assume that the values of their culture (the dominant culture) are also the values of all other cultures. The argument of multiculturalists, however, is that this not only promotes the right of minority groups, but reveals that the dominant culture is merely one amongst many cultures of equal worth.

7. From the notion of ‘multi’ to the notion of ‘culturalism’

Although multiculturalism and multicultural education have gradually been penetrating many societies, the arguments in this paper have focused upon the debate between the proponents of the notion of diversity and proponents of the notion of integration.

One more important point must be mentioned. As Tai (1999) noted, those for and against multiculturalism have regarded culture as an entity. Appadurai (1996: 12) pointed out that culture as a noun seems to carry associations which conceal more than they reveal. He proposed that the term “cultural” be used instead of “culture”. Sakai (1996) has argued that both multiculturalism and anti-multiculturalism fall into the same problem of ‘culturalism’. According to Sakai, culturalism is a way of regarding culture as an organic entity. The assumption is that multicultural societies consist of two or more undivided cultures which exist in a parallel fashion.

The arguments in this paper so far have focused on the ‘multi’ in multiculturalism, but the arguments presented above hint at the necessity to shift the focus to the ‘culturalism’ in multiculturalism (Morris-Suzuki 1996). Therefore, the problem of culturalism, in particular, its essentialism will be examined in my next paper which will follow soon.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, multiculturalism and one of its most distinctive manifestations, multicultural education, were analyzed basically in the American context. This is because multiculturalism and multicultural education in the US have strongly influenced their Japanese counterparts. While intercultural relations have passed through four general stages, from perception of assimilation to liberal cultural pluralism, to pluralistic multiculturalism, to particularistic multiculturalism, the two notions of integration and diversity have always been the center of the debates. However, it is generally the minority that is integrated into the majority, not vice versa, and consequently existing power
relationships remain as the status quo. One approach that has been adhered to in intercultural education in Japan has been liberal cultural pluralism, which, without examining power relations between cultures, advocates all cultures have equal values. The ways in which those in intercultural education in Japan regard these cultural pluralistic views and how they respond to the recent phenomenon of non-Japanese coming into Japan needs further exploration in the future.

Notes

(1) Definitions of each term will be given in the following section.

(2) Afrocentrism rejects the conventional understanding of African history and culture, saying it has only been framed by dominant European concepts. Afrocentrism attempts to rewrite the history of Afro-Americans and also reconceptualizes the history focusing on Africans' contribution to the world such as the civilization of ancient Egypt.

(3) The argument between Ravitch and Asante was widely acknowledged in Japan. A president of the Intercultural Education Society, Japan referred to this debate in his opening address of the symposium in its 20th anniversary conference.

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