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Multicultural conflicts as group boundary creation practices in Japan

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Introduction

Due to the population decline, Japan is currently seeking to bring in more foreign laborers. The Japanese government encourages universities to invite more international students in hopes that they will seek employment after graduation either in Japan or abroad. This current study presents multicultural episodes that were obtained from various international students who attended university in Japan. There are nine episodes that show the difficulties they had in various areas.

The analysis is about the boundary creation of groupings within which Japanese sense of empathy is usually practiced, because the Japanese empathy centering around humanity seems to be

However, this sense of Japanese grouping appears very differently from the concept of African UBUNTU, for example, which holds a wider grouping as "other" is not perceived as "competitors" (Kamlesh, 2013).

UBUNTU is explained as a philosophy by this example (Kamlesh, K. K., 2013).
"An anthropologist proposed a game to children of an African Tribe. He put a basket of fruit near a tree and told the kids that the first one to reach the fruit would win them all. When he told them to run they all took each others' hands and ran together, then sat together enjoying the fruits. When asked why they ran like that, as one could have taken all the fruit for oneself, they said, "UBUNTU, how can one of us be happy if all the others are sad?" 'UBUNTU' is a philosophy of African tribes that can be summed up as "I am because we are."

In Japan, children learn from early age whose hands can be taken, or who is in your group. However, this grouping boundary is fluid so that children have to follow all the cues known to them. This even includes learning situations, in which a who child tries to get help from other students in a formal education situation may be punished and called a "cheater."

Such a difference is not expected when international students come to Japan, in which cultural, gender, language, race, ethnicity, age, nationality, company, school from which one graduated, and a host of other qualitative conditions exist that serve as a source of forming various groups.

The Japanese sense of empathy seems to hold the similar philanthropic humanity as UBUNTU, but the range of groupings that utilize this concept seems extremely small, and the boundary seems unclear to international students in Japan. Therefore, the difficulties experienced by international students appear many times, and in many places. From the Japanese perspective, it is the boundary creation activities. The boundaries are to discern the different groupings, such as status as in a hierarchy, nationality, race and ethnicity.

In this study, the difficulties are understood as the different expectations for the boundaries that are defined to separate different groupings. Through the difficulties expressed in the situation of multicultural interactions, boundary creation effort becomes clear, and therefore, UBUNTU or empathetic effort will not be applied, if one is situated outside the boundary. Therefore, those who do not belong to the innate groupings, they are considered "outsiders" who will not be a recipient of empathetic interactions. Therefore, this study is to find the emic (subjective) categories of Japanese group concepts by examining the conflicts that occur when international people interact with Japanese people.

The final suggestion is to expand the boundary on the side of Japanese and the Japanese university system, and at the same time, to let the international students input their ideas into the Japanese system to receive the UBUNTU spirit. The methods of voicing should be effective, so that their voice

imply for Japanese and international students themselves?" Then, the current multicultural interactional difficulties are examined in light of Barth (1969)'s three categories: "(1) They may occupy clearly distinct niches in the natural environment and be in minimal competition for resources. . . (2) They may monopolize separate territories, in which case they are in competition for resources and their articulation will involve politics along the border, and possibly other sectors. And (3) they may provide important goods and services for each other, i.e. occupy reciprocal and therefore different niches but in close interdependence (Ibid., p. 19)."

Further, practical questions will be asked; "how can Japanese groupings be more inclusive to accept international students as a member of each group?" and, "how can international students in Japan make salient voices to challenge the Japanese higher education system?"

Method

Interviews and surveys were conducted among approximately 500 international and Japanese students at a national university in Japan in 2018. Questions are around various difficulties, such as "unhappy/harsh/sorry/sad/life threatening/ego threatening/upsetting/devastating experiences in Japan." The episodes that showed multicultural difficulties were looked for, and the opinions and solution were asked.[1]

Data presentation

In the following section, nine episodes will be presented with discussions regarding boundary creating activities and expectations of either or both Japanese and international students.

1. A plagiarism accused

This student's nationality was socially treated as a minority in Japan. His term paper's authenticity was questioned. Without knowing what was going on, he apologized from the beginning which his parents who used to live in Japan told him to do when you are in Japan. He admitted to the charge of plagiarism but brought up the complaints of harassment and unfair treatment. Finally, his classmate helped him with his term paper, and that justified the unfair treatment. The professor in question moved out of the university, but the reason was not revealed. Finally, the accusation against this student was officially dropped. His remaining strategies to survive happily in Japan must include declaring his existential value for the cultural niche which resembles Barth's (1969) cultural boundary-maintaining processes.

The boundary making practice is to delineate the authority to judge the content of the student's term paper. The boundary was clearly discerned, and the student himself pointed out that there appeared an unfair balance of power from the beginning due to the unfair amount of information given to him. The unclear part for this student was the bases of a judgement which seemed extremely cultural to him. Moreover, the boundary making practice is the manner in which this

higher administrative power, and the other who has to learn to follow the direction of a higher authority figure. The boundary creation by the Japanese professor is to let the lower status people to accept their inferior power status in this case.

The above situation is fairly ordinary, as contrasting to the case in which a British professor allows students to call him by his first name, and the authority seems more equalized between students and professors. The student in this case came from one of Britain's former colonies and speaks English fairly well. Therefore, this boundary making was conceivably based on that of "an ego threatening experience" for this student.

2. Learning risks in disclosing one's own nationality

Lee (pseudonym) belongs to a minority ethnic group. Right after joining the university, an extracurricular circle hosted a welcoming party for new students. There, he introduced his nationality, without knowing disclosing his nationality would involve risks of discrimination. His physiological outlook resembles that of other Japanese. He was unprepared for the cynical criticism that erupted by his Japanese host Tanaka (pseudonym). Lee left the place, quickly, and stood confused outside of the building. Then, several Japanese students ran after him, and found Lee, asked if he was alright. They promised to take care of this issue, and not to make it happen again. Later, he was informed that Tanaka was dropped from the circle. Lee continued the circle that plays humorous acts wearing costumes on the stage for the school festival. This particular morale support from Japanese students can be considered as a brightening sign of multiculturalism in Japan, and the boundary was broken by them.

In the minority boundary maintaining process, Kim "may accept a 'minority' status, accommodate to and seek to reduce their minority disabilities by encapsulating all cultural differentiae in sectors of non-articulation, while participating in the larger system of the industrialized group in the other sectors of activity (Barth, 1969, p. 33)."
Tanaka (pseudonym) tried to create the boundary based on ethnicity and/or nationality which is extremely tough on minorities in Japan, as some do not use their original names in the daily life. If there are any hints in the signs that show minority status, it is a vulnerable sign to be attacked in Japan. The boundary making practice is seen along with this ethnic/nationality difference by the Japanese side, which is not expected by a new generation of minority like Lee. Historically, minorities in Japan have received negative treatment, but this new generation is more positive about coming to Japan, expressed by Lee who watched Japanese animation on TV in his country.

The Japanese who ran after him plays crucial role to bridge the boundary to make minorities more inclusive. What is more important is these bridging people are not only using the verbal communication, but also, "running after" or "playing together on a stage," that is "doing some activities, together." This boundary erasing behavior based on empathy is noteworthy for

3. No helping hand to lend in the heavy rain

Nancy (pseudonym) tried to go back to her dormitory by bicycle, but it was raining very hard, so she decided to use the city bus system instead. She did not have an umbrella, so she was completely soaked at the bus station, and she asked three people which bus should take her to the dormitory. Blaming herself for not speaking Japanese, but these three people did not even try to understand her English. No one helped her, so she decided to pick up her bicycle, and she cried all the way back to her dormitory.

The boundary making behavior by three Japanese is made based on the ethnicity and English language used by Nancy. They may or may not be related to the university, but conceivably it was not the first time they saw someone from abroad and spoke some language other than Japanese. However, Nancy's anger is in fact, "little willingness to help others in Japan." Therefore, empathy did not reach Nancy, or three Japanese people did not think Nancy was worth giving their empathy because she does not belong to the groups that three Japanese do. Nancy is perceived by three Japanese, as "a foreigner who does not speak Japanese." There is a mental block to offer a help, simply because Nancy does not belong to the same group as theirs; Nancy's ethnicity and language are not same as those Japanese. The humanities are not practiced when one is outside of the groups. How can Nancy erase this boundary? Banks (1994) suggests that the inclusive communal ethics must be done through "empowering school culture and social structure."

The boundary making on the Japanese side implies "separate groupings of minorities" that are officially allowed to exist geographically, but no interaction at the social level is expected. This is really hard on international students who expect friendship from Japanese students, also. Separating international students from rest of Japanese students is not ordinarily expected by international students. Some international students feel there are too many rules for the boundary creation.

4. Open prejudice expressed in a classroom targeted at only an international student

Kim (pseudonym) was the only international student in a 40-students undergraduate class. The instructor's story was about the Japanese military occupation that started in 1920 and ended in 1945, and he openly justified what the Japanese military did during that time. Kim became very scared if someone noticed that she was from that country. She felt that her entire identity was negated publicly, thus she became frightened with the university system and people that permit such behaviors in its' instructors. In this study, the instructor's attitude demonstrated a clear discriminatory remark about the country from which this student came.

The boundary making behavior had taken place at the instructor's level, by negative historical

Boundary erasing behavior can be changes in the attitude of the instructor, this student's empowerment, the place to counsel, as well as Japanese host students' general consciousness. The issue is in James Banks' "Prejudice reduction dimension (1995)." It is noteworthy that a minority student who is in the classroom is powerless and they fear additional attack if they point out the unfair treatment of the instructor. It is quite ordinary for them to be silenced by just the condition of being minority in a group, as Kim expressed. As university system recognizes such individual behavior on the side of instructor, which takes quite a long time to surface, interventions should be introduced so that instructors as well as students do not hold any residues, such as replacing the instructor as soon as possible, or offering an alternative means for a credit so that emotional influence on the final result can be avoided.

Kim in fact recognized the risk, then, she developed the strategy of checking the instructor's political stance before registering for the class. Therefore, a boundary creating behavior would result on the side of international students which would create a heavy unfair burden.

Intervention is not an on-going counseling system in which traditional Japanese cultural behavior is enforced, and that is only strengthening Anglo-conformity mode (Postiglione, 1983). This mode assures the boundary by assimilation of one group to the other, and not erasing the boundary. Rather, the conscientization (Paulo Freire, 1970) or empowerment (Sleeter, 1991) of all the parties is suggested to include fully in the system (Banks, 1994) when cultural-minority students are involved in Japan.

5. An irresponsible international student

As a class assignment, group work was assigned in one class. The group consisted of several Japanese and one international student. After assigning each task to a person, one international student didn't contact the other members of the group nor showed up on the day of the group presentation, thus everyone's grade was affected because of this international student. The student's excuse was a selfish one and this student just laughed about it. Furthermore, this international student offered no apology, nor felt guilty which made the Japanese students upset. Negotiation was impossible, and the instructors did not know what actually happened.

The analysis included the stage of multiculturalism that is "emerging culture (Postiglione, 1983)" in the issue of "equity pedagogy (Banks, 1995)." Equity pedagogy is the concern of this episode because "An equity pedagogy exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. However, the international student took advantage of "equity pedagogy" and chose not being forced to do the group work. It appears that the effort of erasing the boundary, that is the equity pedagogy, was taken advantage of by a minority student, and the story ended as a philanthropic effort in vain.

In the education arena, it can be “change the rules of the competition” or “change the evaluation content” is suggested. Rather than, the uniform grade is given to same group members, each member is evaluated from the group work, asking “What did you learn from group work?” In this way, the boundary will be erased, and individuals will be treated equally in the final grade. The remaining question is, if a minority does not hold the UBUNTU spirit, then the entire picture will be shifted towards a more individualistic competition. Is it inevitable, or can we come up with the solution that would uphold UBUNTU, or the empathic spirit so that multicultural co-existence will be assured?

In social life, international students experience various conflicts, or ethical dilemma in Japan.

Conclusion

International students in Japan usually feel a strong pressure to adjust themselves to Japanese cultural expectations, and that starts from the day one of their visit. When some conflict happens based on cultural differences, both sides (guest and host) come up with some solutions to comprehend the conflict, and that usually leads to a modification in their behavior and thinking. This corrective behavior to acknowledge and recognize other’s dignity seems to be one of the phenomena of multiculturalism indicated by James Banks (1994), and it is in the type of impact integration indicated by Postiglione (1983).

In the five episodes, boundary making efforts were delineated in the areas of (1) status in an organizational system, (2) nationality/ethnicity, (3) physical outlook and language, (4) nationality/ethnicity and organizational system, (5) equity pedagogy, (6) differences in “moral,” (7) differences in “inclusivity,” (8) differences in “fairness in language use,” and (9) race and discrimination.

In Japan, there is a concept called Omoiyari (empathy), which plays to calm down the conflicts stemmed from the different cultural or any other differences. However, its effectiveness is valid to an extent of limited range because one’s background should be similar to the group practicing the empathy. When it comes to the differences between cultures, this prerequisite for empathy to play out is not valid although Japanese emphasize more on its universal nature, so it is quite difficult to accept the differences among different cultural backgrounds.

In practice without knowing, this boundary making effort of the Japanese side continues at various levels such as seen in the above episodes.

In Africa, these efforts seem unnecessary from the point of UBUNTU, an African concept of philanthropy which plays out in societies in very simple ways.

various ways for being erased or maintained in the episodes. Therefore, it is not easy to distinguish the plateau area of the progression of ethnic interaction as Barth suggests. Barth indicates only the still picture of the plateau, but actually in the survey, erasing and maintaining of boundary exist. There are two issues in this discussion: one is the discreteness of the boundary itself, and the other is the erasing behavior that is regardless of conscious adoption. Both can be portrayed in qualitative nature, and in various scenes.

In the above discussion, boundaries can be clearly distinctive, so that legal solution is sought out such as the case of "(1) Plagiarism accused and cancelled." The articulation is made through the official system, but erasing of boundaries are not sought out, but to solve an unsatisfactory result. In the case of "(2) Learning risks in disclosing one's own nationality," two Japanese sympathetic students followed the minority student who fled the scene of a discrimination. This is the boundary erasing act, and shows "close interdependence," not for the ecologic purpose, but for the moral development. It is crucial to note that multicultural boundary erasing acts involve the moral development aspect for both international and hosting Japanese students. The case of "(3) No helping hand to lend in the heavy rain," also indicates, clearly distinctive boundaries, and no intentional boundary erasing behavior was taken place. In the case of "(4) Open prejudice expressed in a classroom, and it was targeted at only me," is also, clear and distinctive boundaries, and no open solution is sought out. The case of "(5) An irresponsible international student," is actually more "reciprocal"; in other words, the boundary is blurred, but did not utilize the concept of UBUNTU to be interdependent. The group boundary was probably already erased, but in the group, reciprocal relations were not effectively done, and this international student took advantage of "being a member of the group."

One remaining point in education is crucial to note that several international students did participate in some activities with other Japanese students and this led them to erase boundaries; such as the case of "(2) Learning the risks in disclosing one's own nationality," and the club activities that require group performance, rather than individual ones, enhance this boundary erasing behavior.

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[1] This study is the secondary analysis of the original text data which displays the analysis on identity and empowerment, "Experiences of international immigrant students in a Japanese University: An in-depth study" in Gross, Z., ed. (forthcoming in 2020). *Migrants and Comparative Education, Call to Re/Engagement.*Brill

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