

POLITICS OF RECOGNITION AND EFFECTS OF MULTICULTURALISM ON IDENTITY: CASE OF JAPANESE CANADIANS IN MONTREAL

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[M]isrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need. (Taylor, 1994: 26)

1. Introduction

“Is there electricity in Japan?”

“Japan is part of China, right?”

The comments above were made by my classmates while I was attending a public high school in Ohio, U.S.A. in 1992. Hearing these comments, I was surprised at their lack of knowledge about Japan and awareness about world geography. At the same time, I felt rather insulted by their ignorance about my country of origin. I wanted to ask them: Don’t you know Sony? Don’t you know Japanese cars? Toyota? Honda? Don’t you know the Japanese capital, Tokyo, one of the biggest cities in the world? As stated by Charles Taylor in his “Politics of Recognition” that “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (1994: 25), I felt as if my sense of identity and dignity was being denied.

The episode I described above is the major reason why advocates of multiculturalism have lobbied for more inclusion of non-European writers and materials in school curricula (Eller, 1997: 250). The argument made by multiculturalists is attributed to the concept of “recognition”. Charles Taylor states that “the demand for recognition...is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter terms designates something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being” (1994: 25). Multiculturalists contend that not recognizing non-Western culture can harm minorities’

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sense of identity and that equal recognition should be given to them. They subsequently demand that changes be made in educational curricula to recognize the historical and modern contributions made by minority groups².

In this paper, I present voices of some Japanese Canadians, both old and young. Voices of older Japanese Canadians who experienced incarceration during the Second World War show how their sense of identity may have been conditioned by the political, economic, and socio-cultural climate of the society at that time in history. Voices of contemporary young Japanese Canadians represent that the perception of Japan and Japanese people in the society has changed so that they feel “recognized” and that they are “proud” of their heritage. These voices illustrate how the given socio-cultural, economic, and political condition can cause positive and negative perception of themselves and the other. I also demonstrate various factors that currently help create positive images of Japan among Japanese youth and their friends in Montreal. Notwithstanding problematic aspects of multiculturalist use of “culture” raised by some anthropologists such as Turner (1993)³, I argue that the concept of multiculturalism is essential in a multicultural society like Montreal, Canada, because recognition of minority culture by the dominant group greatly influences the way in which the members of minority cultural communities perceive of their heritage, of their heritage language, and ultimately of themselves vis-à-vis others.

2. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative methods of inquiry. I conducted several informal interviews and participant observation in various places where Japanese Canadians get together. I have interviewed a little over twenty Japanese Canadians who

² As opposed to multiculturalists, anti-multiculturalists maintain that multiculturalists are making unjust demands for the revision of history textbooks and curricula of literature, which “constitute not scholarly advances but personal commitment or even overwrought emotion posing as knowledge and reason, resulting in an ‘illiberal education’” (Eller, 1997: 250). The debate between multiculturalism and anti-multiculturalism is essentially, according to Jack Eller, “about which groups and interests will hold power and shape the production and reproduction of society in such domains as education, government, institutions, and art” (1997: 251).

³ Some anthropologists claim that multiculturalism “tends to become a form of identity politics, in which the concept of culture becomes merged with that of ethnic identity” (Turner, 1993: 411) and also that it tends to essentialize and reify the concept of “culture” overemphasizing the internal homogeneity of cultures –cultures that anthropologists strive to reveal otherwise (Turner, 1993: 412). In essence, multiculturalists represent cultural struggle for the recognition of certain groups’ cultural differences and the attempt to reduce the hegemony of Western culture.

differ from one another in age, linguistic skills, and immigration paths. Due to the limited space, I present only selected number of people. In conducting interviews, the fact that I was Japanese worked to my advantage. As a Japanese, linguistically and culturally, I was able to “enter to their world” without difficulty. At least, that is how I felt, given my language competencies and Japanese outlook. Some of those who had lived several years in internment camps during World War II seem to have slight reservations to associate with White Canadians.

3. Voices of older Japanese Canadians

According to Ms. Mori, a Japanese Canadian who frequents to the Montreal Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, the perception of Japanese Canadians among themselves was not very positive in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. She states:

After the internment [during World War II], all Japanese wanted to do was to blend in. They didn't want to stick out at all. That's why they moved here [to Montreal and to the eastern Canada in general]... It was easier to re-begin life again...

(A Japanese Canadian; Originally in English; Interview on March 20, 2000)

Mrs. Hashimoto, a member of the “Japanese Cultural Committee” (a volunteer organization that offers cultural activities to general public in Quebec), gave me another account about the negative experience of Japanese Canadians in Montreal:

Japanese Canadians came to Montreal during and after World War II, seeking refuge from discrimination and prejudice they suffered in the west. However, even in Montreal, they continued to face discrimination on the basis of their being Japanese. When my husband and I came to Montreal from Japan in 1963, there were instances where Japanese Canadians could not rent an apartment due to racism.

(Originally in Japanese; Interview on March 22, 2000)

It was only forty years ago that the people of Japanese origin were openly discriminated against in Montreal, Canada. Because of such negative images of Japan and of Japanese that were dominant in the society, Japanese Canadians tried to conceal their origin and to blend in. In order to avoid discrimination, Japanese people tried to be invisible.

In order to “hear” the “voices” of Japanese Canadians whose lives were affected by the Second World War directly or indirectly, I went to visit the Montreal Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre and had several informal interviews. The following is the

dialogue that I had with Ms. Mori, a third-generation Japanese Canadian, and Mrs. Okabe, a second-generation Japanese Canadian.

RY: Do you...recall whether you felt that you wanted to assimilate, and didn't want to be different?⁴

Mrs. Okabe: Yes, but I couldn't. I had always kind of inferior complex.

RY: Did you try to fit in to more and more...?

Mrs. Okabe: I guess I tried. I worked hard. But somehow, till this day, I feel more comfortable with Japanese people than with Caucasians. I guess I am too Japanese.

RY: In terms of mannerism?

Mrs. Okabe: I don't know...

Ms. Mori: But, all of your friends are Japanese...

RY: How about you? (to Ms. Mori). Did you want to blend into the majority, so that you won't be pointed out as a stranger?

Ms. Mori: Yeah, I think so. Obviously, we are different just by looking at us, but I don't think we tried to be different any more than we had to be...

Mrs. Okabe: Did you feel that you fitted in very well?

Ms. Mori: Yeah, I didn't...

Mrs. Okabe: I always had an inferior complex...

(Originally in English, Interview on March 20, 2000)

As illustrated by the dialogue above, the socio-cultural and political situations in Canada in the early and mid twentieth century negatively influenced the way Mrs. Okabe felt about herself. She was only an elementary school student at the time of Pacific War (1941-1945). She suffered from discriminatory treatments as a young girl just because she was a Canadian of Japanese origin, and those negative experiences conditioned the way she perceives herself and others for the rest of her life.

Mrs. Nakamura is eighty-three years old. Born in Vancouver, she is a second-generation Japanese-Canadian. She told me the following story, recalling her earlier experience:

When I was young, most Japanese Canadians in Vancouver were sent to the internment camps. In avoiding forcible relocation, my family attempted to move to Toronto, which was declined. Then, my sister and I were somehow accepted to move to Montreal. That's how I got here. While my family went to one of the camps in the western province, my sister and I worked in the houses in the West Mount as a domestic laborer.

In Montreal, while my sister was well treated by the family for whom she was working, I was constantly mistreated. I was not given enough food to eat at the house and often hungry. I wanted to buy foods, but I didn't have any

⁴ This seems a leading question; however, we were already talking about wanting to be invisible to avoid discrimination in the course of our interview.

money to buy anything. After a while, I left the house and began to take cleaning jobs at multiple houses. Since I did not have a place to stay, I lived in a convent. Later, my family got reunited in Montreal. Oh yes, my life has not been easy... (Originally in Japanese; Interview on March 16, 2000)

As she recounted her story, she had tears in her eyes. Due to the War, she was forcibly separated from her family at her formative years, which had lasting consequences to her. Her account is an indicative of how much discrimination Japanese Canadians had to bear during and after the War.

I also spoke to Mr. Abe, a ninety-one-year-old first-generation Japanese Canadian. The following is an excerpt of his story:

I was originally from Fukuoka, Kyushu. I came to Canada seventy-three years ago. I left Japan for Vancouver on September 24, 1926, and I was seventeen years old. At that time, Canadian government was accepting only hundred-fifty people from Japan each year... I came to Canada as an agricultural worker to work on my uncle's strawberry farm. When I arrived in Canada, I had to sign the contract which stated that I had to stay on my uncle's farm for at least three years. After three years, I took a new job in timber industry...

I got married on March 9, 1940 to a second-generation Japanese Canadian woman. We got our first baby girl soon after our wedding. When my wife was pregnant with the second baby, the Pearl Harbor attack occurred (December 7, 1941)⁵. Since my wife was pregnant and not so healthy, we were able to remain in Vancouver when many Japanese Canadians were sent out of British Columbia, (Canada). Most Japanese Canadian men between eighteen and forty years of age were sent to the border between BC and Alberta to work on road construction. In October 1942, we were finally forced to leave our home in Vancouver. We first moved to a house where all the remaining Japanese Canadians in Vancouver were brought together. For our moving, we were only allowed to take eight items when we left home. Leaving all the personal properties behind, we signed an agreement with the British Colombia government who promised that the personal properties would be under the government custody until we come back to Vancouver. Soon after we left home, however, our friends told us that our house was emptied by someone, and all the properties were taken away.

Since 1942, we [his family and he] stayed in New Denver for three and a half years. While there, the police tightly inspected our daily activities. We were forbidden to fish and take any pictures. On August 15, 1945, an announcement was made that Japan had surrendered, and the War was over. Soon afterward, the Canadian government forced all Japanese Canadians to take a decision of either going back to Japan or going further east of Canada. We then decided to move to the east.

[After working as a farmer for eighteen years in southern Ontario,] we moved to Montreal to join my wife's family. In Montreal, I worked as a marble polisher. I worked there for twenty-five years. When the government

⁵ Soon after the Pearl Harbour attack, the U.S. declared war against Japan and the Pacific War started. This is when the Canadian government began the forcible relocation of Japanese-Canadians out of British Columbia.

changed and began to use tiles instead of marble floor, demand for marble polishers became scarce. In 1988, I finally retired [at the age of seventy-nine], and since then, I have been enjoying coming to this Centre and doing activities. (Originally in Japanese; Interview on March 16, 2000)

Listening to his story, I was amazed by the fact that he still remembered the exact dates of some events in his life. I imagine it is because these events were so critical, altering his course of life dramatically. Despite the misfortune he experienced as a Canadian of Japanese origin, he kept a smile on his face as he told his life story. Both interviews with Mrs. Nakamura and Mr. Abe illustrate that their life story and identity are represented by the hardship they experienced as Japanese Canadians. When I sensed how sensitive the subject of internment camps was for an outsider to inquire about, I did not pursue it. Although I did not continue asking them to give me detail as to how the War affected their lives, I feel that I was able to discern the general feeling among Japanese Canadians. That is, finding it difficult to gain recognition as Japanese Canadians, what they wanted was to assimilate into mainstream society as much as possible by being invisible, thereby hoping to minimize the discrimination they faced.

I was informed by the people at the Montreal Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre that during and after World War II, Japanese Canadians were restricted from speaking Japanese and gathering as a group, and their sphere of activity was severely monitored by the government. Anything to do with Japan whether it be culture or language was seen with suspicion. As a result of not being able to have a Japanese language school nor a community centre, many second-generation Japanese Canadians lost the Japanese language skills. In other words, the loss of Japanese language among older Japanese Canadians was caused by the socio-cultural and political situation of the host society that was not ready, at that time, to appreciate the beauty of cultural diversity.

4. Policy of multiculturalism in Canada

In 1971, Canada under the Pierre Trudeau government became the first country in the world to have multiculturalism as an official policy. The Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism was established in order to facilitate cultural preservation through support for festivals and heritage language classes. The establishment of the Montreal Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in 1976 is a part of those initiatives. Ms. Mori explained that “one of the goals of us being here (the Montreal Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre) is so that we can promote Japanese culture to the general public...”

(Originally in English; Interview on March 20, 2000). Mrs. Hashimoto told me about the origin of the “Japanese Cultural Committee” as follow:

At that time [in 1960s], there was no unified Japanese community to fight against injustices [such as not being able to rent an apartment]. Japanese people were divided into three groups; one consisting of academia and their family including myself; one consisting of Japanese business people and their family; and one comprising of Japanese-Canadians from the west coast. At some point, one Japanese Canadian suggested that all groups unite together in order to try to ameliorate discrimination against Japanese. This is how Japanese Culture Committee was organized. Our main objectives have been to promote Japanese culture to the general public, so that Canadian people would better understand about Japan and Japanese people, and subsequently, we will be able to understand each other and live together in peace...”. (Originally in Japanese; March 22, 2000)

With the effort of many people who believed in mutual respect among the members of different cultural communities, the discrimination against Japanese and the perception of Japanese as an “enemy of Canada” was slowly but surely lessened.

In 1988, Canada’s multiculturalism policy was revised, and the Multiculturalism Act became law. The Act declares that the Canadian government is to recognize and promote the mutual understanding among diverse members of Canadian society and that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canada and acknowledges the freedom of all Canadians to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage. (Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999). This policy of multiculturalism is central to Canadian government philosophy and is promoted as an integral part of Canadian identity. Canadians have come to believe that unlike in the United States, where visible minorities become part of an “ethnic melting pot” and ideally blend into mainstream society, in Canada, they form an “ethnic mosaic” and retain their cultural boundaries, which separate them out from other cultural groups and from the regular, “non-ethnic” Canadians. Within the policy of Multiculturalism Act, languages are considered “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeronn, 1977). Multicultural education derived from the idea of Multiculturalism, and it seeks to protect and promote cultural diversity while maintaining equality of rights and opportunities for all citizens. Multicultural education is seen as an essential means to this end (Smith, Foster & Donahue, 1999)⁶.

⁶ Advocates believe that multicultural education reduces discrimination, helping minority students maintain positive self-images. Critics, on the other hand, argue that multicultural education has done little to encourage tolerance and respect for cultural diversity.

As a result of the political, economic, and socio-cultural changes occurred in Canada and in the world, the experience of the contemporary young Japanese Canadians in Montreal is quite different from the one of the older Japanese Canadians like Mr. Abe and Mrs. Nakamura. Although varying degrees of racial or ethnic discrimination continues to exist in society, those young Japanese Canadians, whose parents were born in Japan, came to Montreal after World War II, and thus did not experience apparent discriminatory treatment as a Japanese, do not share the view that they have to blend into the mainstream. Rather, they feel proud to be Japanese. Provided that their identity as Japanese is now recognized and accepted without hatred by the society in which they live, they feel no hesitation to state their sense of belonging to Japan.

5. Voices of contemporary young Japanese Canadians

In order to find out what it means to be Japanese Canadians for young students in Montreal, I have been conducting participant observation at the Montreal Hoshuko (Japanese Supplementary School) every Saturday from April 2000 to date⁷. The Montreal Hoshuko was founded in 1972 in response to demand by Japanese parents living overseas that their children receive Japanese education while living abroad. The school used to cater exclusively to Japanese students who came to Quebec, Canada due to their parents' job transfer and were to return to Japan eventually. Along with the change in Japanese political economy, the school has evolved itself and become more inclusive; it is now attended both by Japanese students who return to Japan in the end and by Japanese Canadians who are likely to remain in Canada.

Masato is early teenage Japanese Canadian who was in the class I did my participant observation. His parents came from Japan to Montreal to teach at university level in the late 1970s. Because of the nature of his parents' research, Masato has gone back to Japan numerous times. He also has experiences attending elementary school in Japan. During the course of interview, Masato repeatedly emphasized that he likes Japan, and he is happy to identify himself as Japanese. He stated, "in my class, there are people who like Japanese animation. To them, I would say, 'ha, ha, you are from here, and I am from Japan!'" (Originally in Japanese; Interview on August 23, 2000). In response to my question, "how do you define Japanese people?" he told me:

My friends think Japanese people are amazing. They think Japanese people are smart. I also think that Japanese people are smart and do things right. It is a small thing, but for example, subways are neatly maintained and kept clean. There is not much spray paint on walls in cities, and I think Japanese people are very disciplined.

(Originally in Japanese; Interview on August 23, 2000)

His comments above signify the issue surrounding the politics of “recognition”. In the case of Masato, he is happy to acknowledge his tie to Japan because his friends recognize Japan positively. When his friends talk well about Japan, he can reinforce his identity as Japanese, feel a sense of pride to be Japanese, and ultimately feel good about himself.

Throughout the interviews I conducted with the Hoshuko parents, I kept hearing comments that their children watch Japanese movies, dramas, TV shows, and play Japanese computer games. In *Imagined Community*, Benedict Anderson argues that the development of print media such as newspapers and books and print capitalism created a new kind of collective consciousness that led to the creation of nationalism. He states that print capitalism “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways” (1991: 36). As Anderson argues, the students at the Hoshuko feel a sense of belonging to Japan through reading Japanese magazine and cartoons. Here, I would like to emphasize that reading Japanese in the forms of magazines and cartoons not only give them a sense of Japanese identity, but also help them learn and acquire new Japanese words. Living in Montreal, they do not have many opportunities to learn and use Japanese, apart from their home environment and the Hoshuko. Given such a circumstance, their reading Japanese, whether it be a magazine or cartoon, functions as a means to acquire new Japanese words and expression and maintain their Japanese language skills (Yoshida, 2001a, 2001c).

Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* states that “electronic media decisively change the wider field of mass media and other traditional media... Such media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (1996: 3). Referring the point raised Appadurai to the case of the students at the Hoshuko, because of the technological advancement and easy access to Japanese media (both print and

⁷ The data collection began as part of my research for my M.A. Thesis at McGill University.

electronic), the Japanese students at the Hoshuko no longer feel that Japan is a far away, foreign country. Rather, they feel quite connected to Japan by watching Japanese TV shows and talking to Japanese people in Japanese on the Internet. They “imagine” Japan as a country full of technology and things they like. For them, Japan is a place they belong to in their imagination (Yoshida, 2001a, 2001b).

Now, let us return to Masato. He loves Pokémon. He wrote about how much he loves Pokemon in his last year’s yearbook. Also, at home, the family has a satellite TV, and he watches TV shows broadcast in Japan all the time, thus maintains very active connection with Japan. In his imagination, he almost “lives” in Japan. This strong tie he feels toward Japan is evident in his feeling about his own identity that he feels both Japanese and Canadian equally.

Unlike Masato, Hiroshi, his classmate at the Hoshuko, says that he feels more Canadian than Japanese. At the same time, he added that he feels Japanese when he plays Play Station and Japanese computer games. His parents told me that he is often on the net to chat with people from different parts of the world, and he also chats with people from Japan in Japanese.

Regarding the access to Japanese commodities, Hiroshi often watches dramas from Japan. He also reads Japanese amines. His parents said that sometimes his knowing technical Japanese words that he learns from Japanese magazines and TV shows surprises them. While he often has problems with kanji (Chinese characters) at the Hoshuko, his parents say that he knows a lot of kanji for martial arts because he reads a lot of martial arts cartoons.

Another Masato’s classmate, Shouji, feels very much Japanese according to his mother. She told me that although he was born and raised in Montreal, his Japanese is the strongest out of the three languages (i.e., Japanese, English, and French). His mother believes that the reason why he developed Japanese rather than other languages is that he grew up watching Japanese TV shows and dramas.

His mother told me that Shouji has a very good image of Japan:

He often asks me to go visit Japan... Now, he is into soccer, and his dream is to play soccer in a Japanese professional soccer league... I think that he feels proud to be Japanese. He does not feel small because he is Japanese. He rather feels proud because he is Japanese... Anyhow, [he thinks that] Japan is top for many things, and he feels he is part of it. Whether it is about cars or other things, good things tend to be “made in Japan.” These good things come from Japan and he feels that he was born into the country that

produces these good things. He is Canadian, but he is also Japanese. He has things to be proud of... Anyway, he has not had many opportunities to get to know Japanese “culture,” and the opportunities are usually through Japanese TV programs and dramas.

(Originally in Japanese; Interview on September 23, 2000)

As noted by Shouji’s mother, many Hoshuko students actively engage in exchanging each other’s Japanese cartoon books and taped Japanese TV shows. During the recess, they get together and watch Japanese TV shows recorded and sent by their relatives in Japan.

Nozomi, another Hoshuko student who stayed in Montreal for two years due to her father’s research kept herself up to date with what was going on in Japan through the electronic media while living in Montreal. Her mother gave me the following comments when I asked her about Nozomi’s identity:

Nozomi feels empathy with Japanese, and she is proud of it. She feels that Japanese commodities are good. When her friends at the regular school say that they like this thing and that thing about Japan, she then feels proud to be Japanese... When her friends praise Japan, she is happy. This feeling seems different from being nationalistic about Japan. It is like as if she feels happy when something about her is being positively recognized. Some of her friends at her regular school like Japanese cartoons, and they can sing the theme songs in Japanese. When they have problems with the Japanese song, they sometimes ask Nozomi questions. When this happens, Nozomi feels that she has something positive to contribute to them, and she feels close to her Canadian friends. Because of this common tie [that Japanese popular culture creates between Nozomi and her classmates], she feels that she can better communicate with them. [Originally in Japanese]

Having something in common with Canadian friends despite the cultural differences makes Nozomi feel accepted and integrated in her Canadian school. Moreover, if Nozomi knows something that her friends want to know, she feels wanted and needed, that is, recognized by her Canadian friends.

Tsuyoshi, a ten-year-old student at the Hoshuko, shares a similar feeling as Nozomi. He came to Montreal in April 2001 with his family when his father was transferred to an office in Montreal. At the beginning of his stay in Montreal, he did not speak either English or French, and not being able to communicate with his classmates was a great source of frustration to him. As an active boy, he used to have many friends at school in Japan, but due to the language barrier, he found it difficult to make friends in Montreal. What gave him the opportunity to make friends was the popular playing cards that he brought with him from Japan. He told me that these playing cards that have been popular in Japan for sometime just became available in Montreal. His

Canadian friends were just starting to collect these cards while Tsuyoshi had them all already. Although he does not have the linguistic skills to talk deeply with his English-speaking friends, he found a way to communicate with them through playing cards. The Japanese cultural commodities that he possesses brought him peer recognition, safeguarding him from feeling out-of-place and inferior.

Through my fieldwork at the Hoshuko and the interviews with students and their parents, it has become clear to me that the students are proud to have a connection to Japan and to identify themselves as Japanese. This is in contrast to the Japanese Canadians who experienced or whose parents experienced internment camps during World War II. The students feel proud about the country that their parents came from because their friends at school admire Japanese products and envy them for what they bring back from Japan. In other words, their identity is “recognized”, giving them a positive self-image and identity as Japanese. Having easy access to Japanese print/electronic media and to popular culture in Montreal positively influences their sense of identity as Japanese (Yoshida, 2001a). These factors, at the same time, help them stay interested in Japanese language, and thus contribute to their Japanese language acquisition and maintenance. In addition, “as mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres” (Appadurai, 1996: 22). Through accessing Japanese electronic media and popular culture, the students I interviewed belong to the Japanese diasporic community and imagine their sense of belonging to Japan.

6. Conclusion

In order to create positive image about themselves and their cultural background, it is essential for the students to be recognized positively by their fellow students and by the society in which they live. In my case study, the students receive “recognition” as Japanese by their friends not because Japanese people and culture are actively introduced through school education in the name of multiculturalism, but because both Japanese and Canadian children are increasingly becoming familiar with the commodities, (popular) culture, and electronic media from Japan. Having easy access to

Japanese electronic media/computer games (e.g., Japanese TV shows, animation/cartoons, Play Station) and popular culture (e.g., Pokémon) help create a positive self-image and identity among people, and such a positive identity in turn can contribute to the heritage language acquisition and maintenance.

I argue that multiculturalism can work to provide visible minorities with a sense of identity. It is not difficult to encounter past instances of racism in Canada (e.g., the colonization and abuse of aboriginal people, the internment of Japanese-Canadians). At the turn of the century, Canada had a number of racist laws –the head tax against Chinese and a series of discriminatory actions against weaker sectors. It was only forty years ago that the Japanese Canadians were discriminated against on the basis of their origin and could not rent an apartment in Montreal. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, Canada has attained higher equality and standard of living compared to other countries. In opposition to those who claim that multiculturalism disrupts the shared identity of a nation, I maintain that multiculturalism fosters mutual respect and recognition. One of the most important purposes of multiculturalism is to educate people to recognize and appreciate cultural diversity (Ghosh, 1995, 1996).

With regard to cultural diversity, Homi Bhabha suggests through the notion of “cultural translation” that

[...] all forms of culture are in some way related to each other, because culture is a signifying or symbolic activity. The articulation of cultures is possible not because of the familiarity or similarity of contents, but because all cultures are symbol-forming and subject-constituting, interpellative practices. (1990: 209-210)

Perhaps through the concept of multiculturalism, an important lesson to be learned is that there is commonality in all cultures as stated by Bhabha. By understanding the diversity of cultures and realizing the commonality of all cultures, people would be able to appreciate and welcome those cultural groups who have not fully participated in society.

One issue remains: multiculturalism does not work as effectively as it should to empower certain groups of people. John Ogbu, a prominent educational anthropologist, states that multiculturalism empowers some individual and some minority groups but not others (Ogbu, 1992, cited in Wax, 1993: 107). What can those groups that multiculturalism fails to empower do? As pointed out by others (Levinson & Holland,

1996), all I can suggest is that more critical, contextualized qualitative research in multicultural settings needs to continue.

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