

Beyond ‘the West as Method’: Repositioning the Japanese Education Research Communities in/against the Global Structure of Academic Knowledge

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Drawing on the recent critiques of the global knowledge economy of social science research, this article explores possible ways in which the Japanese education research communities can reposition themselves in the wider international education research community. The premises of this discussion are that there exists a global structure of academic knowledge and that Japanese education scholarship is deeply imbedded in this structure. Hence, repositioning is called upon so that alternative knowledge practice can be imagined to unsettle the structure. To develop this argument, the paper makes the following moves. First, it examines how the global structure of academic knowledge operates and how it has shaped the knowledge practices within Japanese education scholarship. It identifies the particular pattern of knowledge practices among Japanese education researchers, or what Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) calls ‘the West as method’—the use of ‘Western experience’ as the single point of reference against which the Japanese self and context are made intelligible. Based on this critique, the paper then explores how the Japanese education research communities can engage in the type of alternative knowledge practices and relations that unsettle the global structure of academic knowledge and what paradoxes they might have to negotiate in the process. In concluding, the paper once again turns to Chen’s work, in particular his exposition of ‘Asia as method’ to articulate possible strategies towards alternative knowledge work which recognizes the ambivalent epistemic location of Japanese education scholarship.

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Speaking as a ‘halfie’

As a Japanese education researcher trained in North America and currently based at an Australian university, I have always looked at the Japanese education research communities as an inside-outsider, or a ‘halfie’ (Abu-Lughod 1992). I am linguistically and culturally equipped to read and understand Japanese domestic scholarship while at the same time always being part of the English-language academic discussion which centres largely in the Anglo-American academic communities. If there is anything epistemically and ontologically significant about my positionality, it might be a set of vantage points arising from the “doubleness of knowing” (Hall in Hall & Sakai 1996, p. 363) that enable me to question the ‘doxa,’ the scholarly conventions and norms of both the Japanese and the so-called ‘international’ scholarly communities. I am familiar enough with both academic communities to move within them respectively, while also sufficiently outside of them that I can critically examine them both (Hall in Hall & Sakai 1996, p. 363–4). It is from this vantage point that I explore possible ways for the Japanese education research communities to reposition themselves in the wider international education research community.

In the following pages, I am going to approach this topic from a set of distinctive perspectives informed by the recent critiques of the global knowledge economy of social science research. Raising questions about the uneven structure of academic knowledge production which privileges the epistemologies of select Western scholars and institutions, this emerging literature forces us to re-examine how our academic knowledge practices and relations are positioned in relation to the unequal relations of knowledge production on the planetary scale. Recent calls for ‘global sociology’ (Patel 2014), ‘postcolonial sociology’ (Go 2013), ‘southern theory’ (Connell 2007) and ‘world anthropologies’ (Ribeiro & Escobar 2006) are some of the most notable manifestations of this intellectual shift wherein the Eurocentricity and metropolitan centricity of disciplinary knowledge are challenged to include alternative epistemologies from the global peripheries, or the ‘South.’

Hence, my discussion invites readers to consider academic knowledge practice in Japanese education scholarship in terms of its location within the global structure of academic knowledge. More specifically, I make two key arguments. First, I highlight the particular pattern of knowledge practices among Japanese education researchers, or what I call after Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) ‘the West as method’—the use of ‘Western experience’ as the single point of reference against which the Japanese self and context are made intelligible. This pattern largely reflects the global structure of academic knowledge in which Japan is positioned as one of the ‘semi-peripheral’ countries vis-à-vis the dominant academic powerhouse countries in social science and education such as the UK, the US and select European countries (Alatas 2006). The term ‘semi-peripheral’ adequately captures the contradictory location of Japan in the global knowledge structure: Japan is a rich ‘advanced’ country and flexes its intellectual muscle towards other marginalized countries through the provision of research scholarship and training and development aid projects, but at the same time its scholarly communities rely heavily on European and North American academic institutions for intellectual insights, directions and theoretical knowledge development.

However, the discussion of the global structure of academic knowledge must be adequately nuanced so as not to perpetuate the kind of deterministic view that rules out any possibilities for change (Connell 2007). The structure never determines what goes on inside; hence we need

to pay attention to spaces for alternative knowledge practices emerging within the system and consider how they can be extended and multiplied further. Indeed, advances in information technology have facilitated an unprecedented level of interactions among marginalized academic communities, countries and regions of the global South. This has created alternative flows of knowledge, or the so called 'South-South dialogue,' though it is true that various structural forces continue to work against its further development. Hence, my second argument addresses how the Japanese education research communities can engage in the type of alternative knowledge practices that disrupt the global structure of academic knowledge and what paradoxes they might have to negotiate in the process. Here I once again draw on Chen's work, in particular his exposition of 'Asia as method' to articulate possible strategies towards alternative knowledge work arising from the particular vantage point of Japanese education scholarship.

The global economy of knowledge and its consequences

As many scholars have pointed out (Alatas, 2006; Bhambra, 2007; Chen, 2010; Connell, 2007), social theory has grown out of the particular socio-political, geographical and temporal context of European modernity, and yet it has been applied to explain 'the Rest' of the world. In the foundational works of sociology such as Karl Marx and Max Weber, for instance, non-Western societies are characterized as 'deficient' of what a 'normal' modern society should exhibit (see Takayama 2016). Such negative characterizations of 'other' societies were created through the application of theoretical constructs specific to the conditions of European modernity and capitalism and the predicaments generated by them within which most of the sociological theorists lived. While it is true that a crude, Eurocentric caricature of the 'rest' is less visible in contemporary social science, the tradition of seeing non-Western societies through the categories developed in the Western theoretical powerhouses continues to permeate knowledge production in social science (see also Alatas 2006; Bhambra 2007; Chen, 2010; Go 2013).

The global structure of academic knowledge operates upon a clear division of intellectual labour. So-called 'theories' are produced in a handful of academic institutions of North America and part of Europe, leaving the production of social theories 'a distinguishing mark or even mission of the West' (Sakai, 2001, p. 74). In contrast, the 'rest' of the world provides 'raw' data upon which metropolitan theories are further extended for global reach and applicability. Indeed, according to Yoshio Sugimoto (2014), Japan has long served as "a productive space for testing—and potentially enriching and modifying—general sociological theories of Western origin" (p. 192). As a corollary of this knowledge practice, knowledge produced in the academic peripheries, including Japan, is deemed 'local' and 'provincial,' thus assumed unable to travel beyond the confine of specific localities and nationalities (Befu 2003; Chen 2010; Kuwayama 2004). Indeed, social theory as we know it today is "an ethno-sociology of metropolitan society" (Connell 2007, p. 226), in that the development of modern social theory has been largely based on the experiences and perspectives pertaining to European modernity, while suppressing "the colonial and imperial dynamics from the terminological toolkit of classical sociology" (Boatcă and Costa, cited in Go 2013, p. 33).

Intellectual dependency in the periphery academic communities has created the problem of 'bifurcation'—the complete separation of method and theory from data and application (Connell 2007). Theoretical knowledge—developed out of a particular intent of understanding

the key features of European modernity and its contradictions and its contemporary postmodern and globalized social conditions—is widely accepted as the ‘theories’ that supposedly explain the social conditions around the world. As a result, social science in many periphery countries becomes bifurcated, suffering from “a kind of epistemological drift where the society of the periphery comes to be understood as an imperfect extension of metropolitan modernity” (Connell 2011, p. 109). The bifurcated sociology of the periphery runs the risk of applying theoretical constructs that are not necessarily useful and as a result perpetuating an inaccurate and distorted understanding of social reality and self (Chen 2010). Furthermore, periphery sociologists’ desire to speak the ‘global language’ can further remove their analyses from the actualities of their local contexts, hence rendering them a purely academic exercise that has few implications for political struggles and policy development on the ground.

Education scholarship has been deeply imbedded within this global pattern of social science knowledge production. But this is not surprising, given that education as a discipline has always been in an inseparable relationship with the modernist project of nation building and its notion of ‘progress’ supposedly diffused from the ‘advanced’ West to the rest of the world (see Bhambra 2007 and Go 2013 for a critique of such a ‘diffusion’ thesis of modernity). Since the late 19th century formation of nation states and their modern education systems, learning from educational systems and scholarship in the ‘advanced’ West has been the key component of the modern nation-building project, and this was particularly the case in Meiji Japan. The tradition of looking to the West (UK and US in particular) in reforming Japanese education continues today, as the Japanese media, state officials, and education scholars closely follow educational trends and debates in these countries (Cummings 1986). While Japanese educational researchers perceive the UK and US education as the ‘standard’ and seek to borrow its techniques and ideas, the American and British counterparts perceive Japanese education and scholarship as ‘peculiar,’ as suited only to its cultural and social context, thus with little universal application to other contexts. For ‘advanced’ Western countries, educational theory and practice in “other” countries are “a subject of anthropological interest...but not the substance from which lessons can be applied at home” (Cummings 1986, p. 297).

Various types of ‘West as method’

In a manner that parallels the global structure of academic knowledge, education scholarship in Japan has been characterized by extensive reference to the educational experience and research in the Anglo-American countries, primarily the UK, the US, and a handful of European countries. However, a closer look suggests that there are several distinctive patterns in the way the West is referenced and consumed in Japanese education scholarship. First, Japanese scholars refer to UK and US experience to inform domestic debates over contested reform measures. This is often justified because many of the reform measures proposed by the government—such as constructivist curriculum reform, school choice, citizenship education and high-stake testing—have been introduced earlier in the UK and the US. Just to name some of the most notable examples, much of the debate over the controversial 2002 *yutori* curricular reform was framed through extensive references to US education reform of earlier decades and its supposed outcomes. Takehiko Kariya (2002), one of the leading critics of the reform at the time, drew upon a number of US studies suggesting how a similar curricular reform, driven

by the constructivist model of teaching and learning, had widened the existing socio-economic gap in student academic achievements in the US, hence warning of the similar undesirable consequences of the *yutori* curricular reform in Japan. Likewise, the extensive debate over school choice at the turn of the century among some of the leading Japanese education scholars (e.g. the Fujita-Kurosaki debate over school choice) was shaped through their extensive references to various school choice programs and evaluative studies and debates in the US. Hence, as best summarized by Shigeo Kodama (2013) who reviews US studies and debate on the No Child Left Behind legislation, "reviewing the trends in the US provides an extremely relevant case for our consideration of the current state and future of the ongoing problems" in Japanese education (p. 174).

The second type of 'West as method' takes a more explicitly comparative approach; it aims to particularize Japanese education through the act of binary contrasting with UK and US education. This type comprises two distinctly identifiable variations. First, the 'Western experience' is mobilized to denaturalize the taken-for-granted assumptions about Japanese education, with the West serving as a contrasting mirror image against which 'something peculiar' about Japanese education is exposed. Here, the researchers tend to take a relativistic stance in which Japanese peculiarities are appreciated without being subjected to any explicit value judgement. Takehiko Kariya (2009, 1995) constantly appropriates this comparative method to subject to critical scrutiny the widely-held and yet unspoken premises underpinning Japanese educational practices and institutional arrangements. In his most recent work, for instance, Kariya (2009) uncovers the different cultural and institutional logics of resource allocation in the US and Japan education systems. The key feature of the resource allocation strategies in the Japanese system, according to him, lies in its use of collective units (e.g., classroom and area) as the basic unit of resource distribution. Hence the Japanese system aims to achieve 'equality' by standardizing the learning environment and conditions under which the collective unit of students learn. This is contrasted to the US strategy in which student enrolment figures are used as the basic unit of calculation ('per head' allocation). This difference, according to Kariya, is also reflected in the contrasting pedagogic logics of these countries: US education is based on the recognition of individual differences, while its Japanese counterpart is characterised by the standardization of instruction and elimination of difference. There are many influential studies employing this 'West as method' strategy for denaturalization, including Yo Takeuchi's (1995) work on 'Japanese meritocracy,' Ryōko Tsuneyoshi's (2000, 1992) studies on the Japanese cultural logic of teaching and Misako Nukaga (2003)'s work on 'equity pedagogy' as enacted in Japanese schools, to name a few.

The other type of particularization is similar and yet different in that it goes further than contrastive relativisation; it tends to construct Japanese peculiarities as 'anomalies' to be rectified. In this sense the contrastive use of the West is much more politicized as it serves to 'scandalize' some aspect of Japanese education as a way of justifying a reform. This type of particularization/scandalization often appears in popular writings as I have discussed elsewhere (Takayama 2008). For instance, in comparing the media discourse on education policy matters in US and Japan, Kariya (2003, p. 150–151) points out that US media and politicians tend to discuss education policy matters as part of economic and social policy, a trend which he sees as reflecting the American belief in education as a vehicle for economic prosperity, equality and democracy. This is contrasted with Japanese media reporting, in which education policy matters are articulated in terms of mental and psychological problems faced by youth. Kariya's

key point is that the US-Japan contrast helps highlight the peculiar way in which education policy matters are framed in Japan. Nonetheless, it is obvious which style of reporting he sees as more appropriate, thus identifying the ‘anomaly’ of the Japanese reporting style which is to be corrected. Hidenori Fujita (2014, 1997) is another influential scholar who relies heavily on the US experience as a device for domestic scandalization. In his latest book, for instance, he projects the image of US education policy development (e.g., NCLB and Race to the Top) as consistent in its focus on educational equity and then contrasts it to the lack of equivalent policy focus in Japanese education (Fujita 2014, p. 130). Notably, these studies tend to resort to a rather romanticized representation of the US as a way to justify their criticisms of the lack they identify in Japanese education.

While the studies thus far reviewed use a form of explicit national comparison, others engage in a much more implicit form of ‘comparison’; they draw upon theoretical tools developed in North America and Europe in framing their analyses of Japanese education and their research findings. To name a few, recent publications by some of the leading Japanese scholars draw upon Michael Young’s ‘meritocracy’ (Hirota 2015; Kodama 2013), Phillip Brown’s ‘parentocracy’ (Mimizuka 2007), Brian Turner’s social functions of education and Weber and Durkheim’s analyses of state formation and the role of public education in its process (Nakazawa 2014), and Basil Bernstein’s discussion of visible and invisible pedagogy and his performance and competence models and Jill Bourne’s conceptualization of ‘radically visible pedagogy’ (Kodama 2013). Indeed, many Japanese scholars translate the latest theoretical works published primarily in the UK and US, and it is through the experience of translation that they acquire theoretical tools for their analyses of Japanese education. Yoshiyuki Kudomi (2011) states in the postscript to the Japanese translation of Basil Bernstein’s work that ‘most of my own theoretical tools in recent years for the analysis of Japanese education have been gained through this translation work’ (p. 383).

The extensive borrowing of theoretical tools developed in North America and Europe is not a surprise, given the highly Eurocentric history of the evolution of sociology as a discipline and its branch, the sociology of education. Indeed, Japanese sociology “has a lengthy history of being subject to the domination of imported Western ideas” (Sugimoto 2014, p. 202), and the same trend is clearly observable in the Japanese sociology of education where Michael Apple, Pierre Bourdieu, Basil Bernstein, Emile Durkheim, Geoff Whitty and Michael Young, to name a few, are extensively cited and their major works translated into Japanese. Of course, this does not necessarily suggest Japan’s intellectual dependency because some, if not all, Japanese scholars do critically engage with the ‘imported’ theoretical tools. And indeed, translation can be a creative, imaginative and generative act of intellectual engagement as will be discussed shortly. But it is still legitimate to ask to what extent these sociological concepts, developed in the particular temporal, cultural and socio-political context of Western modernity to analyse its education system and its contradictions, are actually useful to make sense of the Japanese experience.

Problematizing ‘the West as method’

To be sure, the pervasive use of ‘the West as method’ may impose a set of methodological limitations on Japanese education scholarship. First, as discussed earlier, many of the studies

that resort to the binary contrast between US and Japan justify their use of 'US experience' as a way of uncovering 'Japanese peculiarities.' While relativisation and denaturalization are part of the well-established rationale for comparative research in education, it is important to remind ourselves that the binary contrast between Japan and the West is the key discursive trope of *nihonjinron*, Japanese cultural nationalism (see Takayama 2011a). What is erased through the repeated acts of binary contrasting is the socially constructed nature of the 'Japanese peculiarities' thus constructed; they are produced through a particular kind of binary comparison where differences between Japan and the US are construed as Japanese particularities. It is entirely legitimate, therefore, to ask what the particular features of Japanese education might look like when compared to non-US, non-UK and non-Western education systems and pedagogic practices, say, Brazilian, Indian or Korean. Very different features of Japanese particularities could emerge from such comparisons, potentially allowing Japanese researchers to develop a different understanding of their own education system. Therefore, the ironic consequence of these genuine and yet overly-repeated attempts to relativize Japan through binary comparison with the West is that it actually fixes—as opposed to denaturalizing—a particular understanding of Japanese education while freezing the binary constitution of 'national differences.'

Second, what underpins the constant use of 'Western experience' as a point of reference is the presumption of 'sameness'; the assumption that the context of education systems is 'similar enough' between Japan and, say, the US so that the 'US experience' provides useful lessons for Japan. Here, Japan is implicitly conceived as a natural 'extension' of the US or UK education policy landscapes, so much that historical, cultural and institutional differences do not affect the relevance of Western experience to education policy development and scholarship in Japan. Though many Japanese education scholars recognize more cultural, historical and institutional similarities between Japanese education and other East Asian education systems, they continue to look to the UK and US as the sources of relevant ideas and theories. This practice tacitly accepts, therefore, the 'universal' relevance of education research and policy experience generated in the UK and US, which in return has the effect of positioning Japanese educational knowledge as 'parochial' and 'particular.'

But not all Japanese education researchers 'import' in a reductive and simplistic manner the analytical constructs developed elsewhere in their analyses and discussions of Japanese education. In fact, many, if not all, have attempted to critically engage with them and would have contributed considerably to the theoretical and conceptual development of English-language 'international' scholarship, had their works been published in English. By 'rubbing' the borrowed theoretical constructs against the specificities of Japanese education, these scholars often point to the gap between the theory and social reality, hence implicitly identifying the specifically located nature of those 'universal' theoretical constructs. For instance, the aforementioned Nukaga's (2003) comparative analysis of 'equity pedagogy' as enacted in US and Japanese classrooms not only allows us to question how it is practiced in Japanese schools; it also exposes the particularities and the possible limitations of how US-based scholars theorize 'equity pedagogy.' Likewise, many scholars working closely with *buraku* schools in Osaka (e.g. Ikeda 1996) have long attempted to refine and extend the theoretical development in the new sociology of education around the so-called 'reproduction theory' and 'theory of resistance.' Their work effectively translates the theoretical frameworks developed in the US and UK into a more clinically-oriented discourse of schooling, resulting in a new framework for how schools can be reconstituted to ensure minoritized students' academic achievement (e.g. Ikeda 1996).

To what extent do Japanese education research communities suffer from the aforementioned problem of ‘bifurcation’ said to be prevalent among sociological communities in periphery countries? On the one hand, one can argue that Japanese researchers’ tradition of importing and refining Western theoretical constructs, or the work of ‘translation,’ has come at the cost of intellectual originality. Certainly this criticism can apply to some corners of Japanese education scholarship wherein Western theoretical tools are applied rather unreflexively without careful attempts to ‘rub them against’ the specificities of the social context particular to Japanese education. When researchers approach such theoretical constructs while leaving the “ex-nomination of British [and American] distinctiveness unspoken and unaccounted for” (Turner cited in Takayama 2016, p. 76), they are likely to perpetuate the problem of bifurcation. On the other hand, as discussed above, some Japanese education scholars demonstrate their heightened reflexivity towards the universalist premises of social theories and subject the ex-nomination of British and American distinctiveness in theories to critical scrutiny. In so doing, they generate insights that would have enabled them to speak back to the debate in the centre of the theoretical development, had their writings been translated into English.

While intellectual dependency no doubt characterizes the Japanese education scholarship to a degree, it is also true that Japan enjoys a highly-developed scholarly tradition and an extensive network of Japanese-language scholarly publication outlets. This allows Japanese-using scholars to engage in debates over ‘imported’ theoretical constructs within their own closed circle. They actively introduce Western theoretical constructs either through the translation of the original European or English-language scholarship or their own selective readings of such works. And yet these are consumed within the closed circle of the Japanese-using scholars, with their critiques and debates never reaching back to where they originate. This creates a fertile ground for the art of re-contextualization; the theoretical constructs are retranslated and reconfigured as they are inserted into the specificities of Japanese education and its scholarly discourse. In a sense, this relative ‘insularity’ of Japanese scholarship has shielded them from the extreme problem of bifurcation experienced by other periphery countries, including former colonies where English is used as the language for academic work. The Japanese scholarly discourse is shaped in parallel to the scholarly trends of the English-using international community, yet without being completely subsumed by it.

What takes place behind Japanese education researchers’ reliance on Western theoretical constructs, then, is the work of ‘translation.’ The relatively enclosed nature of their scholarship communities allows the creative disarticulation of these theoretical constructs from the original scholarly discourse of the West. As Anthony Elliott, Masataka Katagiri and Atsushi Sawai (2013) rightly point out in their review of the historical development of Japanese sociology, the art of translation characterizes the modern history of Japanese social science, in which Western social theories have been constantly imported and adapted for the analysis and critique of modern-day Japan. Here, these authors distance themselves from the pejorative definition of translation as ‘mimicking’ which suggests a lack of originality. Instead they view it as “an act of intellectual or cultural innovation” (p. 12); the act of “importing and adapting Western social theories into Japanese” is inherently “reflexive, playful, pluralistic, decentered and eclectic” (p. 12). Certainly this applies to some corners of Japanese education scholarship, including many reviewed in this article.

While it is important to acknowledge the creative and generative potentials of translation, the fact of the matter still remains: that is, it does little in troubling, let alone reversing, the

unidirectional intellectual influence on a global scale. Rather, the unqualified celebration of translation could further reinforce the intellectual marginality of Japanese education scholarship, permanently positioning it as the receiving end of social theory developed elsewhere. Furthermore, it leaves unaddressed the fact that the quality critical insights that Japanese scholars produce in relation to Western theoretical scholarship stay largely within Japanese-language academic discourse. As a result, their insights with considerable theoretical implications remain unrecognized and the uneven knowledge relationship within 'international' education scholarship remains unchallenged. These limitations perpetuate the partiality of 'theories,' setting limits on the kind of epistemic contribution that the proposed translation work could make towards unsettling the global structure of academic knowledge.

'Asia as method' and paradoxes

The issues thus far identified are not particular to Japanese social science and education scholarship, according to Chen (2010). The same intellectual tendency has been observed among Asian countries, particularly among East Asian nations where he argues that "'the West as method' has become the dominant condition of knowledge production" (p. 216). These countries underwent during their postwar histories considerable cultural, economic and military intervention by the US. Part of the US Cold War regional strategy in Asia was to disrupt the political and economic alliances among Asian countries so that the US could maintain its hegemonic position in the region. When the economic and political survival of these countries relied heavily upon their bilateral relationship with US, it had the effect of disrupting any attempt to create regionally based alliances and co-operation, which could have undermined the US hegemony in the region. As a result, maintains Chen, "knowledge production in the region has been heavily influenced by the US academy ever since the end of the Second World War" (p. 120). The cause for the US intellectual hegemony in Asia may be much more multifaceted, with nationalism in Asia, for instance, disrupting the regional intellectual exchange and collaboration. Nonetheless, there is no denying that US Cold War geopolitics contributed to the intellectual dominance of the US in Japanese social science, as argued by Elliott, Katagiri & Sawai (2013). This has resulted in Asian academics pursuing a particular kind of comparison, that "between Euro-American theory and our local experiences" (Chen 2010, p. 226).

As a way to move beyond 'the West as method' problem, Chen calls for Asian researchers to "leave America for Asia" (p. 120). The task for what he calls, after Yoshimi Takeuchi, the 'Asia method' is not to take the path of 'politics of resentment' against the West and its knowledge but to shift the point of reference from the West to Asia. In Chen's (2010) words, the task for Asia as method is to redefine Asia "as an imaginary horizon for comparison" and "to multiply frames of reference in our subjectivity and world-view, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward" (p. 223). For this to materialize, Chen continues, scholars in Asia need to begin "multiplying the sources of our readings to include those produced in other parts of Asia" (p. 255). Here the West is not categorically rejected but rather redefined, not as the only source of useful knowledge—but as "one cultural resource among many others" (p. 223)—for educational practice, theory and policy making in Asia. More useful ways of understanding ourselves and our own societies, which "have lain dormant, mainly because our points of reference have been the United States and Europe" (p. 243), can

be rejuvenated by the strategy of inter-referencing that Chen proposes, a strategy of multiple points of reference within Asia.

Chen's proposal offers several implications for the ways in which the Japanese education research communities can explore alternative knowledge practices so as to reposition themselves vis-à-vis the global structure of academic knowledge. First, the idea of inter-referencing within Asia helps Japanese education scholarship break away from the tradition of 'West as method' and the static self-perception generated from the incessant contrasting with the West. Furthermore, to shift the point of reference to Asia makes both empirical and epistemic sense, given the similar historical experience among Asian (East Asian in particular) countries of the postwar developmentalist state regimes, the so called 'compressed modernity,' the particular articulation of meritocracy in education systems where individual aspirations for upward social mobility are closely aligned to the economic and political needs of the states, the strong political and economic ties with the US and its powerful cultural, intellectual and educational influences, the long history of democratic educational movements organised around oppositions to any of these attempts to subordinate education to the state's economic and political needs, and lastly the lingering Confucian cultural heritage.

Second, Chen's call for Asia as method suggests a crucial role that the Japanese education communities can play in facilitating the kind of regionally-based alternative knowledge movements advocated here. As the former imperial power and an economic powerhouse, Japan continues to exercise a degree of cultural and intellectual hegemony in the region, as evidenced in the large number of international students drawn from the region. Well connected with universities across Asia, Japanese universities are well equipped with both the institutional and intellectual resources to act as the conduit for the development of Asia-focused inter-referencing networks. However, this strategy needs to be pursued with some caution. Most problematically, it can easily slip into the century-old Japanese imperial ambition for regional hegemony in which Japan viewed itself as the anti-Western-imperialist leader in the past and today positions itself as the regional economic and political leader. The task is to de-centre Japan in the emerging development of inter-referencing networks within Asia and reposition the Japanese education communities as one of the 'nodes' in the region through which more relevant and useful knowledge can be generated.

Third, the call for 'Asia as method' forces us to rethink the current knowledge-producing relationship that Japanese education researchers develop with their Asian research partners. This relationship has been characterized by the perception of Asia as a source of data and local knowledge, as opposed to an intellectual resource for theoretical insights. Here, the distinction between 'epistemic other' and 'empirical other' is useful (see Takayama 2016). In a sense, Asian international students and Asian education research communities have been defined as the 'empirical other' from which data are extracted for analyses, while little attention has been given to the intellectual work they produce which could potentially contribute to theoretical development. This reconceptualization should encourage Japanese education scholars to imagine different knowledge practices and relations with Asian 'others.'

Lastly, it is important to point out that Chen's discussion of Asia as method does not rule out the role of 'Western experience' in the constitution of the inter-referencing networks in Asia. In fact Chen recognizes that 'Western experience' (theoretical knowledge and English language) can "serve as a common referent for us to use in beginning conversations with each other" (Chen 2010, p. 227). Indeed, familiarity with Western theoretical knowledge can constitute a

shared discursive space for Asian scholars to meet, given that Western knowledge has influenced the development of social science and education scholarship around the world. Because of the long tradition of importation and translation of ideas from Western scholarship, the Japanese education communities are well placed to facilitate the dialogue among Asian scholars about various 'translations' of Western theoretical constructs into their own national and local contexts. Out of this conversation can emerge divergent intellectual paths—particular to their shared cultural, historical and institutional context of East Asia—that both connect with and disconnect from the intellectual discourse of the West.

However, Chen's positioning of Western experience as a meeting place does create a set of paradoxes, as well. This is because his proposal clearly reflects his own positionality within Taiwanese academia, where those with Western experience are privileged over those who were domestically trained. While the designation of Western experience as a shared discursive space does address the pragmatic issues around communicating through linguistic differences within Asia, it has the potential to privilege a particular group of academics who are versed in Western theoretical knowledge and equipped with English language competency, most likely those who have been trained in Western institutions like Chen himself. Here we should be reminded that many non-Western scholars who received their scholarly training in Western institutions tend to be privileged in relation to their 'home' population and often disconnected from local scholarship (Shome 2009). Hence, Chen's idea of perceiving 'Western experience' as a 'common ground' could further reinforce unequal relations within the Asian academic communities. Furthermore, it must be noted that the proposed trans-Asia dialogue takes place, at least initially, through the mediation of the theoretical language of the West. Here, we need to be reminded that communication via the theoretical language could further prevent more substantive mutual understanding of the specificities of East Asian context (see Ge cited in Takayama 2016), unless the West is quickly decentred in the inter-referencing networks.

In sum, none of the strategies discussed here will work as a 'panacea,' and they will all come with a set of paradoxical consequences. However, at least one thing should be clear from the above discussion: What should underpin all these suggested initiatives is a clear recognition of the ambivalent epistemic location of Japanese scholarship within the global economy of academic knowledge. The contradictory location, resulting from the semi-periphery status of Japanese scholarship vis-à-vis the Western powerhouses of social science and educational knowledge, must be recognized as a critical epistemic resource enabling them to critique with other Asian researchers the universalistic premises of metropolitan knowledge and its epistemic parochialism. Just as in the rest of Asia, Japanese scholars have developed a double consciousness, living "a dual existence between the particular and the universal" (Sugimoto 2014, p. 204). The paradoxes inherent in working within, without or against the Western theoretical paradigm are commonly shared by Asian scholars. They all experience the complex challenges of intellectual marginality and dependency, bifurcation, nativist rejection of Western theoretical knowledge and the art of translation. But all these issues paradoxically constitute the basis of a distinct epistemic standpoint characterizing the periphery scholarly communities in Asia. Though this shared epistemic ground is often disrupted and obscured by Japan's desire for cultural and intellectual hegemony in Asia and by nationalism in Asia, when fully recognized and appreciated it can be the starting point of dialogue from which a robust critique can be mounted against the continuing division of labour in educational knowledge and the epistemic ignorance of the centre.

Towards a new reflective dialogue

I have explored different ways in which the Japanese education research communities could reposition themselves in relation to the global structure of academic knowledge. Clearly Japanese education scholars' knowledge practices have been shaped by the distinct patterns of knowledge production characterized by the global division of intellectual labour, the unilateral flow of intellectual influence and the prevalent use of the 'West as method' in the peripheries. I have drawn upon Chen's notion of 'Asia as method' to explore some of the ways in which the Japanese education research communities might be able to begin to initiate different ways of organizing their knowledge practices and relations so as to unsettle the global structure of academic knowledge.

But calling for others to act is much easier than actually putting it into practice. As I have discussed elsewhere (see Takayama 2011b), my own scholarship in the last decade or so has been deeply shaped by the global economy of academic knowledge; much of my work has looked at Japanese education from a distinctive theoretical perspective developed outside Japan. Indeed, I have treated Japan as an empirical 'case' which was then used as a testing ground for theoretical refinement and critique. This sort of scholarship does have its legitimate place in current academia, and to be perfectly honest I continue to engage in this line of scholarship, albeit with a more acute sense of reservations. It is only in the last few years that, influenced by postcolonial, decolonial and Southern theory projects, I have begun to critically reflect upon my own scholarship and to start pursuing different knowledge practices and relations in my own research work (see Takayama 2015). This shift has led me to pay close attention to how Japanese education researchers engage with the empirical and theoretical knowledge produced elsewhere in their discussion of Japanese education. What is presented in this paper is a culmination of my particular reading of Japanese education scholarship over the past several years.

There has been a considerable reflective conversation about what has constituted 'post-war' in Japanese education scholarship. Many scholars have critically assessed and proposed ways to break away from the continuing legacy of the postwar/coldwar political discourse in Japanese education scholarship. Perhaps a similar reflective conversation is in order around the continuing legacy of the century-old tradition of 'catching up with the West,' a clear manifestation of colonial mentality in Japanese education scholarship. Though the 'catch up' phase was officially declared to be over by the late 1980s in the Japanese education policy discourse, scholarship continues to operate under its spell, relying heavily on the West as the sole point of reference. Clearly, the 'catch up' discourse has penetrated deeply into Japanese education scholarship and its knowledge practices to such an extent that its pervasive use of 'the West as method' remains virtually unquestioned. The proposed strategies towards 'Asia as method' are perhaps too experimental, and indeed enacting them can result in a set of paradoxical consequences. But such is the predicament of postcoloniality. It is hoped that my explorative discussion will serve as a modest beginning for the much needed reflective dialogue about yet another postwar legacy that Japanese education scholarship needs to grapple with and eventually leave behind.

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