

The rise of the far right in Japan, and challenges posed for education

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Abstract

This paper examines emerging far-right movements and xenophobia, and the challenges they pose for justice in education in Japan. It illustrates discourses on nationalism and cultural diversity in both education and wider society from the perspective of critical race theory. It explores the voice of educators, particularly about their concerns and uncertainties regarding xenophobia, and examines their perceptions and reactions. By focusing on the narratives of interviewees from different ethnic backgrounds, this paper investigates far-right extremism and its challenges to education from different viewpoints. Data from interviews reveals different perceptions among both majority and minority teachers regarding the culturalization and personalization of problems in the classroom. This data also suggests that due to the absence of collective strategies and visions to challenge racism, approaches to combating racism depend largely on individual teachers. Drawing from these findings, this paper argues that culturally focused discourses among teachers and politicians may conceal problems beyond culture, such as structural inequality and the legacy of colonialism.

Keywords: far right; populism; xenophobia; colonialism; zainichi Korean

Introduction

In recent years, the growth of right-wing populism and xenophobia has been seen across Europe, and Japan has observed a similar phenomenon. Sharing a common self-image as a mono-ethnic nation, Japanese society has witnessed the rise of an ethno-nationalist far-right movement that plays on a myth of the country's supposed homogeneity. Populist and nationalist politicians exploit such trends to gain power, suggesting a space for xenophobic and far-right ideas within democratic society. Xenophobic and far-right discourses are a threat to both adults and young people because they involve them, directly and indirectly, as potential victims and offenders.

The rise of right-wing and xenophobic populism can be tracked in the rising fortunes of the National Front in France, Alternative for Germany, the Progress Party in Norway, the Danish People's Party, UKIP in the UK, and Donald Trump in the USA. This trend is not simply characterized as populism, but as 'national-populism', which is identified by its polarized discourses that construct an opposition between 'us' and 'them' (Brubaker, 2017). The term 'populism' is often used to indicate right-wing populism or the populist extreme right, although there are also left-wing populist parties – such as Podemos in Spain and SYRIZA in Greece. Stavrakakis *et al.* (2017: 433) argue that ethno-nationalist and extreme-right populism can be clearly differentiated from inclusionary, left-wing populism in contemporary Europe by its characteristics, such as 'xenophobia, anti-immigrantism, exclusionary (ethnic) nationalism along with

versions of antagonism against perceived external threat to the nation'. Such far-right populism can also be observed in East Asian countries including Japan, although here it does not have such anti-establishment tone as most of the right-wing populism in the West – instead it is sympathetic to the establishment (Vickers, 2017).

Such national-populist movements have been successful in gaining seats, and also in mainstreaming their discourse on immigration. They typically present immigration as a cultural threat by emphasizing and stigmatizing the cultural differences of a certain group, such as Muslims. This cultural focus has been adopted by the mainstream right, and consequently brought the culturalized immigration debate to the centre of political discourse (Yilmaz, 2012). Drawing upon critical race theory, Volpp (2001) highlights how minority culture is blamed for subordinating non-Western women in the United States, while cultures in the West and the history of colonialism are seldom recognized as a force of subordination. For example, Volpp points to a popular discourse that casts immigrants' cultural practices as 'backward, barbaric, primitive and misogynist' (Volpp, 2011: 92) and as manifesting the gendered subordination of women in their community. Such selective stereotyping and culturally focused discourses about migrants and immigration politics have been widely adopted, not only by the far right but also by the populist right, and even by some in the left – thus blurring the borders between the mainstream right and the far right. This trend of culturalization is problematic, however, as it may attribute to the culture of minority groups consequences that actually reflect the complex influences of structural inequalities, such as racism, unequal distribution of wealth, and asymmetric power relationships between different groups.

This paper investigates right-wing nationalism in Japan, which often employs populist approaches to appeal to wider audiences. The paper explores this in light of the continuity of colonialism as well as of post-war national and international politics. It also examines the struggles of teachers in tackling xenophobia and far-right ideology and in drawing out the educational implications of these. First, this paper outlines a brief picture of the context and educational challenges in Japan, focusing on migration and ethnic minority teachers. Second, it examines the recent political climate and the rise of nationalism, and their impacts on children and teachers, illustrating how recent educational policies place greater emphasis on a potentially exclusive national belonging. Third, the results of interviews with teachers are presented and discussed in order to identify the xenophobia that they face in everyday school life. Drawing on these interviews, this paper also scrutinizes a potential pitfall of culturalized discourses that may apply not only to Japan, but also to the wider context – including European countries.

Japan: An imagined mono-ethnic nation

Demography and minoritized communities

Japan's contemporary self-image as a homogeneous nation state emerged after the Second World War, as the country distanced itself from a pre-war imperialist self-concept that had been based on the ideology of a deliberately multi-ethnic state (Kashiwazaki, 2000; Oguma, 2002). Although Japan has an indigenous population and populations of migrants, including those from the former colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, the country's ethnic diversity has not been highly visible and has not gained much attention from authorities. There are no official statistics about ethnic minority populations in the national demographic statistics or in any other nationwide survey, all of which lack a category concerning ethnicity. Instead, the numbers of foreign

residents are recorded based on the alien registration system. In 2016, approximately 2.4 million foreign nationals were registered, comprising 1.8 per cent of Japan's population (Ministry of Justice, 2016). Chinese, Korean, and Pilipino nationals are the biggest groups, and comprise 29.2 per cent, 19.0 per cent, and 10.2 per cent of the total number of registered foreigners respectively (Immigration Bureau, 2016). By taking into account the number of uncounted minorities, such as indigenous people and naturalized Koreans and Chinese, the full size of the ethnic minority population is estimated to be between 3.9 and 5.7 million people (Okano and Tsuneyoshi, 2010), which amounts to 3.3–4.8 per cent of the total population.

The non-national residents include '*zainichi* Koreans', a group of long-term residents of Korean heritage who have been settled in Japan for generations. The total population of *zainichi* Koreans is estimated to number approximately 700,000, including both those with and without Japanese citizenship (Ahn, 2012). The majority of this population reside in Japan as foreign residents, because – having been deprived of their Japanese citizenship as colonial subjects – naturalization has not been an easy option for them. This is due to naturalization's historical association with the colonial legacy of an assimilationist policy and with the loss of ethnic identity (Lie, 2008; Weiner and Chapman, 2009). Following the Second World War surrender of Japan, the Japanese nationality of former colonial subjects was revoked and they were grouped into the category of *Chōsen* (a non-Japanese person originating from Korea) or Taiwanese, depending on the place of their origin. Today, *Chōsen-seki* (literally 'Chōsen-domicile') indicates Koreans in Japan who have not obtained either South Korean or Japanese nationality, making them virtually stateless. Because the Japanese government recognizes only South Korea as a legitimate state in the Korean peninsula, *Chōsen-seki* potentially includes effectively stateless persons who are tied closely to North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (Kashiwazaki, 2000; Nozaki *et al.*, 2006).

In consequence of all this, a significant number of ex-colonial subjects, mostly Koreans, reside in Japan as *Tokubetsu eijyuusha* ('special permanent resident') – a status in which they are non-nationals but have *de facto* citizenship to a large extent (Chung, 2006). However, as non-Japanese nationals they do not have the same rights as Japanese citizens, and institutional and everyday discrimination may also prevent them from exercising the full capacities of their citizenship on the basis of equality. Such unequal treatments of ex-colonial subjects have reflected a continuity of colonialism and the complexity of domestic and international politics, such as political opposition between the Western and Eastern blocs, and the North–South division of the Korean peninsula, which in turn affected the Korean communities in Japan (Chong, 2013; Kashiwazaki, 2000; Lie, 2008).

Diversity and education

Since the 1980s, a number of educational initiatives with a global dimension have been implemented in Japan, in areas including English teaching and in Education for International Understanding (EIU). Although EIU has the potential to promote inclusive citizenship, government guidelines stress the 'internationalization' of Japan and competitiveness in the global economy. There tends to be an emphasis on essentialist understandings of different cultures that is likely to reinforce the concept of fixed identities, rather than challenging injustice or prompting critical examination of the concept of the nation. Hence, these initiatives are often Japan-centric, with a focus on national citizenship, and have failed to create a curriculum space for recognizing multiple identities or for fostering an inclusive notion of citizenship (Lincicome, 1993).

Furthermore, non-Japanese citizens in contemporary society are often portrayed by school textbooks solely as unproblematic ‘visitors’ who represent Japan’s ‘internationalization’, while Koreans and Chinese are described as historical groups in the contexts of past human rights abuses and discrimination (Tsuneyoshi, 2007). From the perspective of critical race theory, Yosso (2005) suggests placing greater focus on the cultural capital of racially minoritized communities – such as their cultural knowledge and skills, experiences and strategies – instead of promoting a deficit view of these communities. Nevertheless, both the colonial past and the current richness of cultural diversity have been underplayed, and an image of Japan as a homogeneous nation and an exclusive Japanese national identity have been embedded in public education.

In Japan, a majority of children are educated at state schools: only 7.1 per cent of lower-secondary-age pupils attend private schools, and 1.2 per cent of primary-aged children attend private primary schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). Nakajima (2014) points out that there is an assumption that teachers are ‘Japanese’, which is connected to the unequal status afforded to teachers without Japanese nationality. Nakajima’s research team conducted interviews with minority teachers, who were mostly of Korean or Chinese heritage. The interviews revealed that their experiences of discrimination varied across generations, with younger teachers tending to face less explicit discrimination and to believe their ethnicity is a strength for their profession, not only because of their linguistic proficiencies and cultural knowledge but also because of a uniqueness, which gives them an extra capacity as educators (Kwon, 2014; Yabuta, 2014). Kim and Shibuya (2012) also found that *zainichi* Korean teachers’ identities and experiences enriched their professional capacity, and argue that Japanese society needs to be more open to cultural diversity so that such teachers are not labeled as ‘ethnic minority teachers’. Ohashi (2011) examines her own experiences as a teacher and a daughter of a Japanese ‘left-behind’ child raised in China, part of a cohort of orphans of Japanese parents resident in China at the end of the Second World War and fostered by local Chinese families. She analyses different stages of her life, from her assimilation into Japanese society – which involved internalizing a prejudice against Chinese people – to the exploration of her own identity, which crosses the borders between Japan and China. In addition, Hester (2000) illustrates how ethnic studies for Korean children in state schools have provided a place in which to construct minority culture and identity that allows them to differentiate themselves from the mainstream Japanese. Also, Osler (2018) examines a narrative by a Korean ethnic studies teacher and draws out its reflections on historical and ongoing struggles for justice that provide a cosmopolitan vision.

Right-wing discourses and xenophobia

The rise of right-wing populism

While pre-war right-wing nationalism in Japan involved a militarist ideology, revering the Emperor as a living deity, its post-war properties were authoritarian, nationalist, pro-USA, and anti-communist. The growth of a new far-right ideology in the last decades, however, has been characterized by xenophobia rather than nationalism (Higuchi and Matsutani, 2016). During the 1990s, a number of right-wing politicians came to greater prominence following a series of notable events involving controversy over Japan’s wartime conduct. In 1991, the first former ‘comfort woman’ claimed that the Japanese government had been responsible for the violation of her human

rights by the pre-war Japanese Army. The Kono Statement was released on behalf of the Japanese government by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno in 1993, and acknowledged the direct and indirect involvement of the Japanese military in forcing women to work in military brothels. This was followed by the Murayama Statement in 1995, which is often quoted as the official position of the Japanese government, and which apologizes for the wartime damage and suffering that Japan caused to its Asian neighbours. Responding to these events, right-wing politicians formed a number of caucuses within the diet that aimed at countering these discourses and rejecting the acknowledgement of Japan's responsibility for war crimes (Higuchi, 2017).

Xenophobic sentiments towards ethnic minorities have been fuelled by populist politicians like Shintaro Ishihara, one of Japan's most prominent nationalist politicians (Ito, 2014). A member of parliament later elected as the governor of Tokyo, Ishihara has repeatedly made xenophobic statements targeting those from Japan's former East Asian colonies (Itagaki, 2015; Penney and Wakefield, 2008). Meanwhile, Nakano (2016) points out a significant shift to the right in Japanese politics in recent years, particularly during the first and second Abe administrations (2006–2007, 2012–). As the ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has made explicit expressions of nationalism, particularly on topics such as international relations and security and on the revision of the Constitution. However, this does not immediately indicate that the LDP and its supporters are right-leaning as a whole, since the second Abe cabinet has basically followed the stance of its predecessors with regard to official statements on wartime aggression and on the Japan–South Korea comfort women agreement (Nakakita, 2017).

Grassroots far-right movements

The rise of the far right can be observed from two directions. One is from the top, in the form of nationalist policies that attempt to promote collective patriotism; the other is from the bottom, in the form of grassroots far-right movements. In recent years, grassroots right-wing movements have attracted new members by taking approaches that differ from the typical image of the traditional far-right, which is often associated with negative images of people in paramilitary uniform shouting into megaphones, driving black vans, and playing war songs loudly. In the 1990s, increasing activity in the grassroots right-wing movement was triggered by key events such as controversies over Japan's war crimes and the foundation of nationalist groups such as the Society for History Textbook Reform in 1996 and the Japan Conference in 1997. These bodies were successful in gaining attention from the popular media and played an important role in spreading revisionist discourses concerning Japan's colonial history and responsibility for wartime actions. They did this by stressing the positive attributes of colonialism and removing the emphasis from atrocities such as the Nanking massacre (Yamaguchi, 2013). Importantly, these grassroots and new nationalist movements made far-right activities more accessible to ordinary citizens (Oguma and Ueno, 2003).

This expansion of far-right movements was not driven solely by government initiatives or international politics: it is arguably reinforced also by widespread feelings of insecurity and deprivation in contemporary Japanese society (Ito, 2014). According to Otsuki (2013), a person who has less satisfaction in their own life, unstable employment, and little contact with foreigners tends to be unsupportive of equal rights and not open to communication with foreigners. While there is a stereotypical image that members of new far-right groups are economically and socially deprived, studies have revealed that far-right ideology does not only attract socially and economically marginalized people, but also those from a middle-class background (Higuchi, 2014). Based on his fieldwork

with far-right group members, Higuchi illustrated that the typical path to the far right includes key incidents as triggers: territory disputes, the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea, the football World Cup, world baseball championships, or anti-Japan demonstrations. Higuchi documents also a significant influence from the internet, which provides information that is not broadcasted by major mass media. Higuchi notes that hostility towards East Asian neighbours, such as China, South Korea and North Korea, tends to constitute a major motivation for new far-right members, rather than general xenophobic or anti-immigration sentiments (Higuchi, 2017).

Hate speech

According to McGonagle (2013: 5), hate speech can interfere with the human rights or public values of others, including their right to 'dignity, non-discrimination and equality, effective participation in public life, freedom of expression association, religion, etc.'. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) requires state parties to condemn and take action to prevent 'all propaganda and all organizations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form' (UN, 1965: Article 4).

There has been a significant rise in the expression of xenophobic sentiments and far-right activities in Japan, and particularly in those concerning neighbouring East Asian countries. Between 2013 and 2015, a total of 1,221 rallies by far-right groups was reported (Koudou-hoshu Archive Project, 2016). Ealey and Norimatsu (2018) also point out discriminatory statements made by far-right politicians, labelling activists opposed to the presence of a US military base in Okinawa as 'anti-Japan'. In 2013, 'hate speech' was selected as a top-ten national buzzword (chosen annually from among the newly coined words included in the dictionary *Gendaiyogo no kiso chishiki*), indicating a general public awareness of hatred towards ethnic minorities. Through surveys conducted with *zainichi* Korean regarding hate speech, M. Kim (2016) identifies 'fear' as the word mentioned most frequently in their comments.

Article 14 of the Constitution of Japan guarantees the equality of all people under the law and prohibits 'discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin' (Constitution of Japan, Article 14, Section 1). Japan ratified a number of key international conventions on human rights, including the ICERD; however, it noted a reservation in respect of Article 4 of the convention, which obliges parties to criminalize hate speech. The government noted that it shall fulfil the responsibility listed in Article 4 to the extent that this does not violate the constitutional freedom of assembly, association and expression and other rights, recognizing a potential conflict between this provision and the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution. Nevertheless, against a backdrop of perceived xenophobic discourses in media and the internet, as well as an actual increase in the number of xenophobic offences reported, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) demanded in April 2010 that the Japanese government enacted legislation to tackle hate speech against ethnic minorities (Johnston, 2015). Pushed by the growing public attention to hate speech and by demands from minorities and their supporters, Japan's diet enacted an anti-hate speech law on 24 May 2016. In June 2016, an ordinance aimed at deterring hate speech was implemented in the city of Osaka, instituting the first legal penalty against hate speech in Japan (Johnston, 2016). Certain other local governments in Japan, including the cities of Kawasaki and Nagoya, have recently begun the process of setting up guidelines and ordinances to regulate racist rallies (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2017).

To summarize, the far right in Japan has shifted from authoritarian nationalism to xenophobic national-populism, reflecting the national and international political climate. Over the past decades, the rise of the far-right movement has been driven both from the top (via prominent politicians) and from the bottom (through grassroots movements). These two engines mutually influence one another, as the expansion of hate speech against ethnic minorities is fuelled by xenophobic remarks by national-populist politicians and antagonistic historical revisionists, while the development of the internet has provided a new space for far-right public discourses.

Xenophobia and educational challenges

Children as targets of xenophobic attacks

Far-right extremism affects children. While it directly and indirectly threatens minority children as the potential victims of racial harassment, it can also harm majority children, who may be involved as offenders or perpetrators.

As a consequence of the current expansion of far-right movements, ethnic minority schools – particularly Korean schools – have been targeted in racist attacks by far-right groups. Pro-pyongyang Kyoto No. 1 Korean Primary School became a notable focus of such hate attacks by far-right racist groups, who held protests rallies outside the school between December 2009 and March 2010. Members of the far-right shouted insulting slogans through loudspeakers, such as ‘Korean schools are spy schools, kick them out of Japan!’. According to an account by Nakamura (2014), many children inside the school started crying, and teachers closed curtains and played music loudly so that the children did not see or have to hear the racist chants. After hearing the far-right protestors call them spies and cockroaches, some children developed stomach aches due to stress and anxiety (Fackler, 2013). Indeed, Nakamura (2014) reports that some children were unable to go to the bathroom or stay alone at home, and that some still get scared when they hear voices through a loudspeaker, such as from a recycling truck or during an election campaign. In October 2013, the Kyoto district court identified these chants as an ‘extremely insulting and discriminatory’ expression of racism and as prohibited by the ICERD, thus ordering the far-right groups to pay 12.26 million yen (about US\$111,500) in damages. It also ordered the groups to refrain from all racist activities within a 200-metre radius of schools. While the decision was appealed by the far-right groups, it was upheld by the Upper Court and Supreme Court (Boyd, 2015).

Regarding the concerns about growing xenophobic sentiments, Lee *et al.* (2016) reported the view of a third-generation *zainichi* Korean woman whose child goes to Tokyo Korean School, which is affiliated to the South Korean government;

The school told children ‘do not read Korean books or speak Korean on the train when you commute to the school’ ... Why can’t they speak their own language? ... How can they be proud of their own ethnicity and develop a healthy identity? (Lee *et al.*, 2016: 58; translation by the author).

This quote suggests that racist attacks and hate speech have negative effects on the day-to-day lives of the minority community.

While far-right activities threaten minority populations, including children, they can also affect mainstream children who participate as offenders. A notorious example of this involves a 14-year-old girl who participated in a racist demonstration led by far-right groups in Tsuruhashi district in Osaka, which is known as ‘Korea-town’. A video

of this episode was uploaded onto YouTube in which the girl was seen chanting with a loudspeaker:

I hate the Koreans so much that I can't stand it and I just want to kill them all now. If Koreans behave with this arrogance further, so we will carry out Tsuruhashi massacre like Nanking massacre! [other participants shouted 'yeah that's right'] (IMADR, 2013).

Furthermore, there are cases in which teenagers become offenders by writing racist comments on the internet (Otake, 2015).

Nevertheless, teachers at state schools often employ a subtle or indirect approach to counter political extremism. This is because of Article 12 of the Basic Law on Education (2006), which requires teachers to refrain from 'political education or other political activities for or against any specific party'. Although a number of teachers have attempted to implement antiracist and inclusive citizenship education, this depends on individual initiative, and there has been a lack of governmental measures against racism (Kitayama *et al.*, 2017).

Schools as an arena of political conflicts

Following the Second World War, Japan reconstructed itself as a democratic country with an ethos based on pacifism, and explicit expressions of patriotism became a sensitive issue due to their association with the country's martial and imperialist past. Over the past two decades, however, a change in attitude with regard to the expression of nationalist sentiment has been observed.

The Japan Teachers Union (JTU), which is the largest and oldest labour union of school teachers and staff, was established in 1947 with the slogan 'Do not send our students to war again'. This slogan evoked memories of the wartime cooperation of schools and teachers in indoctrinating children with the ideology prevalent before the war that they should serve their country uncritically. Although no longer as powerful as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, the JTU today is still known for its left-leaning stance, and often opposes the LDP and Ministry of Education on issues concerning the promotion of patriotism. Thus, schools often become an arena of ideological controversy around issues of patriotism, such as whether pupils and teachers should be forced to sing the national anthem, or whether the national flag should have a place at school ceremonies, both questions being associated with the image of pre-war militaristic nationalism. In recent years political conservatives have made several attempts to enhance patriotism in education: their most notable success has been the revision of the Basic Law on Education, under the first Abe cabinet in 2006, which added 'fostering patriotism' to the list of the purposes of education. Another relevant development was the Act on the National Flag and Anthem, enacted in 1999. Given the popular sensitivity to national symbols from the pre-war period, Japan had until this date used a *de facto* national flag and anthem without ever introducing formal legislation. With this legislation, though, and although it was explained that individuals would not be forced to satisfy its provisions against their will (House of Representatives, 1999), the Ministry of Education issued an official order mandating the use of the national flag and the national anthem at school ceremonies. The new provision was introduced in a strict manner in Tokyo and Osaka under well-known populist politicians – the then governor of Tokyo, Ishihara, and the then mayor of Osaka, Hashimoto – and a number of teachers were punished for not obeying the order (Mullins, 2016).

In 2015, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced that Moral Education would become a compulsory special

subject from 2018. Although Moral Education has the potential to serve a variety of purposes, including the countering of bullying and racism, there are concerns that government-led Moral Education promotes uncritical respect for and obedience to authority. Indeed, the curriculum and textbooks provided by MEXT stress discipline and 'traditional' morality, but make little reference to diversity.

While they have served as a means of preserving ethnic heritage and pride, which is not provided by Japanese state schools, Korean schools have also been an arena of political conflict. In 1948/49, Korean communities held a number of protests against government plans to close Korean community schools. These protests were violently suppressed, and many of the schools were forced to close (Tsutsui and Shin, 2008). The predominant rationale for this was that the Japanese and American authorities alike believed that these schools were vehicles for disseminating Communist propaganda; however, the issue also involved an ideological divide within the Korean communities (Chong, 2013). In 2017, there were 72 Korean schools in Japan: 68 were *chōsen gakkō*, i.e. sponsored by *Chongryon*, a pro-North Korean organization, while four were sponsored by the pro-South organization *Mindan*. The closures were aimed at the former group of pro-Pyongyang schools, which were also excluded from the funding programme subsidizing tuition fees for all high school students and eventually making high school education free (Itagaki, 2015). The Japanese government's decision to exclude these schools was made despite the concern expressed by CERD (2010: 6) that it would 'have discriminatory effects on children's education'. Moreover, the then governor of Osaka, Hashimoto, claimed that Chongryon-supported schools were connected to North Korea, which is 'no different from gangsters' (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2010), in an effort to justify state intervention in the schools as a means of protecting 'innocent' children. Mindan, for its part, was supportive of Hashimoto and MEXT's intervention in the operation and curriculum of these pro-Pyongyang schools (Ha, 2017). Meanwhile, Yuriko Koike, elected as Tokyo governor in 2016, announced that she would cancel the metropolitan government's plan to lease a property to a South Korean-supported school (Otake, 2016).

The controversies over the Korean schools indicate a complex of issues regarding cultural diversity and ethnic identity. They reflect not only growing xenophobic sentiments and a social stigmatization of North Korea that is exploited by populist politicians, but also the ideological oppositions between the Western and Eastern blocs, as well as the legacy of colonialism, often concealed by culturally focused discourses that are accompanied by selective stereotyping.

In the following sections, I investigate the influences of culturally focused discourses of xenophobia and the far-right movement in day-to-day school life.

Method and data

The interviewees assembled for this study include not only teachers from government schools but also educators with other affiliations, because the proportion of teachers with non-Japanese nationality working at state schools is far lower than the picture in wider demographic statistics. While it is possible for non-Japanese nationals to work as school teachers or administrative staff in municipalities, they are limited to non-management roles (Nakajima, 2017). This stipulation might have discouraged non-Japanese citizens from taking jobs as teachers at state schools.

In the following section I report the results of interviews conducted with educators engaged in promoting cultural tolerance. The study employed unstructured interviews to allow the interviewee a degree of flexibility and openness in responding. Interviewees

were selected based on 'snowball sampling' through personal connections. This is a common strategy to access a small group of people relevant to the research focus who are difficult or impossible to reach via a probability sampling method (Noy, 2008). I conducted face-to-face interviews with ten educators in Tokyo and Osaka in March and December 2015. According to alien registration records, Tokyo is home to approximately 500,000 non-Japanese nationals – the largest total in Japan. I also contacted educators from Osaka, which is the largest city in western Japan and has Japan's biggest Korean community.

Table 1: Characteristics of interviewees

| | Occupation | Sex | Ethnicity | Place |
|---|---|------------|------------------|--------------|
| A | Upper secondary school teacher | F | Japanese | Tokyo |
| B | Upper secondary school teacher | F | Japanese | Tokyo |
| C | Lower secondary school teacher | F | Japanese | Tokyo |
| D | Primary school teacher | M | Japanese | Tokyo |
| E | Primary school teacher | F | Japanese | Tokyo |
| F | Lower secondary school teacher (recently retired) | M | Japanese | Tokyo |
| G | Head teacher, state primary school | M | Japanese | Osaka |
| H | Ethnic education teacher | F | Korean | Osaka |
| I | Lower secondary school teacher | F | Japanese | Osaka |
| J | Non-profit organization staff | M | Korean | Osaka |
| K | Head teacher, pro-Pyongyang primary school | M | Korean | Osaka |

As shown in Table 1, six interviewees came from Tokyo and five from Osaka; they included employed and retired teachers, head teachers, and other education staff. All individual names mentioned here are pseudonyms. I asked interviewees about their views regarding the current social and political situation relating to social cohesion in Japan and their experiences of xenophobia and right-wing activism. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Japanese, which is the native language of all interviewees as well as myself as the interviewer; I am ethnically Japanese and female. Throughout the analysis, a possible influence of my positionality to the interviewees needed to be considered: an ethnic Korean participant might be reluctant to strongly criticize Japanese people and the Japanese government, for example. I took extensive notes during the interview, and the interview data were coded with a focus on their perceptions, concerns, reactions, and needs regarding xenophobia and far-right movements.

As this study uses data from a small number of respondents, it does not attempt to generalize their personal experiences; however, it does try to draw out the educational implications and frame them using the findings of the studies discussed in previous sections of this paper.

Teacher narratives

Stereotyping and scapegoating

Teacher A, who teaches English at a state high school in central Tokyo, recalls a boy in her class who claimed that 'The government should ban the entry of Muslims in order

to protect Japan from the Islamic State'. She challenged him by asking questions such as: 'How can the government ban the entry of everyone because of her/his faith?' and 'Is the "Islamic State" the same as "Islam"?' Her students seldom objected strongly when such different views were posed, and she supposed that they had never even thought in such a way (the discussion preceded Donald Trump's proposed ban on Muslim entry to the United States). Indeed, she noted:

They just lack knowledge. There are many Muslims actually living in Japan. I never overlook such a statement, but don't deny them simply either. I always ask them a question like 'Is this really true?' Because some of them will start working just after their graduation from the school, and I am worried that they will be adults with the same racist attitude.

At the time of the interview, there was increasing media attention to the so-called Islamic State. Teacher C offered an extracurricular activity named 'world cuisine' as a part of EIU provision. During the activity, a girl told her that she did not want to even hear the word 'Islam', having watched a horrifying video about Islamic State on YouTube. Teacher E realized that pupils in her Year 6 class tended to have vague but negative images of Islam, such as that is 'something scary'. Many teachers mentioned that students lack knowledge about people from minorities and about the historical background of immigration.

Teacher I, who serves at a lower secondary school and also works in her municipality's human rights education division, was concerned about the xenophobic discourses often used by members of the populist party.

One day, I saw some members of the Osaka Restoration Association [a local populist neo-conservative and neo-liberal political party, founded in 2010] giving a speech on the street claiming 'We should not accept the illegal act by people who take away cans that are supposed to be recycled by Osaka city.' Everyone knows there are elderly Chinese people who collect cans on the street and their speech is obviously attacking them.

She expressed her concern about current trends within the populist party, which uses xenophobic discourses to boost its own power while carefully avoiding direct expressions that could be criticized as racist.

Culturalization and personalization

Several teachers, including Teacher A, mentioned that the images in Japan of neighbouring East Asian countries – particularly China – have been negative in recent years, and that they often hear stereotypical comments by parents and even fellow teachers. Teacher D, who works at a state primary school, said that she does not hear many racist words from children, as they are very young and may not have been influenced by a particular ideology yet. However, she did recall the comment of a colleague who blamed a student's administrative mistake on the ethnicity of their parents, saying: 'That student doesn't submit documents appropriately because his parents are Chinese.' She also noted that some parents told their children not to be friends with Koreans. Similarly, Teacher I mentioned that 'some children do not consider it as wrong to say bad things against China, and some teachers do not warn against it.'

Teacher A recalled several xenophobic statements made by students. She described these as 'not really an expression of a certain ideology or hatred, but an insensible expression of prejudice influenced by the media'. When negative news of China was broadcasted, such as coverage of territory disputes or the production of

counterfeit products, some students asked her questions such as ‘Why do Chinese people always steal?’, despite the presence of some Chinese classmates. She believes that these pupils lack the sensitivity to recognize what such negative stereotypes would mean to their classmates with Chinese heritage. She presumes such attitudes might also reflect the masculine culture of her students, who are predominantly from working-class communities.

Mr F, a recently retired junior high school teacher, believed that some cases of xenophobic expressions are a product of individual frustrations. He recalled one of his former students:

There was a student who repeatedly cut a picture of Kim Il-sung in a history textbook into pieces until the textbook was damaged and had a hole. I think it was driven by his frustrations about family problems and the stress of entrance exams.

Although all teachers had heard racist name-calling among pupils, none of those with an ethnically Japanese background believed that far-right activism posed a serious threat to them or to children, since these far-right elements were in a minority and would make no substantial impact on the wider society. Teachers tended to consider pupils and students who made racist comments to be simply ‘insensitive’ people who had uncritically accepted stereotyped media images.

Fear of escalating hatred

In contrast to the Japanese teachers, Mr Kang (listed in Table 1 as ‘K’), a head teacher of Korean ethnicity, expressed strong concerns about the escalating hatred towards his pupils. He serves as a head teacher at a pro-Pyongyang primary school, and his school is often targeted by xenophobic attacks, especially when political tensions between Japan and North Korea escalate. Financial support to his school from the municipal government was suspended after the Osaka Restoration Association came to power in the city. As a *chōsen gakkō*, Mr Kang’s school has some features that distinguish it from state primary schools. For example, pictures of Kim Il-sung, the founding father of North Korea, are placed in its classrooms. The school is not, however, totally segregated from the rest of the local community. It occasionally holds open days and events open to public, and its pupils use a swimming pool shared by a neighbouring state school.

According to Mr Kang, xenophobic pressure is ‘not as bad as in other districts because there is a high proportion of Korean residents in this area. We occasionally receive threatening phone calls like “I’m going to kill you” and we simply report it to the police’. Mr G, who serves as head teacher at a state lower secondary school, also mentions certain phone calls that made xenophobic claims, such as ‘why do you devote too much time to studying Korea’ or ‘(Korean) ethnic drums are too noisy’. This school, as well as other pro-Pyongyang Korean *chōsen gakkō* in neighbouring areas, provided safety guidance to all pupils due to the increasing volume of racial harassment directed towards children of Korean heritage. Mr Kang felt that ‘hate speech has become tolerated’ these days. The school decided to change its uniform from an ethnic design to a Western style in order to avoid having its pupils recognized as students of a Korean school. Although most pupils will study at a lower secondary *chōsen gakkō*, he noted that only half of them will continue their studies at a Korean upper secondary school. The other half choose to study at schools that are not affiliated with the Korean community because they are concerned that an educational record from ethnic schools might prove disadvantageous in job hunting or integrating into mainstream society.

I was shocked when a pupil in Year 4 asked me 'Are we evil people?' It's a self-denial of one's own identity. I believe children should be free from such a negative environment. I want our children to love their local community and feel like they can contribute to it. Being rooted in the local community will be a foundation for their life. I am very worried that they will be rootless because of discrimination.

As former colonial subjects, nurturing ethnic identity and self-esteem has been at the centre of ethnic studies for *zainichi* Korean children. Ms E, who works as an ethnic education teacher at several state schools, says 'one hour a week is too short to learn the (Korean) language, but I want children to be positive about their own heritage'.

Mr Kang recalled that there used to be a number of Japanese people in the municipality – including top-level officers – who were supportive and 'shared the same ideals', but that right-wing ideology had latterly come to dominate local politics. He stressed that being indifferent about injustice is equivalent to supporting it.

This is not about one-way help [for Koreans], but this is about Japan's democracy. I want Japanese people to think about whether this [injustice] is all right for Japanese society.

The lack of a whole-school strategy against racism: Joo's case

Mr Joo is a *zainichi* Korean who is a local non-profit organization staff member and often involved in training teachers on issues of intercultural understanding. He has a son studying at a state primary school, who was shocked when his classmate told him that 'Korea is the enemy'. It took a few months before the son told this father about this, because he was at first too shocked to talk about it. Joo and his son were very concerned about the incident, which they felt might be reflective of emerging xenophobia. Joo reported the situation to his son's homeroom teacher at a regular Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, but was not taken seriously. He later participated in a teacher training session and had the chance to talk to another teacher from the same school who was in charge of matters concerning ethnic minority pupils. Through this teacher, Joo finally reported the case to the head teacher, who took it very seriously and even revised the school's curriculum. Joo said 'Teachers do not recognize the severity of far-right demonstrations because they are majority, although half of we *zainichi* Koreans have seen an anti-Korean rally'.

Teacher I also pointed out the importance of the whole school taking action against racist incidents.

There is a significant growth in xenophobic statements and I am worried that teachers might overlook them. So, I organized a teacher training programme including a two-hour workshop to discuss how to examine a racist statement and how we should react. It doesn't matter what kind of belief they have, they shouldn't tolerate discrimination as professional [educators]. We should all stand against it together.

During the course of conducting interviews, I was unable to find a state-school head teacher or PTA president with an ethnic minority background. I asked interviewees if they knew any, but all were unable to name one. Although appointments of non-Japanese staff members at municipality level is limited to non-management roles, there is no legal grounds for limiting ethnic minority appointments with Japanese nationality and PTA membership to teaching roles or PTA presidencies. However, an 'unwritten

rule' has been maintained in most places because of an underlying assumption that influential positions should be occupied by Japanese people.

Discussion

Interviews revealed a gap in perceptions of xenophobia and the threat of far-right extremism between educators from different cultural backgrounds. While Korean teachers tended to express serious concerns, none of the Japanese interviewees considered the current xenophobic problems to be as serious as Korean teachers did (except for one teacher working in the Human Rights Education division). Instead, Japanese teachers believe that far-right groups are just a tiny minority and have little influence in society. Although principles of human rights offer a standard by which to assess human rights problems, the interview results suggest that these issues may be perceived differently by people from different ethnic backgrounds. Such minority perceptions tend to be underrepresented, while those of the mainstream often serve as the dominant discourse. Drawing on the conception of 'the right to narrate' by the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (2003), Osler (2015) argues that minority narratives would provide an alternative perspective to enable a reimagining of the nation in the context of education – an area in which hegemonic curricula based on an exclusive notion of the nation have served to misrepresent and often exclude minoritized students. This suggests the importance of minority voices being shared in schools and of an awareness of the asymmetric power relations that marginalize them, in order to narrow the perception gap about xenophobia and to tackle it together.

This study found that almost all teachers recognized racist name-calling, and some mentioned this in relation to the negative portrayal of particular groups in the media. Many of the teachers realized that there is a need for media education, especially digital literacy. The interviews revealed that ethnicity is often blamed, with stereotypical generalization used to explain a problem with a student or parent from a minority background. Volpp (2001, 2011) argues that this problematization of a particular culture makes it difficult to see forces beyond culture, such as institutional discrimination and socio-economic conditions. These culturalized discourses about minoritized groups correspond to what Yilmaz (2012) has written regarding the populist far-right discourse on immigrants in Europe, and especially on Muslims. It suggests that common discourses driven by right-wing populism could pervade in both Japan and European countries, regardless of the ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds of the targeted minority group. It also indicates how the normalization of xenophobic discourses influences children in everyday life. In contrast, xenophobic attitudes from pupils are often interpreted as being caused by personal frustration or as simply representing insensitivity. This tendency is also reported by studies in Western countries. Volpp (2001) illustrates how domestic violence by a white person is considered to be triggered by a personal cause, and points out that this may overlook possible problems among the white community – such as Christian fundamentalism – while culture tends to be blamed for violence perpetrated in or by those of non-Western communities. Biseth's (2010) study of teachers in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden found that racism is often mentioned in relation to bullying or teasing by teachers. She argues that the students' character tends to be considered as a major source of such problems, rather than problematizing the school environment.

Through interviews, this study found that approaches to combating xenophobia and right-wing extremism depend on individual teachers, and that there is an absence of collective strategies and shared visions that effectively challenge xenophobia

and racism at a whole-school or municipal level. Although there are a number of international legal instruments as well as national and local ordinances against racism and hate speech, it is still left to individual teachers to decide whether and how to take action when faced with racist attitudes in the classroom or school community. This lack of collective strategy and vision is problematic, because such measures are necessary to tackle racism effectively and to protect both minority and majority children from xenophobia and extremist ideology. This lack of institutional initiative resonates with the general tendency to perpetuate culturalized discourses about minority problems and the personalization of those of the majority. Indeed, they conceal complex influences beyond culture and hide structural problems, such as the institutional exclusion of teachers of non-Japanese nationality from management roles, the continuity of colonialism that prevents such individuals from obtaining Japanese nationality despite residing in the country for generations, as well as national-populist discourses that use xenophobic sentiments and stigmatize minority communities.

Conclusion

This paper examined the emergence of far-right extremism and xenophobia, and explored the challenges posed for justice in education. It illustrated the impact of right-wing populism that emphasizes and promotes a negative and culturalized discourse on ethnic minorities, which is now widely pervasive. A significant gap in the perception of the threat of racism among teachers from different ethnic backgrounds suggests the underrepresentation of minority voices in schools. This may be caused by both a lack of collective strategies and shared visions based on the universal principles provided by anti-discrimination legal instruments, and by structural inequality between majority and minority groups in schools and wider society – which could in turn more properly be understood as the legacy of colonialism. I also suggest that the cultural heritage of minority children and teachers and their experiences need to be focused on as sources of cultural capital rather than in deficit discourses. This is necessary not only to enjoy and learn from cultural diversity, but also to counter the negative and culturalized discourses that are exploited by national-populists. As noted by a Korean teacher, the rise of the far-right and of xenophobia needs to be tackled not as a problem for minorities, but as the challenge for democratic society as a whole.

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