Feminism in Radical Democracy and Japanese Political Theory: Mouffe, Pateman, Young, and “Essentialism”

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Abstract

This paper examines feminist arguments in radical democracy and Japanese responses to them. Although feminist insights are significant intellectual sources of radical democracy, recent political theorists have tended to exclusively consider radical democracy as agonistic pluralism. The radical democratic thinker Chantal Mouffe, who is very popular among Japanese political theorists and philosophers, criticizes the “essentialist” tendency of two feminist political theorists, namely Carole Pateman and Iris Marion Young. First this paper examines Mouffe’s critique of the two theorists. Second, it evaluates the relevance of Mouffe’s criticism of Pateman and Young by reconsidering their ideas on democracy and citizenship. Third, it engages the works of a few Japanese political theorists who respond to the issue of essentialism and points out the problems involved in the introduction of radical democracy in Japan and in Japanese feminist political theory. Finally, this paper concludes that we are still in the early stages of introducing and absorbing foreign feminist political theories into Japan as opposed to developing original Japanese feminist political theory to share with the world.

Keywords

feminism – Chantal Mouffe – Carole Pateman – Iris Marion Young – Japanese political theory
Introduction: Radical Democracy and Japanese Studies of Political Theory

When we consider what comparative political theory is about, we can conceive not only of the comparative studies between Western and non-Western political theory, but also of those between male-centered (or patriarchal) and feminist political theory. In this sense, feminism in Japanese political and/or democratic theory is a very suitable research subject in comparative political theory.

However, it is uncertain whether Japanese feminist democratic theory has yet been established. Only in the mid-1990s did Japanese studies of politics begin to discuss feminism and/or gender issues, and the majority of the discussion on political theory in Japan has been based on the introduction and examination of renowned Western feminist political theorists. Rich discussions of feminism have been conducted in Japanese sociology, psychology, legal studies, anthropology, and women’s studies over the last few decades, and empirical studies of Japanese politics and international relations have increasingly been conducted with attention to gendered perspectives. In contrast, it is difficult to consider that there is a feminist political theory that is theorized from the uniquely Japanese historical experiences and intellectual context. It is also difficult to say that Japanese political theorists have sufficiently examined, understood, and absorbed American and European feminist political theory developed since the 1980s. In short, feminism has still not become a major subject in Japanese studies of political theory.

Over the last few decades, many Japanese academics have referred to novel foreign (and mainly Western) thought as “contemporary thought” (in Japanese: “gendai shisō”). In the heyday of the popularity of postmodernism in the 1980s, Japanese scholars tended to treat feminism as a typical example of contemporary thought. This history sheds light on why Japanese academics, sociologists, and social thinkers in particular introduced postmodern Western feminist thinkers. A Japanese political theorist stated retrospectively that while “politics” was a very popular topic among thinkers and/or philosophers of “contemporary thought” in the 1980s, Japanese political thinkers and political philosophers almost ignored this contemporary thought (Kawasaki, 1992, pp. 9–12). In the 1990s, some political theorists and philosophers in Japan became drawn to postmodernism by the burgeoning popularity of Michel Foucault’s theory of power. In addition, in accordance with the trend that Japanese political theorists came to be interested in postmodern ideas, they also began to mention feminism and/or gender issues. This is the context in which Japanese political theorists and philosophers introduced Western arguments of radical democracy in the mid-1990s.
The publication of Shin Chiba’s Japanese book *The Horizon of Radical Democracy* in 1995 was an epochal event. In the book, Chiba mainly discussed Sheldon S. Wolin’s idea of radical democracy and also introduced the feminist political philosopher Iris Marion Young’s argument about the politics of difference. In 1996, the September issue of a Japanese monthly magazine in philosophy, *Shisō (Thought)*, featured radical democracy with several articles including translations of essays by Western political thinkers, such as Chantal Mouffe’s “Democratic Politics Today,” Young’s “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” and Michael Walzer’s “The Civil Society Argument.” At that time, many Japanese political theorists and philosophers were intrigued by the liberal-communitarian debate, civil society, and postmodern political theory. Along these lines, the 1990s saw the popularization of several keywords such as “difference,” “identity,” “common good,” “citizenship,” “pluralism,” “multiculturalism,” and “deconstruction” among Japanese political theorists (cf. Sugita, 1998). The introduction of radical democracy into Japanese political theory was an extension of these interests. In the second half of the decade, several English books on radical democracy were translated into Japanese and published, including Mouffe’s *The Return of the Political*, C. D. Lummis’ *Radical Democracy*, and an anthology edited by David Trend called *Radical Democracy*.

It seems that there are two ways of understanding “radical democracy” in Japan: (a) a broader sense, in which radical democracy includes participatory and deliberative democracy; and (b) a narrow sense, in which radical democracy exclusively signifies the concept of “agonistic pluralism” as theorized by Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), and William E. Connolly (Connolly, 1991). Mouffe’s theory of radical democracy is popular in Japan because of its postmodern nature. The introduction of radical democracy in Japan increased Japanese political theorists’ interest in Western feminist political theorists such as Mouffe, Young, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Susan Moller Okin, and Judith Butler. However, it is important to note that this trend did not make feminist political theory a major field of research in Japanese political studies. In 1998, the Japanese Political Science Association organized a session on “women and politics” for the first time as part of its annual conference. While this brought the topic of feminism to the fore, it did not necessarily mark the beginning of Japanese political theorists’ engagement in in-depth examinations and discussions of feminist political theory. Japanese political

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1 Evidence includes the fact that many of Mouffe’s major books have been translated into Japanese, including *The Return of the Political, Democratic Paradox, On the Political* and *For a Left Populism*. 
theory textbooks for undergraduate students have only recently devoted an entire chapter to feminism. While some Japanese political theorists have come to cite issues raised by feminists in their works, these citations are not necessarily resulting from the scholars' own interest in feminism, but from their theoretical and philosophical interest in topics such as identity, citizenship, justice, and multiculturalism. Along these lines, Japanese scholars often situate the renowned feminist political theorist Carole Pateman as a theorist of participatory democracy and tend to ignore her major feminist works.

The aim of this paper is to re-examine feminist arguments in radical democracy and some Japanese responses. The paper focuses on three political theorists, Mouffe, Pateman, and Young, who are deeply related to feminism and well-known in Japan. Since Pateman radically criticized mainstream democratic theory from a feminist perspective in the 1980s, I situate her as a theorist of radical democracy in a broad sense. Mouffe criticizes feminist thinking in general from the viewpoint of her radical and pluralist democratic project. In her essay “Feminism, citizenship and radical democratic politics” that appeared in 1992, Mouffe criticizes both Pateman and Young for what she contends is the “essentialist” nature of their arguments. This paper unfolds in three stages. First, I examine Mouffe’s criticism of Pateman and Young in her feminist essay. Second, I evaluate the relevance of Mouffe’s criticism by reconsidering the ideas of democracy and citizenship as presented by Pateman and Young. Lastly, I explore the responses of a few Japanese political theorists to the problem of “essentialism.” Although it is difficult to find a cause-and-effect relationship between the popularization of radical democracy and introduction of feminist arguments in Japanese studies of political theory, several Japanese political theorists deal with the problem of essentialism. This paper

2 For example, Kawasaki and Sugita (Eds.) (2006) and Okazaki and Kimura (Eds.) (2008). I contributed a chapter on feminism to the latter. The omission of the chapter on feminism in Japanese standard textbooks of political theory is remarkable when contrasted with introductory books on political philosophy or political ideologies from the West published in the 1990s (e.g., Kymlicka, 1999; Eccleshall et al., 1994; and Vincent, 1992). While I pointed this out in the mid-1990s (Yamada, 1995), it took about ten years for the situation to begin to change.

3 I would like to add that Japanese political theorists who are interested in feminist arguments have already read Pateman’s works on feminism from the 1990s. In 2014, I translated one of her major books, The Disorder of Women (1989), into Japanese. In 2017, the Japanese edition of another important book, The Sexual Contract (1988), was also published by another Japanese historian of political thought.

4 Originally this essay was published as a chapter of Feminists Theorize the Political, edited by J. Butler and J. W. Scott. Later on this essay was included in Mouffe (1993).
ultimately shows that Japanese democratic theory is still at the stage of introducing, absorbing, and critically examining Western feminist political theory, as well as at the stage of not sufficiently developing original Japanese feminist political theory that might be transmitted to other nations.

**Mouffe’s Radical Democracy and Feminism**

The main point of Mouffe’s critique of feminist political thinkers is that they are wedded to the notion of essentialism. Mouffe argues that if feminism is to be situated as part of a radical democratic project, it must abandon any essentialist ideas. Specifically, Mouffe critiques essentialism by insisting that the category of “women” does not correspond to any unified and unifying essence (1993, p. 78). Instead, her radical democratic project situates a social agent as an ensemble of “subject positions” that are constructed by diverse discourses that are not necessarily related. For Mouffe, the identity of a subject is contingent and only temporarily fixed, constituted by the social relations with which the subject identifies. Constructed by various social relations, Mouffe’s social agent is plural rather than a unified and homogeneous entity (1993, p. 77). Her theory applies to all subjects and social groups including the working class, women, blacks, and homosexuals. Significant here is the transformation of the identities of different groups to realize “articulation” of the demands of each (e.g., workers) with those of others (e.g., women). This articulation requires what Mouffe (with Laclau) calls “the principle of democratic equivalence” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). She states:

> In order that the defence of workers’ interests is not pursued at the cost of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers, it is necessary to establish an equivalence between these different struggles. (1993, p. 19)

Mouffe rejects any fixed or permanent identity for the subject not because she wants to negate concepts such as “working class,” “woman,” or “black,” but because she conceives of these subjectivities as opening to other subject positions, regarding all subjects as “nodal points” only partially fixed by discourse. The deeper point is that Mouffe’s framework yields variable articulation between different subject positions that are not predetermined. Considered in a feminist context, the identity of “women” is a category constructed by various discourses, making the dichotomy of homogeneous “men” and homogeneous “women” impossible. Ultimately, Mouffe clarifies that feminist politics as a struggle against women’s subordination must be diverse (1993, p. 78) and that
any notions of “essential” womanhood and “true” feminism must be abandoned, as the category of “women” is a constructed nodal point (1993, pp. 87–88). For Mouffe, various kinds of feminist struggles must be articulated with other struggles for liberation as parts of a broader project of radical democratic politics.

Based on her thinking explained above, Mouffe sees that the feminist political theories of both Pateman and Young have the essentialist nature that should be criticized. I first examine her critique of Pateman. Pateman repeatedly points out the patriarchal character of social contract theory, which is the basis of modern democratic theory. She argues that in social contract theory, “free and equal individuals” denotes male heads of household, men who possess their wives as their property, and men as “breadwinners.” Pateman frames the social contract as a fraternal pact and argues that political and civil society is thus constructed through confining women to the private domestic sphere, situating them as the cause of political disorder. Despite Pateman’s critique, democratic theorists tend to assume that categories such as “individuals” and “citizens” are not exclusive, making the deep-rooted patriarchal nature of political theory invisible. Furthermore, such theorists believe that the expansion of universal suffrage to women—the realization of women’s formal citizenship—solved any democratic problems between men and women, negating the fact that women have historically been and continue to be treated as second-class citizens in many social contexts. In other words, from the beginning, “citizenship” has been constructed according to the male standard (typically, military service and tax payment) (Pateman, 1988; Pateman, 1989).

While Mouffe affirms Pateman’s critique of patriarchal political theory, she criticizes the way in which Pateman tries to overcome the dilemma of citizenship that women must face. Pateman calls this “Wollstonecraft’s dilemma,” which can be found in the tension between liberal feminists and other kinds of feminists. On the one hand, liberal feminists admit the universal significance of citizenship and attempt to expand it to women. However, this way never succeeds because citizenship itself is constructed according to men’s attributes, capacities, and activities. Expanding such citizenship requires women to be (like) men, and women who cannot do this are still regarded as second-class citizens and cannot obtain full citizenship. On the other hand, other feminists insist that women have different abilities, needs, and concerns from men, thus suggesting that women’s citizenship should be different from that of men. Here it is argued that the unpaid work women often perform (such as work related to mothering) should be regarded as components of women’s citizenship because such work is comparable with the kind of paid employment typically performed by men. However, this latter way is not fulfilled, because from the beginning, citizenship excludes domestic (or “women’s”) work, such
as child-bearing, child-rearing, housekeeping, and caring for family members. The latter way confines women to the domestic sphere, makes them economically dependent on men, and forces them to perform unpaid work (Pateman, 1989, pp. 195–97). Pateman states the aim of the overcoming of such a dilemma as follows:

...if women are to be citizens as women, as autonomous, equal, yet sexually different beings from men, democratic theory and practice has to undergo a radical transformation. (1989, p. 14)

Pateman affirms and elaborates a differentiated democratic social order that “rests on a social conception of individuality, which includes both women and men as biologically differentiated but not unequal creatures” (1989, p. 136).

It is precisely Pateman’s expression “as women” that Mouffe criticizes. According to Mouffe’s interpretation, Pateman pursues differentiated citizenship between men and women. In other words, Pateman conceives of two types of individuality that should be expressed in two different forms of citizenship: men as men and women as women. Mouffe insists that Pateman’s view “still postulates the existence of some kind of essence corresponding to women as women” and that Pateman’s “proposal for a differentiated citizenship that recognizes the specificity of womanhood rests on the identification of women as women with motherhood” (1993, p. 81). In short, for Mouffe, Pateman tries to find a way to overcome Wollstonecraft’s dilemma in the conception of the differentiated citizenship between men and women. Mouffe considers this conception an inadequate essentialism that fails to deconstruct the men/women dichotomy, arguing that “in the domain of politics, and as far as citizenship is concerned, sexual difference should not be a valid distinction” (1993, p. 82).

Next, I shift my examination toward Mouffe’s critique of Young. Young’s “politics of difference” concerns the oppression and disadvantage of women and other marginalized social groups. Young is very critical of the prevailing Schumpeterian “interest-group pluralism” that reduces politics to bargaining for private interests. She sympathizes with participatory democracy. Nevertheless, she also criticizes the republican citizenship for its idealization of universal citizenship based on the traditional patriarchal division between public and private. This division, Young argues, presupposes the dichotomies such as “universal” vs. “particular,” and “common” vs. “differentiated.” The former elements of each of these dichotomies (i.e., “universal” and “common”) are often regarded as the ideals of the public sphere, while the latter elements (i.e., “particular” and “differentiated”) are often confined to the private sphere. The ideal of universal citizenship prioritizes “generality” so that particular,
self-centered interests do not erode the public sphere. However, for Young, such dichotomies and the universal ideal are irrelevant to the realities of large-scale multicultural and plural mass societies. The conception of the public sphere from the viewpoint of universality and generality conflates “equality” with “sameness,” excluding social groups that are regarded as “different” or “particular” from the mainstream norm. Young continuously considers the problem of structural injustice, that is, “domination” by the mainstream of society (white, middle-class, heterosexual males) and “oppression” of different social groups (the working class, women, blacks, Native Americans, homosexuals, etc.) (Young, 1989, pp. 251–58; Young, 1990, chap. 2).

Although Mouffe sympathizes with Young’s concerns about the many forms of oppression in a society, she criticizes the essentialist nature of Young’s notion of social groups. Young’s politics of difference conceives of the public sphere as a plural domain open to different social groups rather than as dominated by generality and sameness. Therefore, she advocates for a “heterogeneous public” and “differentiated citizenship” over and against traditional ideals of universality. She argues that such a reconstruction would enable the particular and different needs and voices of marginalized groups to be expressed and heard publicly. To support this objective, Young proposes “group representation” (1989, pp. 258–67). Notably, Young’s “social group” does not denote a group with a particular political ideology or interest group, but rather a cultural group with a specific way of life. Mouffe argues that Young’s concept of the politics of difference presupposes the existence of social groups with given interests and identities, and ultimately rejects her conception of group-differentiated citizenship, stating that

...the notion of a group that she identifies with comprehensive identities and ways of life might make sense for groups such as Native Americans, but is completely inadequate as a description for many other groups whose demands she wants to take into account, like women, the elderly, the differently abled, and so on. She has an ultimately essentialist notion of ‘group’, and this accounts for why...her view is not so different from the interest-group pluralism that she criticizes. (1993, p. 86)

**Pateman’s Democratic Theory and Feminism**

Pateman cites Mouffe’s critique at least twice, but she does not offer a genuine counterargument. On the first occasion, in her essay “Democracy, Freedom and Special Rights,” Pateman insists that she never argues for “two different
forms of citizenship” for men and women. However, she makes this statement in a footnote (1998, p. 230, note 14) and she does not fully refute Mouffe’s decisive argument that her work is essentialist. On the second occasion, in her book (with Charles W. Mills) *Contract and Domination* (2007) in which Pateman devotes an entire chapter to a response to her critics, she only just barely touches on Mouffe. In this chapter, Pateman responds to two critiques of her asserted essentialism. First, some critics label Pateman’s arguments about patriarchy in her major feminist volume *The Sexual Contract* (1988) as essentialist on the grounds that, by considering patriarchy as historically necessary and unchangeable, she falls into pessimism and fatalism. Pateman reacts to this type of criticism by stating that she cannot understand why her arguments are misunderstood as essentialist; she insists that patriarchy is not natural and universal but historical and social (2007, p. 227). Second, Pateman also addresses critics that charge her with situating differences in biological sex as unchangeable. Here, she quotes Mouffe’s passage that states that Pateman “postulates the existence of some kind of essence corresponding to women as women,” as mentioned above. Pateman responds, saying that such critics confuse two different things: a political theorist’s analysis of conceptions of manhood and womanhood, and the theorist’s own views (2007, p. 228). The deeper point for our purposes, however, is that Pateman does not directly refute Mouffe’s critique. Arguably, for Pateman, critiques like Mouffe’s do not get to the heart of her own arguments.

So, what exactly is Pateman’s interest in feminism? More recently, in reflecting on her life-long study in political theory, Pateman noted that “democratization” is the backbone of her all work and that her contributions to feminist political theory are also situated as part of this broader interest. Here, Pateman uses democratization to denote the creation of a more democratic and more participatory political system (2014). Before her turn to feminism near the end of the 1970s, she “radically” criticized liberal democracy from the standpoint of participatory democracy. For Pateman, liberal democracy as it emerges in the form of a representative democracy with a huge bureaucratic system is nothing more than elite domination: because it fails to realize a relationship of “free and equal individuals.” Pateman conceives that any democracy based on consent among “free and equal individuals” can only be realized under participatory democracy because citizens’ political obligations should be to fellow citizens and not to the state or its representatives (1989, p. 62). As such, Pateman’s interests are in real individuals’ actual participation in decision-making, not that of abstract individuals in general. By the end of the 1970s, she came to realize that the permanent subjection of women to men precluded any democratic relationship between “free and equal individuals” (Yamada, 2009,
p. 104). Therefore, the realization of a relationship of “free and equal individuals” between men and women is at the core of Pateman’s thesis of intensified (or radical) democratization.

Today, Pateman admits that the feminist issues and environments in which women find themselves have changed since the 1960s when the so-called “second wave” of feminism flourished. However, she refuses to consider that the problems questioned in the second wave of feminism are now things of the past or that this second wave is now obsolete. Instead, Pateman insists that women continue to face the traditional problems she originally outlined: “authoritative positions in all areas of political, judicial and economic life are still dominated by men. They monopolize the more prestigious and higher paying occupations and earn more than women, who continue to do the bulk of the unpaid caring work; men remain free riders” (Pateman, 2014, p. iv). Certainly, women also grapple with other traditional problems including poverty, violence, and their unstable status as citizens, to name a few (Pateman, 2010; Pateman, 2011). Pateman’s views make evident that as a democratic theorist she is interested in the concrete problems women face, not necessarily in the development of feminist movements and/or thought. For her, the second wave of feminism made it clear that further democratization is necessary: democratization worthy of the name must involve the betterment of the status and circumstances of women.

This argument is evident in Pateman’s work in the 2000s on the notion of basic income and its relationship with democratization. Pateman suggests that debates about basic income tend to focus on questions such as social justice, poverty relief, equal opportunity, and the promotion of flexible labor markets instead of democracy. However, individual freedom—as autonomy or self-government—is central to democracy. To realize autonomy and self-government, individuals must become free and equal “citizens” with rights. Here, freedom is not simply a question of individual economic opportunity and participation in free and fair elections, but also a question of individual autonomy including the government in marriage or the workplace. Pateman states:

Self-government requires that individuals both go about their lives within democratic authority structures that enhance their autonomy and that they have the standing, and are able (have the opportunities and means), to enjoy and safeguard their freedom. A basic income—set at the appropriate level—is preferable...because it helps create the circumstances for democracy and individual self-government. (2004, p. 91)
Pateman also details the importance of basic income from the perspective of women's freedom. Basic income is often discussed as the problem of employment and the free riding of men, but the problem pertaining to the household is often ignored. The presupposition that “work” means only “paid employment” makes it such that full-time housewives are considered free riders. The public-private sexual division of labor—that is, the normalization of husbands as breadwinners and women as part-time workers who earn less than men—serves as a reinforcement of the patriarchal rationality that women must get married and men must be employed. Pateman argues that this amplifies the number of free riding husbands in the household (2004, pp. 98–99). Considering these ideas yields the sense that basic income may serve as a means by which women can realize the freedom to live without being employed and without getting married. In other words, basic income has the potential to democratize citizenship and open the door to a society in which women are respected as equal citizens. Near the end of the 1980s, Pateman had already made a similar point without using the term basic income. She expected that a guaranteed social income for all adults would break down the old dichotomies such as those between paid and unpaid work, full- and part-time work, public and private work, independence and dependence, and work and welfare—in short, those old dichotomies between men and women (1989, pp. 202–03).

By now, it should be clear that Pateman’s conception of the democratization of citizenship is very different from the differentiated citizenship between men and women that Mouffe criticizes. Pateman argues that basic income may be a means by which all individuals can become free and equal, insisting that a “right to a basic income is analogous to the right to vote—a democratic right of all citizens” (2008, p. 241). While Mouffe objects to Pateman’s statement “as women” mentioned above, it is reasonable to understand Pateman’s argument not as essentialist, but as evidence of her interest in the actual predicament of women in patriarchal liberal democracy and, moreover, in the realization of a real democracy in which both men and women are treated as equal citizens and women are not forced to become like men. Thus, it can be argued that the arguments of the two democratic theorists are at cross-purposes.

Young’s Inclusive Democracy

It appears that Young does not attempt to refute Mouffe’s critique of her conception of differentiated citizenship and a heterogeneous public. Rather,
Young’s argument takes a direction similar to that of Mouffe’s. For example, in the 1980s, Young presented the ideal of a “rainbow coalition” as what she calls a heterogeneous public. According to Young, traditional coalitions try to realize a unified public by suppressing any and all differences in perspective, interests, and opinions among diverse groups. Emerging against this norm, a rainbow coalition ideally “affirms the presence and supports the claims of each of the oppressed groups or political movements constituting it” and “arrives at a political program not by voicing some ‘principles of unity’ that hide differences but rather by allowing each constituency to analyse economic and social issues from the perspective of its experience” (Young, 1989, p. 265). Considering Young’s thoughts in the context of practical social movements clarifies that her theory is similar to Mouffe’s conceptions of democratic equivalence in her radical democracy.

For Mouffe, however, such a rainbow coalition is “only...a first stage towards the implementation of a radical democratic politics” (1993, p. 86). This is because it is premised on each social group having a fixed identity and therefore does not rearrange already established subject positions. Does this mean that Young considers group identity as fixed and permanent? No. Young points out that a social group should not be understood as an essence or as a nature: rather, group identity should be understood in relational terms. Specifically, she states:

As products of social relations, groups are fluid; they come into being and may fade away... Group identity may become salient only under specific circumstances, when in interaction with other groups. Most people in modern societies have multiple group identifications, moreover, and therefore groups themselves are not discrete unities. Every group has group differences cutting across it. (1989, p. 260)

John S. Dryzek also points out that Young is well aware of the problem of essentializing group identity, noting that “Young resists the use of the term ‘identity’ because it connotes an assertion of essential and unshakeable characteristics” (2000, p. 62).

Young’s notion of unfixed group identity and her affirmation of group representation mentioned above are compatible. Her conception of group representation neither presupposes a fixed identity for particular oppressed groups nor gives each of them the right to vote. Instead, she affirms group representation as an example of a concrete policy that enables public expressions of the needs and desires of oppressed social groups. To conceive that it might be possible to devise policies that consider differences between marginalized
and disadvantaged social groups is different from reading any differences between groups as evidence of their essences. Confusing both things would make theorists reject not only Young’s arguments, but also many other arguments such as those related to gender quotas that Anne Phillips has considered for many years (Phillips, 1995) in the name of essentialism.

How might we enable oppressed and disadvantaged social groups to express their perspectives, needs, desires, and experiences in the public sphere? This question incites Young’s discussion of communicative democracy, a theory she developed in the mid-1990s and 2000s under the influence of the so-called “deliberative” model of democracy. Despite this influence, Young is generally very critical about deliberative democracy and her concept of communication is similar to Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism. In what follows, I examine Young’s idea of inclusive democracy, a theory that she notably bases on her arguments about the politics of difference, by paying attention to the two aspects of her idea of communicative democracy: struggle and cooperation.

First, Young conceives of communication as struggle by stating:

I prefer to call to the normal condition of democratic debate a process of struggle. In a society where there are social group differences and significant injustice, democratic politics ought to be a process of struggle. Far from a face-off in enemy opposition, struggle is a process of communicative engagement of citizens with one another...The process of democratic struggle is an attempt to engage others in debate about social problems and proposed solution, engage them in a project of explaining and justifying their positions. (Young, 2000, p. 50)

Young criticizes deliberative democracy because many of its advocates presuppose not only a common good required for agreement, but also a specific mode of expression (e.g., argument, articulateness, and dispassionateness) as universal for deliberation, even though this common good and mode of expression are products of mainstream society (and, in this sense, not universal but particular). Consequently, for Young, deliberative democracy tends to exclude those who do not share such a common good and mode of expression. For political communication to work democratically in a structurally unjust mass society, such communication must be open to difference. Although Young does not deny agreement, she contends that all agreements are provisional and changeable. She notes that even if we normalize well-structured modes of deliberation, participants must still realize that conflict and disagreement are both part of the usual state of affairs (Young, 2000, pp. 36–44). Just before the quotation above, Young cites Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism and its division
of “enemy” and “adversary.” She quotes from Mouffe’s note that reads that “the opponent should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 4). Young clearly states that she aligns herself with political theorists like Mouffe who endorse the “agonistic” model of democracy (2000, p. 49). Here, struggle and conflict are part of agonistic democratic communication.

Another aspect of Young’s communicative democracy is cooperation. According to her, in a differentiated large-scale mass society, people do not share a common good but problems to solve. Therefore, Young states that a “useful way to conceive of democracy is as a process in which a large collective discusses problems such as these that they face together, and try to arrive peaceably at solutions in whose implementation everyone will co-operate” (2000, p. 28). What connects struggle and cooperation would be Young’s notion of “reasonableness,” which denotes a norm that people are willing to listen to others who want to explain to them why their ideas are incorrect or inappropriate, and are also willing to change their opinions or preferences as a result of respectful persuasion by others (2000, p. 24). The absence of a common good is the reason why such “reasonableness” is necessary. For Young, to be “reasonable” citizens means neither confining different needs, desires, or modes of expression to the private sphere by pretending a common good exists, nor acting in line with a way of argument that is merely a product of dominating social groups and regarding protests and demonstrations as uncivil and unreasonable. Instead, reasonable citizens would participate in “struggle,” a condition in which conflicting needs or interests are publicly expressed, and at the same time, engage each other in solving common problems through mutually hearing different voices (Young, 2000, pp. 27–30, 47–48). Young conceives of difference as a precondition of and a resource for democratic communication, not as its obstacle. The expression and sharing of different kinds of knowledge from different perspectives enrich practical wisdom for problem-solving (Young, 1989, p. 264; Young, 2002, p. 229). This process can be considered the cooperative aspect of communicative democracy.

As stated above, Young pursued inclusive democracy in which different, reasonable citizens struggle with each other to develop solutions for shared problems. Instead of refuting from the front Mouffe’s critique that her argument is essentialist in nature, she incorporates Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism into her elaboration of a communicative democracy based on her politics of difference (although Mouffe might reject interpretations of her “agonistic pluralism” as “communication”).
Japanese Responses to the Problem of Essentialism

The field of feminist political theory in Japan seems to be constituted by two types of theorists: political theorists who take feminism seriously⁵ and feminist political theorists.⁶ The latter type remains a minority. While it seems that no Japanese political theorists deny the importance of feminism as an example of the so-called “new social movements” (Touraine) today, many have failed to discuss democratic theory with an eye for feminism. This prevents feminist insights—significant intellectual sources of radical democracy—from enriching Japanese theories of democracy. Although, as mentioned, Mouffe is a very popular theorist of radical democracy in Japan, her feminist essay has hardly been closely examined by Japanese democratic theorists. Pateman has not attracted even feminist theorists, perhaps because her arguments are not that of the so-called “postmodern” kind. In contrast, several Japanese political theorists are interested in Young’s idea about difference and inclusion. While questions of essentialism have been considered in “contemporary thought” by sociologists and women’s studies scholars in Japan, I am able to find only a handful of discussions by Japanese political theorists about this difficult problem in feminism. Here, I examine the discussions of two Japanese political theorists, Tetsuki Tamura and Mikiko Etō.⁷

First, Tamura is a theorist who takes feminism seriously and an expert on deliberative democracy and issues surrounding basic income (thus, he is also a theorist of radical democracy in a broader sense). Tamura’s efforts to reconsider feminist issues in political theory involve many noteworthy facets such as the meaning of “politics” in feminism; the public/private dichotomy; a reconsideration of citizenship; gender quotas; and the relationship between the state, civil society, and the family. In this section, I concentrate on Tamura’s discussion of Young’s politics of difference. Tamura concisely examines Young’s notions of a heterogeneous public and group representation, and he briefly points out some weaknesses of her theory. Tamura raises two related questions about essentialism. First, he asks, “Can we categorize women as a group?” Tamura mentions that Young divides social groups into two categories—privileged and oppressed groups—and that she regards women as the latter. He

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⁵ Important works include Saitō (1992), Saitō (2008), and Tamura (2009).
⁶ There are several works by such theorists, including those of Etō (2017), Okano (2009), and Okano (2012).
⁷ Yayo Okano is another important Japanese feminist political thinker. I do not examine her works here because her discussions are not necessarily related directly to radical democracy, although her arguments on citizenship and the ethics of care are well worth considering (Okano, 2009; Okano, 2012).
wonders whether such a distinction between two groups can be strict, and whether various women with diverse social attributes, identities, and sexual orientations can be categorized in one particular group as “women” (2009, pp. 126–27). Second, he asks, “Is Young’s notion of group representation based on fixed groups?” Locating this fixed constitution as essentialist, Tamura quotes Mouffe’s critique of Young (mentioned above), arguing that Young’s “view is not so different from the interest-group pluralism that she criticizes” (2009, p. 127). Tamura was certainly familiar with Young’s developing discussion of communicative democracy in the 1990s in the wake of her original affirmation of group representation. Nevertheless, his criticism of essentialism is very similar to Mouffe’s.8

Second, Etō is a leading Japanese feminist political theorist who takes up essentialism in more detail. Etō examines debates on citizenship using feminist perspectives. She outlines three main feminist conceptions of citizenship. The first one is the conception of citizenship by maternalists,9 a group that situates “maternal thinking,” which traditionally confined women as second-class citizens in the private sphere, as a “civic virtue”—a woman’s contribution to her political community. The second is the gender-neutral conception of citizenship. According to Etō, the advocates of this conception, including Mouffe, strongly reject the introduction of maternal thinking into the conceptualization of citizenship because it is such a typical example of essentialism. Citizenship should not be based on a conception of manhood or womanhood, and women should be recognized as citizens not because they are mothers but because they are civic peers.10 The third is found in Pateman’s position. Considering these feminist conceptions of citizenship, Etō suggests that the maternalist conception is a retrogression of the history of citizenship on the one hand, while on the other, a gender-neutral conception ignores the sexual difference, which has historically produced inequality between women and men. Etō’s interpretation of Pateman’s conception of citizenship is neither maternalist nor gender-neutral, but yields the notion of “gender-differentiated citizenship”—a democratic citizenship that locates both women and men as full citizens without abandoning the values of women and men in their lives. For Etō, Pateman’s conception attempts to overcome both male-centered liberal citizenship and female-centered maternalist citizenship (Etō, 2003, pp. 26–28).

8 In his book on radical democracy, Chiba also expresses similar concerns about the nature of Young’s notion of groups as fixed, unified, and static (1995, p. 139).
9 Etō mentions Sara Ruddick and Jean Bethke Elshtain as examples of these thinkers.
10 Etō considers not only Mouffe but also Mary G. Dietz as theorists of this kind.
Etō criticizes liberal universalism for its anonymity in the name of generality, because the liberal notion of equality is based on abstract individuals who ignore tangible embodied experiences and attributes. Etō thus advocates for what she calls a “positive equality,” a posture that names particular social groups, attempts to identify discriminations against them that should be banned, and nurtures their equality (2017, pp. 117–18). From this perspective, we cannot avoid treating a particular collective of people as a “group” (e.g., “women”), a consequence that immediately introduces the problem of essentialism:

Essentialism is dangerous because women will be enforced to belong to a group, saying “if you are a woman, you should be a member of women as a group.” This not only restricts each woman’s free decision and choice, but also petrifies her identity. Categorization as women only because of their embodiment ignores various characteristics a woman possesses, and its consequence is stereotypization of women. (Etō, 2017, p. 132)

Is it possible to pursue “positive equality” without falling into essentialism? Raising this question, Etō refers to Young’s distinction between “group” and “seriality.” According to Young, a “group is a collection of persons that recognize themselves and one another as in a unified relation with one another. Members of the group mutually acknowledge that together they undertake a common project” (1997, p. 23). This means that members of a group are oriented towards the same goals and are united by action. On the other hand, unlike a group,

a series is a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects their actions are oriented around and/or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others...The unity of the series derives from the way that individuals pursue their own individual ends in respect to the same objects conditioned by a continuous material environment, in response to structures that have been created by the unintended collective result of past actions. (Young, 1997, pp. 23–24)

Here, the unity of a series is amorphous: no fixed attributes, no intentions. Etō stresses the importance of Young’s attempt to apply the concept of seriality to gender. A collective as women is not a group per se but a series in which the

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11 Young got the idea for this distinction from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason.*
members connect based on their embodiment as women and their place in the social structure, and not based on common purpose and/or any intentions. Furthermore, women as a series would become a group when they come to share common concerns and goals such as the realization of laws that would be effective in preventing sexual violence against women. When their purpose is achieved, the group returns to a series (Etō, 2017, pp. 134–35). Etō considers Young’s distinction between group and seriality and her insight of gender as seriality as significant because possibly Young’s insight articulates a way in which women can meaningfully emerge as a social collective without falling into essentialism.

Both Tamura and Etō refer to Young’s arguments, and it seems that Young has been accepted as a political philosopher of radical democracy by Japanese political theorists. However, even though Japanese feminists in general know well the serious dilemma of essentialism and constructionism, this does not mean that this issue is sufficiently discussed in Japanese political studies. Japanese political scientists performing empirical gender analyses of Japanese politics are often interested in how to increase the number of female politicians in Japan (e.g., Miura, 2016). Their arguments are frequently based on the idea of women’s underrepresentation (an idea that presumes that women recognize themselves as a politically meaningful collective). Those who take women’s actual hardships, difficulties, and disadvantages seriously would criticize anti-essentialism because they would think this idea renders women’s liberation movements impossible. Tamura and Etō also stress the importance of women’s substantial representation and the introduction of gender quotas in Japan (Tamura, 2009, chap. 5; Etō, 2017, chaps. 8–9). In addition, Etō admits the difficulties in solving the tension that exists between considering women as a collective—without which it would be impossible to conceive of a meaningful feminist politics—and collapsing into essentialism. However, the deeper point is that the dialogue between empirical feminist political scientists and feminist political theorists/philosophers has not been sufficient in Japan.12

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12 In December 2015, the Gender and Politics Specialist Group was established in the Japanese Political Science Association. Group members include both empirical political scholars and political theorists/philosophers interested in feminism and gender issues. Dialogue among them toward the development of Japanese feminist political studies can be expected. One important contribution of this group is Maeda (2019).
Conclusion

By examining Mouffe’s feminist essay in her theory of radical democracy, this paper revealed that arguments on essentialism between Mouffe and Pateman are at cross-purposes, and that Young developed her democratic theory in accordance with Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism. This paper also examined some examples of arguments on the problem of essentialism in feminism by Japanese political theorists. While the introduction of radical democracy into Japanese study of political theory stimulated discussions of the issues strongly related to feminism, the Japanese feminist political theory is still under-developed. Feminist discussions in Japanese study of political theory examine Western feminist political theory, meaning they are still at an early stage in which theorists introduce and absorb foreign feminist political theories into Japan rather than developing original Japanese feminist political theory to circulate in the world. (Of course, we admit that Japanese and Western theories share common issues in feminism, such as essentialism.) Needless to say, there are many studies on the history of Japanese women, history and characteristics of patriarchy in Japanese society and economy, and the history of Japanese women’s liberation movements. However, theorizing feminist political theory from the accumulation of these studies in Japan remains an urgent task, particularly for those interested in radical democracy in Japan.

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References


