

The 'Essential' Memory / The 'Hybrid' Memory: A Case Study of a Japanese Ethnic School in Canberra

Yoshikazu Shiobara

[Graduate School of Human Relations, Keio University]

Critics of multiculturalism argue that it is a discourse that essentialises 'ethnic' cultures and therefore should be deconstructed. However, the problem of these anti-essentialism critiques is that it can also diminish the legitimacy of cultural practices by ethnic minorities and social welfare services for them. The purpose of this paper is to offer a viewpoint which can overcome the limitations of critical multiculturalism studies by examining practices at a Japanese ethnic school in Canberra. Fieldwork was carried out at the school for approximately one year. During this time interviews were conducted with teachers, staff members and Japanese parents of students who have mixed origins.

Japanese residents who founded and now administer this school hope to pass on Japanese culture to their children. They define the essential 'Japanese culture' by drawing upon their own memories and try to teach it to children. However, their practices actually try to give students memories which will result in the reproduction of hybridity which resists assimilation with the dominant culture. Therefore, this paper suggests that we cannot reject multiculturalism just because it is essentialism. That is, we have to examine carefully by each case study whether the essentialism discourse of multiculturalism actually produces essentialist people, or the essentialism discourse causes 'the unexpected consequence': it consequently maintains and reproduces hybridity through the everyday life of people as agencies.