

Multiculturalism and Conflict Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific

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Migration, Language, and Politics

Edited by

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Foreword

In the new millennium, multiculturalism has significantly declined as a policy and social aspiration. While multiculturalism has long been criticized for connoting the mosaic like cohabitation of mutually exclusive cultures and communities, it has come under much stronger attack and critical scrutiny, particularly since September 11, 2001. Multiculturalism is alleged to be nation dividing, a detriment to national unity, and harmful to national security. Thus, the denunciation of multiculturalism has been accompanied by the intensification of national border controls and the reclaiming of national integration; this has resonated in a reactionary fashion, further amplifying people's growing sense of anxiety and longing for a secure and peaceful community in which to live. However, the demise of multiculturalism has diminished neither the dynamics of national border crossings nor cultural diversity within national borders. The speed and scale of transnational mobility and interconnection have become even more intensified. Stuart Hall (2000) famously distinguished the "multicultural question" from multiculturalism, which refers to policy discussion on the management of immigration and cultural diversity. An imperative multicultural issue we need to engage with is "how people from different cultures, different backgrounds, with different languages, different religious beliefs, produced by different and highly uneven histories, live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their 'original identity'" (p. 210). The decline of multiculturalism necessitates that we develop better analytical tools and approaches that seriously tackle the multicultural question by involving a wider strata of people and institutions.

While multiculturalism has come under serious criticism in many Western societies, the management of emerging multicultural situations has come to be officially discussed in East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, though the term multiculturalism is not necessarily adopted. In these countries, in addition to long-existing racial and ethnic minorities, the rise in the last few decades of labor migration and transnational marriage, especially involving people from other parts of Asia, has considerably increased the number of foreign-national residents, migrants, and "mixed race" youth. The multicultural question has become a key issue in the Asia-Pacific, though in contrast

to Europe and the United States, the experiences of East Asian countries pose the intriguing question of how to engage the multicultural question in a societies that have not addressed multiculturalism and related immigration policy through institutional development at the national level. However, while multiculturalism as policy and liberal political discourse in the Asian region has recently attracted academic attention, the multicultural question remains critically underexplored.

Multiculturalism and Conflict Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific is a significant attempt to fill this lacuna. The innovativeness of this book lies in its argumentative structure. The first part presents theoretical and conceptual considerations of multiculturalism in a critical manner. Three chapters in this part critically revisit liberal multiculturalism and the essentialist conception of culture in the Asia-Pacific context. The following part deals with issues pertaining to language and education in a multicultural society—some of the most highly contested issues in policy. The final part explores in an empirical manner various sociocultural issues that migrants encounter and negotiate in their moves to host countries. While these three parts appear to deal with diverse issues by using different disciplinary approaches, they are coherently structured according to the key principle of the book: to examine theories, policies, and negotiations in pursuit of “interactive and communicative multiculturalism,” which is constitutive of the formation of the public sphere. Centered on this analytical axis, interdisciplinary approaches to various issues discussed in these ten chapters are highly complementary with each other and effectively constitute the book as a coherent intellectual project. The book does not directly deal with issues surrounding identity, belonging, and conviviality. However, its key aim has a clear resonance with Hall’s argument regarding the multicultural question, and the book offers fresh theoretical and empirical insights into Hall’s question, derived from the sociohistorical context of the Asia-Pacific region.

People will become more mobile across borders, and cultural diversity in the Asia-Pacific region will intensify in the years to come. This will exacerbate reactionary movements involving racism and xenophobia, which have already been on the rise in the region. How to advance dialogue between citizens across sociocultural divides will be a key issue for all stakeholders in multicultural societies. Toward this end, further interdisciplinary research is required that critically examines how people live, negotiate, and interact with each other under the neoliberal configurations that administer people’s mobility and cultural diversity

within nations. *Multicultural Negotiations in Migration, Language and Politics in Asia-Pacific* shows us one such project to be followed.

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Reference

Hall, S. (2000). Conclusion: The multi-cultural question. In H. Barnor (Ed.), *Un/Settled multiculturalism: Diasporas, entanglements, transruptions* (pp. 209–241). London: Zed Books.



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