Beyond Multiculturalism: A Critical Inquiry into Postmodern Models of Social Integration

Soo-Young Jeong

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Korean Language Education, Dongshin University, Naju City, South Korea

Abstract: This study has undertaken a multidimensional analysis of the complexities inherent in institutionalized multiculturalism, bridging theoretical frameworks with their situated practices. Particular attention was given to the potential of interculturalism as a means of fostering social solidarity. The discussion began with a brief historical and contextual overview of multiculturalism and its subsequent development. It then examined core tensions embedded within multiculturalism, including the paradox of rights recognition, the absence of a cohesive civic identity, and the unresolved conflict between universalism and cultural relativism. Further, the study investigated the diverse national manifestations of multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, Canada, and South Korea, focusing on their policies, institutions, and strategies for identity management. The findings revealed that South Korea's approach has remained overwhelmingly assimilationist, demonstrating that while social institutions have rhetorically signaled a commitment to multiculturalism, they have not yet actualized this commitment in practice. In response, the study introduced interculturalism as an alternative framework, emphasizing that it entails more than symbolic recognition or procedural reform. Interculturalism advances principles of civic participation, anti-discrimination, and inclusive decision-making. Ultimately, the study proposed the groundwork for a new conceptual framework aimed at rethinking multiculturalism in its active, participatory, and justice-oriented forms.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, Cultural Relativism, Social Integration, Immigration Policy, Cultural Identity, Citizenship

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the nation-state model premised on ethnic and cultural homogeneity is being challenged by rapid cross-border migration and multilayered cultural intersections. Demographic changes resulting from international marriages, labor migration, and the influx of refugees demonstrate that the traditional model of "mainstream-centered social integration" is no longer effective (Seok & Chung, 2023). These changes have generated ideological and policy debates between multiculturalism and assimilationism, intensifying scholarly and social concerns over how to achieve integration within an increasingly multicultural reality. Internationally, numerous works have analyzed multiculturalism theoretically and in policy terms. Kymlicka (1995) and Taylor (1994) provide influential philosophical justifications, while Joppke (2004) critically assesses its limits and retrenchment. These studies highlight how multiculturalism, initially proposed as a reaction against the coercion and uniformity of assimilationism, emphasized the recognition of cultural diversity yet often struggled to produce genuine cohesion. Indeed, in practice, multicultural policies frequently concealed within the rhetoric of "cultural recognition" an implicit demand for adaptation to mainstream norms—what may be described as "cultural assimilationism."

South Korea provides a particularly telling case. Scholars such as Lee (2015) and Kim (2010) argue that despite the official rhetoric of cultural diversity, policy practice often remains assimilationist. Yoon (2008) further critiques domestic discourse as oriented more toward management and control than genuine integration. For example, multicultural family support programs, language education initiatives, and migrant integration policies, though implemented under the banner of respect for cultural difference, have often functioned as processes of "Koreanization." At the same time, Western societies have increasingly recognized that institutionalized multiculturalism has not always succeeded in fostering common civic identity or social cohesion. Instead, unintended consequences such as inter-community isolation, reinforced hierarchies within

minority groups, and human rights conflicts have emerged (Joppke, 2004). This recognition has fueled debates on alternative paradigms such as post-multiculturalism and interculturalism, which seek to overcome the limitations of both assimilationist practices and institutionalized multiculturalism (Cantle, 2012). Against this backdrop, this study critically examines the dualities and limitations of multicultural discourse by focusing on the concept of "cultural assimilationism" and explores the potential of non-assimilationist models of integration.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it seeks to critically identify the operational structures and ideological assumptions of cultural assimilationism as they are embedded within multicultural policy discourse (Teng & Chung, 2024). Second, it analyzes the cases of Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea in order to understand how assimilationist dynamics have been institutionalized in different national contexts. Third, it aims to examine interculturalism and rights-based models of integration as alternatives to both traditional multiculturalism and assimilationism, with a view to deriving policy implications that extend beyond existing frameworks. From these objectives arise several guiding questions: How is cultural assimilationism analytically distinct from traditional multiculturalism, and how should it be defined in theoretical terms? In what ways has cultural assimilationism been institutionalized in the multicultural policies of Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea, and what outcomes and limitations can be observed in each context? Finally, what philosophical foundations and policy principles underpin intercultural integration models as alternatives to multiculturalism and assimilationism, and to what extent can these models be implemented in practice?

To address these questions, this research integrates theoretical analysis with comparative case study in order to both conceptualize cultural assimilationism and assess its empirical manifestations in multicultural policy. The theoretical scope encompasses liberal multiculturalism, communitarian perspectives, the paradox of recognition, post-multiculturalist critiques, and interculturalist approaches, while the empirical scope addresses the institutionalization and practical effects of multicultural policy in Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea. These three cases have been selected for their comparative value: Canada represents a paradigmatic example of constitutional institutionalization, the United Kingdom illustrates a trajectory that moved from community-based recognition to a recalibration emphasizing civic integration, and South Korea reflects a setting in which multicultural discourse is robust but practice remains predominantly assimilationist. Taken together, these contexts capture significant variations in policy history, migrant composition, and political culture, thereby offering comparative insights into the dynamics of multiculturalism and assimilationism (Yin, 2014).

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative design that combines conceptual analysis with comparative inquiry. The research proceeds through a systematic review of theoretical literature, peer-reviewed scholarship, and domestic as well as international policy reports on multiculturalism, cultural assimilationism, and interculturalism, with the aim of clarifying conceptual categories and discursive structures (Go et al., 2021). In parallel, statutory texts, executive decrees, white papers, and other administrative documents are collected and examined in order to compare the pathways and intensities of institutionalization across national contexts. Building on these foundations, a comparative case study is conducted that classifies and juxtaposes the multicultural policy regimes of Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea, with particular attention to the scope and distribution of assimilationist elements within each system.

The data employed in this study are drawn from multiple sources. Primary sources include legislation, government policy documents, and official records produced by national statistical agencies, ministries of the interior, and immigration authorities. Secondary sources encompass scholarly monographs, journal articles, and reports published by international organizations such as the United Nations, the OECD, and the International Organization for Migration (Kim & Chung, 2021). Together, these materials provide the evidentiary basis for analyzing the theoretical underpinnings, institutional frameworks, and practical outcomes of multicultural policy across different national settings.

III. RESULTS

The research findings demonstrate that cultural assimilationism should not be regarded merely as an external counterpoint to multiculturalism but as a mechanism operating within multicultural discourse itself, one that can be critically analyzed through theoretical frameworks, comparative cases, and policy alternatives; they also reveal that positioning South Korea within an international comparative frame that includes Canada and the United Kingdom makes it possible to move beyond domestically bounded critiques; finally, the findings show that interculturalism offers a viable non-assimilationist model of integration, whose theoretical coherence and policy feasibility warrant serious consideration.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. Theoretical Foundations of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a contested concept that resists singular definition. Its interpretation varies not only across academic disciplines but also between political traditions and policy frameworks. At its most general level, it refers to the coexistence of diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural groups within a single political community under conditions of equal status. Historically, the rise of multiculturalism in the late twentieth century reflected both normative and structural transformations: the dismantling of explicit racial discrimination, the expansion of citizenship rights to immigrant communities, and broader guarantees of cultural autonomy within liberal democracies (Kymlicka, 1995). Philosophical debates have clarified the theoretical underpinnings of multiculturalism. **Liberal multiculturalism** stresses that cultural membership provides the "context of choice" necessary for individual autonomy. Will Kymlicka (1995, 2007) thus argues that protecting minority cultures is not simply a matter of collective survival but also of enabling individuals to exercise genuine freedom. He famously distinguished between external protections**,** which safeguard minorities against domination by the majority, and internal restrictions**,** which may allow majority oppression to be replaced by internal coercion within minority groups. While endorsing external protections, Kymlicka warned that internal restrictions must be tightly limited by liberal principles, since otherwise multiculturalism risks justifying illiberal practices.

Communitarian approaches, in contrast, emphasize that identity formation is inseparable from community belonging. Charles Taylor (1994) articulated the "politics of recognition," arguing that misrecognition or cultural invisibility inflicts moral harm and perpetuates injustice. For communitarian thinkers, culture is not merely a lifestyle preference but the framework through which human dignity is experienced and affirmed. These arguments provided the normative foundation for minority groups—including Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and religious minorities—to demand institutional recognition. However, critics such as Susan Okin (1999) have raised serious concerns that such communal recognition can inadvertently reinforce patriarchal domination, thereby subordinating women or other marginalized subgroups within cultural communities. Sociologically, multiculturalism also draws on the recognition that cultural diversity is not transient but rather a durable feature of contemporary societies. Tariq Modood (2007) highlights that cultural pluralism is structurally embedded and thus requires institutional responses beyond tolerance or ad hoc accommodation. In this sense, cultural identity functions not only as a marker of difference but also as a political and moral claim on the state. Integration theories—assimilationism, multiculturalism, and interculturalism—have emerged as competing paradigms to structure these claims. Assimilationism presumes incorporation of minorities into dominant cultural frameworks; multiculturalism legitimizes the coexistence of distinct groups; and interculturalism advocates reciprocal dialogue and boundary-crossing practices that build solidarity (Cantle, 2012).

B. Historical Trajectories and National Models

Canada is widely regarded as the paradigmatic case of constitutionalized multiculturalism. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's 1971 declaration, later enshrined in the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, positioned diversity as a core national value. Federal programs supported heritage languages, arts, and minority cultural organizations, thereby embedding multiculturalism into state institutions (Government of Canada, 1988). Scholars such as Kymlicka (2007) have lauded Canada for enabling immigrants to maintain cultural identities while enjoying full citizenship. Yet feminist and postcolonial critiques highlight persistent inequalities: Indigenous communities remain structurally disadvantaged, and racialized immigrants continue to face systemic barriers in employment and housing (Bannerji, 2000). These critiques reveal that recognition alone cannot dismantle entrenched power hierarchies.

The United Kingdom pursued a more communitarian version of multiculturalism during the 1960s–70s, in response to immigration from the Caribbean, South Asia, and Africa. Local authorities accommodated minority demands for separate schools, faith-based associations, and community autonomy (Modood, 2007). While initially praised as progressive, this approach faced severe criticism after the 2001 riots in northern towns and the 2005 London bombings, which fueled claims that multiculturalism had produced "parallel lives." By 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron's pronouncement that "state multiculturalism has failed" signaled a decisive policy shift toward civic integration, national identity, and shared values (Cameron, 2011).

South Korea, by contrast, only began institutionalizing multicultural policy in the mid-2000s, prompted by rising labor migration and international marriages. The Multicultural Families Support Act (2006) established nationwide programs and support centers for foreign spouses and their children. Yet critics argue that these initiatives are framed largely in

assimilationist terms: language acquisition and cultural education are treated as prerequisites for becoming "Korean," while other groups, such as undocumented workers or Muslim communities, remain marginalized (Lee, 2015; Kim, 2010). South Korea therefore illustrates a case where rhetorical commitment to diversity is rarely matched by substantive inclusion.

Although the study emphasizes Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea as the primary cases, other national models provide useful comparative context. France illustrates the universalist republican tradition, where cultural recognition is officially rejected in favor of a singular civic identity. Policies such as the 2004 ban on conspicuous religious symbols in schools exemplify this stance (Joppke, 2007). Yet the 2005 banlieue riots revealed how republican universalism can conceal structural exclusion, particularly among second-generation immigrant youth (Silverstein, 2005). Japan represents another contrasting model, maintaining strong resistance to multicultural frameworks despite demographic pressures. Immigration remains focused on temporary labor, with settlement pathways tightly restricted, and ethnic homogeneity upheld as a dominant national ideal (Ikegami, 2011). Finally, Singapore illustrates what scholars describe as "strategic multiculturalism." While officially recognizing Chinese, Malay, and Indian communities, the state carefully regulates cultural expression through institutions such as the People's Association, thereby embracing diversity but subordinating it to political stability rather than emancipatory pluralism (Rahim, 2009).

C. Critical Issues and Limitations

Despite its achievements, multiculturalism has generated enduring controversies. One of the most persistent dilemmas in the discourse on multiculturalism is the tension between cultural relativism **and** universalism. Cultural relativism, in its broadest sense, asserts that cultural practices, values, and norms can only be meaningfully understood within their own cultural contexts and should not be judged by external standards. This perspective has played a crucial role in challenging ethnocentrism and colonialist attitudes by insisting that minority practices deserve recognition and respect in their own terms. In the framework of multiculturalism, relativism has often been invoked to legitimize diverse cultural traditions, thereby strengthening claims for institutional protection and recognition. Yet this relativist orientation collides sharply with the principles of universal human rights, which are grounded in the assumption that certain moral and legal standards apply to all human beings regardless of cultural background. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), along with subsequent treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), codified rights to bodily autonomy, gender equality, and protection against violence as non-negotiable. When these universalist norms encounter cultural practices that contravene them, conflict becomes inevitable. Concrete examples illustrate the gravity of this tension. Practices such as honor killings or female genital cutting (FGC)**,** defended by some cultural or religious groups as integral to communal identity and tradition, are deemed irreconcilable with the foundational principles of human rights. Susan Okin (1999) famously argued that uncritical multicultural recognition may, under certain conditions, be "bad for women," since tolerating practices of gender subordination in the name of cultural respect entrenches patriarchal domination. From this perspective, multicultural relativism risks legitimizing human rights violations under the veneer of cultural authenticity. This raises profound normative questions. Can a multicultural society simultaneously honor cultural recognition and uphold universalist standards without contradiction? If cultural relativism is taken to its extreme, virtually any practice could be shielded from critique as long as it is culturally sanctioned, thereby undermining the universality of rights. Conversely, if universalism is applied rigidly, minority cultures may experience recognition only insofar as they conform to majority-defined norms, echoing older patterns of assimilation and domination. The dilemma, therefore, is not simply administrative but philosophical and ethical: it challenges scholars and policymakers to define the limits of tolerance, to identify which cultural practices can be accommodated, and to determine the extent to which universal norms should prevail when conflicts arise.

A second major critique of multiculturalism concerns what has been termed the "paradox of recognition." At the heart of multicultural policy lies the conviction that minority cultures should be protected through group-differentiated rights in order to ensure their survival and dignity in the face of majority dominance. On the surface, this appears to advance justice by safeguarding vulnerable groups against assimilationist pressures. Yet paradoxically, the same mechanism that offers protection from external domination can also reinforce internal hierarchies within minority communities, thereby entrenching inequalities among their own members. Will Kymlicka (1995) articulated this dilemma through his influential distinction between external protections and internal restrictions. External protections refer to legal or institutional measures that shield minority groups from unfair treatment or coercion by majority institutions—for example, language rights for Francophone communities in Canada or protections for Indigenous land tenure. These are generally considered legitimate because they promote equality between groups. Internal restrictions, however, occur when minority communities claim the right to limit the freedoms of their own members in the name of cultural preservation. Examples might include imposing

traditional dress codes on women, restricting educational opportunities for girls, or regulating marriage choices according to communal norms. Kymlicka cautioned that while external protections can foster cultural flourishing, internal restrictions threaten individual autonomy and are difficult to reconcile with liberal democratic values.

Scholars such as Avigail Eisenberg (2006) have elaborated on this paradox, noting that recognition can sometimes function as a double-edged sword: by validating cultural rights, the state may inadvertently legitimize practices that perpetuate patriarchal control, generational authority, or heteronormative dominance. In this sense, the very policies designed to promote justice may contribute to systemic injustice for those who are least powerful within minority groups, particularly women, youth, and sexual minorities. For example, accommodating community-specific family laws or religious tribunals may strengthen the autonomy of the group vis-à-vis the state but simultaneously constrain the agency of individuals who dissent from communal norms. This dilemma reveals the complexity of multicultural recognition. If states refuse recognition, they risk cultural erasure and assimilation. If they grant recognition unconditionally, they may sanction oppressive practices within minority groups. The paradox, therefore, underscores a fundamental tension between collective rights and individual rights. It also forces policymakers to confront difficult normative questions: To what extent should cultural preservation take precedence over personal freedom? How can institutions differentiate between legitimate cultural practices and those that violate universal standards of equality and autonomy? The paradox of recognition thus highlights the need for careful balancing. Some scholars propose context-sensitive criteria that allow for external protections while scrutinizing internal restrictions through the lens of human rights. Others argue that recognition policies must be accompanied by mechanisms of intra-group accountability, ensuring that vulnerable members—often women and youth—have channels to contest and reshape cultural norms. Ultimately, the paradox exposes the inherent difficulty of designing multicultural frameworks that honor cultural diversity without sacrificing the dignity and freedom of individuals within minority communities.

A further critique of multiculturalism addresses the problem of civic fragmentation, namely the concern that policies focused primarily on cultural recognition may weaken the bonds of solidarity necessary for sustaining democratic societies. The central argument is that by prioritizing group identity over shared citizenship, multiculturalism can encourage the formation of segmented communities that coexist in proximity but remain socially and politically distant from one another. In such contexts, the public sphere risks being fractured into parallel enclaves, each bound more by internal cultural loyalties than by commitment to a common civic order. The French riots of 2005 serve as a striking example of this dilemma. Although many of the young people involved were formally French citizens, their everyday experiences of exclusion—manifested in residential segregation, disproportionate unemployment, police surveillance, and stigmatization as "immigrants" despite being born in France—revealed the gap between legal status and lived belonging. The three weeks of violent unrest across the banlieues underscored how citizenship on paper does not automatically translate into substantive integration or recognition within the civic community (Silverstein, 2005). The riots highlighted how multicultural rhetoric, absent robust civic inclusion, may fail to provide minorities with a genuine sense of participation and equality.

Scholars have offered different diagnoses of this fragmentation. Joppke (2004) warns that multiculturalism, by privileging cultural difference without cultivating shared norms and civic practices, risks undermining the cohesion required for democratic life. On his view, the overemphasis on diversity as a value in itself can hollow out the commitment to civic obligations, producing a fragmented polity where rights are claimed but responsibilities are unevenly enacted. Similarly, critics argue that multicultural states often fail to articulate a common narrative of belonging that can unite diverse populations, leaving minorities to construct identities primarily within insular communities. This problem is not confined to France. Across Europe and North America, debates have intensified over whether policies of cultural accommodation have inadvertently encouraged "parallel societies," particularly in urban areas where immigrant populations cluster. Some commentators argue that segmented schooling, language enclaves, and separate religious institutions can limit intercultural interaction, reinforcing boundaries rather than dismantling them. From this perspective, multiculturalism's focus on recognition, while well-intentioned, may exacerbate alienation if it is not accompanied by sustained efforts to build civic solidarity. At a deeper level, the critique of civic fragmentation raises important philosophical and policy questions. What constitutes the minimal set of shared values that bind citizens together in a plural society? How can democratic states affirm cultural diversity while also nurturing the sense of commonality necessary for collective decision-making, mutual trust, and social cooperation? If these questions remain unresolved, multiculturalism risks degenerating into what critics describe as a patchwork of isolated communities, each with formal recognition but little commitment to a shared civic project. Thus, the challenge is not whether diversity should be respected—that principle is largely uncontested in liberal democracies—

but how diversity can be embedded within a framework of inclusive citizenship that fosters both recognition of cultural particularity and commitment to a broader civic identity. Without such integration, the danger of civic fragmentation remains acute, threatening the very cohesion upon which democratic societies depend.

A recurring criticism of multicultural policy is its tendency to prioritize symbolic recognition over substantive structural reform. Institutional multiculturalism often manifests in highly visible gestures such as cultural festivals, heritage celebrations, translation services, or community centers that display cultural artifacts and performances. These initiatives undeniably hold symbolic value: they affirm minority identities in public, promote tolerance among majority populations, and project an image of inclusivity. However, critics caution that these measures rarely address the deep-seated structural inequalities faced by minorities in areas such as employment, housing, healthcare, and political representation (Taylor, 1994; Bannerji, 2000; Kim, 2010). Concrete examples highlight this gap. In Canada, the federal government has long sponsored multicultural festivals, bilingual services, and arts programs that celebrate ethnic diversity. While such measures have enhanced cultural visibility, persistent disparities among Indigenous communities—ranging from poverty to inadequate access to healthcare and education—demonstrate that symbolic inclusion does not equate to structural justice. Similarly, in South Korea, the creation of Multicultural Family Support Centers in the 2000s provided administrative services, Korean language classes, and intercultural events for foreign spouses and their children. Yet critics argue that these centers function largely as instruments of assimilation rather than as platforms for political empowerment or equitable resource distribution (Kim, 2010). Such initiatives make minorities more visible but do not challenge systemic exclusion in the labor market, public institutions, or decision-making processes.

Scholars have engaged this issue from multiple perspectives. Charles Taylor (1994) argued that recognition of cultural identity is essential for human dignity, but he also emphasized that recognition alone cannot substitute for justice in material distribution. Himani Bannerji (2000) sharpened this critique by demonstrating how Canadian multiculturalism, while celebrating ethnic diversity at the level of cultural performance, often left untouched the economic and racial hierarchies that marginalized immigrant and Indigenous communities. From this vantage point, symbolic multiculturalism functions as a "legitimating ornament" for the state: it allows governments to display tolerance while deflecting demands for deeper reforms. In Korea, similar critiques suggest that multicultural festivals or educational programs often serve administrative convenience—signaling state benevolence—rather than altering exclusionary structures in immigration law, welfare distribution, or political participation. The implications of this critique are significant. Symbolism without redistribution risks creating a veneer of inclusivity that legitimizes inequality rather than dismantling it. Minority groups may be invited to perform their cultures publicly but remain excluded from substantive influence in shaping national identity, policy priorities, or economic opportunity. Moreover, symbolic recognition can sometimes reify cultural differences, reducing complex communities to static traditions or folkloric images rather than engaging with their evolving socio-political needs. Addressing this imbalance requires shifting the focus of multicultural policy from surface-level recognition to structural transformation. This means not only celebrating diversity through festivals or services but also reforming labor markets, ensuring equitable housing policies, strengthening anti-discrimination legislation, and enhancing minority representation in political institutions. Without such measures, multiculturalism risks being reduced to spectacle—visible, colorful, and rhetorically powerful, yet ineffective in delivering justice. These critiques have encouraged the emergence of post-multiculturalism, which acknowledges the importance of recognition but insists that participation, interaction, and social justice are indispensable (Cantle, 2012).

D. Toward Interculturalism as an Alternative

Interculturalism represents a significant reorientation of integration debates. Unlike multiculturalism, which often institutionalized parallel communities, interculturalism foregrounds **interaction, dialogue, and joint participation** as central to democratic life. Cantle (2012) argues that interculturalism seeks to move beyond passive tolerance toward active engagement across cultural boundaries. Key dimensions include:

A central tenet of interculturalism is that genuine integration cannot be achieved solely through administrative management or symbolic recognition of diversity; it must instead be cultivated through direct participation and everyday encounters. The emphasis lies not on passive coexistence but on active interaction, where individuals from diverse backgrounds engage one another as partners in shared social, educational, and civic activities (Park et al., 2024). Interculturalism therefore highlights schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and community organizations as critical arenas in which trust and solidarity can be built through lived experiences of cooperation rather than through abstract policy rhetoric. Educational settings provide a

particularly vivid illustration. When students from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds participate in cooperative learning projects, they not only acquire subject knowledge but also develop intercultural competencies such as listening, negotiation, and conflict resolution. For example, group assignments that intentionally mix immigrant and non-immigrant students foster mutual dependence and recognition, counteracting tendencies toward self-segregation. Such experiences align with Kim's (2010) observation that intercultural solidarity emerges most effectively when individuals work toward common goals in a structured, participatory environment. Workplaces also serve as crucial sites of participation-based integration. Collaborative teams that include both native-born and immigrant employees encourage daily interactions that transcend cultural boundaries. Shared professional objectives create opportunities for dialogue, dismantle stereotypes, and enable mutual appreciation of skills and perspectives. Studies in organizational sociology have shown that workplace diversity initiatives are most effective not when they merely celebrate cultural differences through symbolic events, but when they foster sustained, practical collaboration on projects that require collective problem-solving. Neighborhoods and local communities further illustrate the logic of interculturalism. Community development initiatives—such as neighborhood clean-up campaigns, joint housing cooperatives, or local sports leagues—enable residents of different backgrounds to interact on equal footing. These projects transform diversity from a source of potential tension into an opportunity for building mutual trust. Participation at this grassroots level promotes what Cantle (2012) terms "everyday citizenship," where civic belonging is enacted not through legal status alone but through shared practices of cooperation and responsibility. Scholars emphasize that participation-based integration does more than reduce prejudice; it **actively** restructures social relations. By creating contexts in which immigrants and host populations collaborate, interculturalism challenges the boundaries that often isolate minority communities. The contact hypothesis in social psychology supports this logic: meaningful, sustained contact under conditions of equality reduces bias and fosters solidarity. Interculturalism builds on this insight by embedding contact into institutional practices across education, employment, and community life. The policy implications are clear. States that wish to move beyond assimilationist or symbolic models must invest in structures that encourage everyday participation (Chung, 2023). This could include designing school curricula that require intercultural teamwork, funding neighborhood associations that engage diverse residents in joint projects, or incentivizing companies to develop multicultural teams with equal opportunities for advancement. Such policies transform diversity from being an administrative category to being a lived reality of shared cooperation. In short, participation-based integration illustrates the shift from managing diversity **to** living diversity. Rather than treating minorities as passive recipients of services, interculturalism recognizes them as active contributors to civic life. This orientation not only builds solidarity and trust but also lays the foundation for more equitable and resilient democratic societies.

A further dimension of interculturalism lies in its call to fundamentally reframe the domains of education, language, and citizenship so that they foster genuine participation rather than superficial accommodation. Whereas traditional multicultural approaches often relied on cultural appreciation programs—such as heritage days, cultural performances, or symbolic inclusion in curricula—interculturalism insists that education must go deeper by cultivating the skills, competencies, and dispositions necessary for navigating diversity in daily life. In other words, education should not be limited to awareness of cultural differences but should equip students with the ability to interpret, negotiate, and resolve intercultural conflicts constructively. Classrooms, in this sense, become laboratories of democratic practice where young people learn how to collaborate across cultural boundaries, critically examine their own assumptions, and develop empathy as well as civic responsibility. By embedding intercultural dialogue into teaching methods and curricula, schools can prepare students not only for academic success but also for life in pluralistic societies.

Language policy constitutes another critical arena in which interculturalism diverges from assimilationist or symbolic approaches. Assimilationist models have historically placed the entire linguistic burden on immigrants, requiring them to master the dominant national language as a precondition for full participation, while offering minimal institutional support in return. Interculturalism, by contrast, recognizes that communication is a two-way process. Effective integration requires that majority institutions also adapt to linguistic diversity through measures such as multilingual signage in public spaces, translation services in hospitals and courts, and intercultural communication training for civil servants. Such measures reduce the asymmetrical burden placed on immigrants and facilitate mutual understanding. Moreover, language is not only a practical tool of communication but also a carrier of identity and dignity. Policies that value and support minority languages—through bilingual education programs or recognition of community media outlets—signal that cultural diversity is a resource to be shared rather than an obstacle to be overcome. In this way, language policy becomes an instrument of reciprocity rather than assimilation.

Citizenship, finally, must also be reconceptualized within an interculturalist framework. Traditional approaches have treated citizenship primarily as a **legal status** conferred through naturalization or birthright, focusing on rights and obligations defined by the state. While legal recognition remains crucial, interculturalism emphasizes that citizenship must also be understood as an active process of participation in civic life. This entails moving beyond formal membership to encourage meaningful engagement in local governance, neighborhood initiatives, schools, and workplaces. By framing citizenship as a practice rather than merely a status, interculturalism invites both immigrants and native-born citizens to act as co-responsible agents in shaping the public sphere. Choi (2018) argues that this participatory understanding of citizenship redefines belonging as something that is enacted through shared experiences of cooperation, rather than something passively granted by the state. Taken together, these reframings point toward a more robust and dynamic vision of integration. Education must form intercultural competencies, language policy must foster reciprocity in communication, and citizenship must be lived as participatory emplacement rather than as static membership. Only when these domains are restructured in an interconnected way can societies move beyond the limits of both assimilation and symbolic multiculturalism. In this respect, interculturalism offers **a transformative paradigm:** one that does not merely manage diversity administratively but actively constructs democratic communities in which cultural difference becomes the basis for mutual growth and solidarity.

A defining feature of interculturalism is its insistence that integration cannot be secured through symbolic recognition or limited cultural accommodation alone; it must instead be grounded in a rights-centered and justice-oriented framework. This perspective emphasizes that immigrant and minority groups are not simply cultural communities to be managed, but civic actors and rights-bearing members of society. Interculturalism therefore demands a structural approach that tackles persistent inequalities in power, resources, and political representation, recognizing that without such measures, diversity remains little more than a rhetorical commitment. The need for this shift is evident in the enduring **structural barriers** faced by minority populations across different national contexts. Immigrant workers often occupy the most precarious sectors of the labor market, suffering from wage discrimination, insecure contracts, and limited access to social protections. Housing policies frequently reinforce segregation, concentrating minority families in under-resourced neighborhoods. In many cases, political institutions fail to represent immigrant voices adequately, with minorities underrepresented in legislatures, school boards, and decision-making bodies. These inequities illustrate that cultural recognition without redistribution does little to dismantle entrenched hierarchies of class, race, and gender.

Scholars have long warned of the risks of reducing multiculturalism to surface-level recognition. Bannerji (2000) criticized Canadian multiculturalism as a "legitimating ornament" that celebrates cultural diversity while leaving racialized economic inequalities unaddressed. Similarly, Kim (2010) argued that South Korea's multicultural family policies, though visible and well-funded, function more as assimilationist tools than as mechanisms for empowerment, failing to secure immigrants' political voice or labor rights. Against this backdrop, Yoo (2019) insists that intercultural integration requires treating immigrants as equal partners in governance, not as passive recipients of state services. This means recognizing diversity as a foundation for democratic renewal rather than as a problem to be managed. Poliicy implications flow directly from this rights-centered perspective. First, redistributive measures must accompany cultural recognition: fair labor standards, anti-discrimination enforcement, and equitable access to housing, healthcare, and education are essential to ensure that minorities enjoy substantive, not merely formal, equality. Second, institutional reforms are needed to guarantee political inclusion. This could include mechanisms such as reserved seats for minority representatives, local councils with immigrant participation, or mandatory consultation processes in policymaking. Third, systemic anti-discrimination frameworks must be strengthened, not only at the level of law but also through training, monitoring, and accountability structures across public institutions. Finally, co-production of policy is vital: rather than designing multicultural programs from above, governments must collaborate with immigrant communities to craft initiatives that reflect their lived experiences and priorities. In this sense, a rights-centered and justice-oriented framework reorients integration away from administrative management toward co-governance and shared responsibility (Chung, 2025a, 2025b). It transforms diversity from a category of policy oversight into a generative principle of democracy. As Yoo (2019) underscores, immigrants should not be seen as beneficiaries of benevolence but as co-authors of the civic project, capable of shaping laws, institutions, and collective futures. This vision not only strengthens democratic legitimacy but also ensures that interculturalism delivers tangible justice alongside symbolic recognition By shifting from inclusion to co-construction, interculturalism redefines diversity as a generative condition of democracy rather than as a challenge to be managed. It represents a non-assimilationist model that can foster both civic solidarity and social justice in an era of intensified global mobility.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the historical formation of multicultural discourse, its institutionalization across Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea, and the controversies that have emerged from its practical application. While multiculturalism was initially framed as a progressive response to cultural diversity through the institutionalization of recognition, it has consistently confronted structural tensions—between relativism and universalism, between the protection of cultural rights and the safeguarding of individual freedoms, and between the aspiration for inclusivity and the erosion of civic solidarity. Comparative analysis revealed that Canada, despite its constitutional commitment, continues to grapple with Indigenous marginalization and immigrant stratification; the United Kingdom shifted from community-centered accommodation to civic integration in response to fragmentation and security concerns; and South Korea, though institutionally committed to multiculturalism, remains constrained by assimilationist logics that prioritize cultural adaptation over genuine recognition. Against this backdrop, the study advances interculturalism as a more viable framework, emphasizing interaction, shared practices, and rights-based participation as pathways toward non-assimilationist integration. Theoretically, this underscores the necessity of moving beyond recognition to forms of democratic practice that cultivate civic trust and structural equality, while socially it calls for policies that treat cultural diversity not as a managerial problem but as a driver of democratic renewal. Although the analysis has been limited to three national contexts and remains more conceptual than empirical in its treatment of interculturalism, future research that develops operational indicators, investigates community-level interactions, and traces long-term patterns of participation and resource-sharing will be vital. Such inquiry will not only refine theoretical debates but also provide practical guidance for societies undergoing rapid demographic change, where diversity must be reimagined as a foundation for justice and cohesion rather than a challenge to be contained.

REFERENCES

[1]   Ahmed, Sara. (2007). The Language of Diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(2): 235–256.

[2]   Bannerji, Himani. (2000). *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

[3]   Cameron, David. (2011). PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference. *UK Government*, February 5, 2011

[4]   Cantle, Ted. (2012). *Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[5]   Choi, Hyun-Jung. (2018). Discrepancies between Multicultural Education Policy and School Practice (다문화 교육정책과 학교현장의 괴리). *Korean Journal of Sociology of Education* 28(3): 33–58.

[6]   Chung, Jun-Ki. (2023). Safeguarding Children from School Violence: A Systematic Analysis of the Issue of Psychological and Physical Pressures from Teachers and Peers. *Journal of Education Culture and Society,* 2(0). 131-143.

[7]   Chung, Jun-Ki. (2025a). THE EDUCATIONAL ROLES OF GEOJASSI CHRISTIAN SCHOOL. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 21 (1), 29-45.

[8]   Chung, Jun-Ki. (2025b). The Spiritual and Socio-Educational Implications of Geojassi Christian School. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 106 (1), 1-16.

[9]   Go, S., Kang, M., Shin, C., Rheem, S., Han, W., & Chung, J. (2021). The American Southern Presbyterian Missionaries in Modern Korea: A Question of Cultural Imperialism. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(2), 5172-5183.

[10] Pue, Wesley. Ed. (2006). *Diversity and Equality: The Changing Framework of Freedom in Canada.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

[11] Goldberg, David Theo. (2002). *The Racial State.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

[12] Government of Canada. (1988). *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c. 24 (4th Supp.) (accessed August 8, 2025).

[13] Ikegami, Eiko. (2011). Historical Contexts of Japanese Cultural Nationalism. *Theory, Culture & Society* 28(5): 68–85.

[14] Jeong, M., Chung, M., Han, W., Kim, H., & Seo, I. (2021). Political Consciousness of Early Korean Mission Schools (1907-1937). *Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing*, 5(3), 756–769.

[15] Joppke, Christian. (2004). The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State: Theory and Policy. *The British Journal of Sociology* 55(2): 237–257.

[16] Joppke, Christian. (2007). Beyond National Models: Civic Integration Policies for Immigrants in Western Europe. *West European Politics* 30(1): 1–22.

[17] Joppke, Christian. (2007). State Neutrality and Islamic Headscarves. *Theory and Society* 36(4): 313–325.

[18] Kim, Do-Gyun. (2010). Critique of Multiculturalism and the Possibility of Interculturalism (다문화주의 비판과 상호문화주의의 가능성). *Society and Philosophy* 18: 65–92.

[19] Kim, H., & Chung, J. (2021). A Study of the Emergence of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Korea. Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing, 5(3), 770-779.

[20] Kymlicka, Will. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[21] Kymlicka, Will. (2007). *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[22] Lee, Seung-Hyun. (2015). An Analysis of Assimilationist Tendencies in Korean Multicultural Policy (한국 다문화 정책의 동화주의적 경향 분석). *Korean Social Policy Review* 22(1): 73–102.

[23] Modood, Tariq. (2007). *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

[24] Okin, Susan Moller. (1999). Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" In *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, eds. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussbaum, 7–24. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[25] Park, Y. H., Kim, K. H., Jeong, M. J., Kim, H. W., and Chung, J. K. (2024). Saenal School in South Korea: Its Historical Significance, *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 15 (2). 801-814, https://jecs.pl/index.php/jecs/article/view/1633.

[26] Rahim, Lily Zubaidah. (2009). Ethnic Politics in Singapore: The Perils of Pragmatic Multiculturalism. *Asian Studies Review* 33(3): 361–382.

[27] Silverstein, Paul. (2005). Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34: 363–384.

[28] Taylor, Charles. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[29] Teng, H., & Chung, J. (2024). Goryeoin Village in Gwangju, South Korea, and Its Socio-Cultural-Historical Significance. *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia,* 23(1),1-17. DOI: 10.17477/jcea.2024.23.1.001

[30] Ungvarsky, John. (2024). *Salad Bowl (Cultural Idea).* Ipswich, MA: EBSCO Information Services.

[31] Yin, Robert K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods.* 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[32] Yoo, Byung-Hwa. (2011). Universality and Relativity of Multiculturalism: Its Intersection with Human Rights Discourse (다문화주의의 보편성과 상대성: 인권 담론과의 교차). *Social Science Studies* 27(1): 85–111.

[33] Yoo, Byung-Hwa. (2019). A Critical Review of Korean Multicultural Policy and the Search for Alternatives (한국 다문화정책의 비판적 검토와 대안 모색). *Journal of Social Policy Studies* 39(1): 85–110.