

Cultural-Moral Difference in Global Education: Rethinking Theory and Praxis via Watsuji Tetsurô¹

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One important task in internationalizing Japanese education is educating Japanese citizens to become “global citizens.” This paper is a philosophical analysis of how Global Education deals with the problem of cultural-moral difference (moral conflict that arises between different cultures). The usual approaches taken in Global Education and Kokusai Rikai Kyōiku are a mix of cultural relativism and moral anti-relativism. Teachers often take one of the following strategies to dismiss cultural-moral difference: utilitarianism, absolutized human rights, rational justification, or “two-layer” approaches (suggested by Will Kymlicka). But these fail to balance the need for both openness to the other and moral engagement. As an alternative, I discuss Watsuji Tetsurō’s search for moral unity in the empty dynamic of individualization and harmonization that is then expressed as culture. This unity is sought through a “hermeneutics of moral action,” which considers how people are emplaced in multiple relational contexts in space and time. I sketch how this can be applied through a class on “Ethics across Cultural Difference.” This alternative (Buddhist-Confucian) approach thus suggests a second sense of internationalizing Japanese education—using Japanese traditional theories to provide solutions for a global problem.

Keywords: Global Education, Moral Education, Citizenship Education, Japanese Philosophy, Ethics of Education

1. Introduction

One of the key aspects of internationalizing Japanese education is the project of educating Japanese students to become “global citizens.” Different approaches to this education

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have different foci—learning to speak in English, awareness of global issues, economically valuable skills for “global human resources” (*gurôbaru jinzai*), cultural understanding, et cetera. However, one crucial but somewhat neglected issue is the *moral* conflict that arises between different cultures (hereafter “cultural-moral difference”). As Will Kymlicka notes, “Conflicts rooted in rival perceptions of good and evil may be even more destructive and intractable than conflicts rooted in conflicting material interests.” (Sullivan and Kymlicka, 2007, p. 2) How can students cooperate with people from other cultures, if secretly they are *morally affronted* by the traditions of others? We might teach about shared global issues, about superficial and exotic cultural differences (like food, clothing, and festivals), but beneath all that lies a depth of cultural difference that is difficult to comprehend and accept.

In this paper, I will explore an alternative approach to moral difference in global education. I will begin with the state of the field and the common attitudes toward these differences. Then, after exploring some limitations of these approaches, I will examine how Japanese ethicist Watsuji Tetsurô might offer an alternative way of thinking about this problem. Finally, I will *sketch* the application of these theories through a class entitled “Ethics across Cultural Difference.”

2. Current Approaches to Moral Relativism in Global Education

There are many discourses that refer to education that reaches across cultural difference. In the Anglosphere, we have Global Education, Global Citizenship Education, Multicultural Education, and Moral Education. In Japan, we have *Kokusai Rikai Kyôiku* (KRK, education for international understanding), *Ibunkakan Kyôiku* (intercultural education) and multicultural education (both as an academic field, *Tabunka Kyôiku*, and the various movements within it: *Dôwa Kyôiku*, *Kaihô Kyôiku*, *Minzoku Kyôiku*, *Jinken Kyôiku*) (see Tsuneyoshi, Okano, & Boocock, 2011, pp. 12-13). In this introduction, I will focus on Global Education and KRK, which highlight experiences of cultural difference from *outside* one’s own culture (but whose insights are easily applied to differences within a nation-state).

Global Education and KRK both refer to the various forms of education that seek to awaken students to their belonging and participation within a world of global connections and global issues. However there are many contested approaches and ideologies in this. Graham Pike (Arthur, Davies, & Hahn, 2008, p. 469) suggests two main divisions: Conservative global education “promotes relatively superficial understanding of other cultures, an uncritical and self-centred acceptance of the nature of interdependence and a belief in progress through unbridled economic growth.” In contrast, reformative global education “emphasizes ethical concern for victims of injustice, equitable sharing and sustainability of global resources, social and political activism, and a critical and empowering pedagogy.”

Cultural-moral difference is generally *not* a concern for conservative global education. However, not even reformative global education deeply engages this problem. For example, the sizable *The SAGE Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy* (2008) briefly mentions moral relativism but once, in a critique of communitarianism (Arthur et al., 28).

However, when one examines the history and practice of Global Education, one finds that cultural-moral difference is a pressing problem. William Gaudelli (2003, p. 15) points out that in 1986, Global Education was accused of being “relativistic/nihilistic with regard to

moral issues,” showing public concern over this issue. Furthermore, Gaudelli dedicates an entire chapter to depicting the perplexity of teachers as to how to balance respecting other cultures and not abandoning moral reasoning altogether, when dealing with contentious practices like female genital mutilation or “accepted” domestic violence. Many teachers in his study either avoid this problem or appeal to moral universalism—teachers accept *cultural* difference, until it crosses a *moral* line of violating human rights or causing harm.

This is very similar to the state of affairs in Japan with KRK. Despite the presence of a long tradition of communitarianism and moral particularism in Japanese thought, the few discussions of cultural-moral difference tend to be morally universalist. For example, in discussing cultural difference, Tadokoro Kiyoshi (2014) pushes for the importance of cultural relativism, but when discussing infanticide in Papua New Guinea, he abruptly shifts to universalism: “What we can understand from this example is that the principle [of cultural relativism] is not necessarily an absolute theorem. In the contemporary world, when the right of people to survive, the right to life, is threatened, one tends to prioritize this human right over the demands of culture” (my translation). One sees similar approaches in Yoneda, Ôtsu, Tabuchi, Fujiwara, & Tanaka (1997, ch. 2), and in Ninomiya’s (2007, p. 46) textbook on citizenship education as well. This absolutization of human rights may result from KRK having emerged from UNESCO’s Education for International Understanding, a program that is heavily focused on human rights education.²

In order to have a clearer view of attitudes educators take, we examine the approaches of philosophers James Rachels, Steven Lukes, and Will Kymlicka, in their very influential views against moral relativism. Rachels (200s, p. 26-28) explains away relativism using *utilitarianism*, suggesting that particular moral rules are prescriptions necessary for the existence of society and for promoting the welfare of people. Thus, harm to individuals and to society can be the measure of ethics across cultures.

Lukes (2008, pp. 133) has a much more detailed argument where he argues for a deep understanding of culture without reducing culture to a static, monolithic construct. But he argues for a two-part moral universalism beneath cultural differences. The first part is a developed form of Rachels’ utilitarian approach—Martha Nussbaum’s capability theory, which looks at a wider range of human capabilities other than mere survival of the individual or the group, as a basis for judging right and wrong. The second part is from Jürgen Habermas, where he sees the need for people to be able to *justify* their moral beliefs to each other.

Finally, Kymlicka provides the most sophisticated model. He is critical of applying any one ethical tradition as “global ethics.” He is *also* critical of merely using human rights as a purportedly neutral global ethics. “For some people, the human rights framework is a lightly disguised form of Western liberalism. It purports to be the product of an international consensus, but in fact reflects distinctly Western ideas about the individual as a rights-bearing agent who needs protection from society and the state” (Sullivan & Kymlicka, 2007, p. 3). (“Some people” here is referring in particular to certain groups from Confucian and Islamic traditions.)

Instead of championing one moral tradition or one “constructed” tradition (human rights), Kymlicka suggests a “two-level” approach:

A third option, therefore, is to think about global ethics as a two-level phenomenon. At one level, we have a self-standing international discourse, such as human rights, that seeks to define a minimum set of standards agreeable to all. At the second level, we

have a multiplicity of different ethical traditions, each of which has its own account of what more, or what else, is needed above and beyond human rights. (Sullivan & Kymlicka, 2007, p. 4)

Kymlicka is not disposing of human rights, but seeing it as a *bare minimum* that is adjusted through rational discourse in an international setting. However, there is much more that this minimum cannot cover—a moral richness that particular cultures alone can cover, and for which they deserve respect. This view comes closest to balancing universalism and relativism.

We can distill the above into four main approaches to dealing with moral difference: utility, absolutized human rights, justification, and two-layer approaches. (These approaches can overlap, as we see between Lukes and Kymlicka.) Concretely, how is each used, and what are its limitations?

An example for the utilities approach is when teachers try to explain away a controversial act by explaining how, in that context, the act actually *benefits* the people involved. We see this in Tadokoro (2014) and in Gaudelli's (2003, p. 95) description of "Mrs. Finberg." However, one major limitation of this view is, who decides what is "benefit" and what is "harm?" The notion of biological survival of individuals and groups as the sole criterion of "benefit" is clearly modernist, and many religious societies value purity and honor over survival (see Shweder 1991.) Hence what constitutes harm in a tribe in Papua New Guinea and in western medicine can be clearly incompatible. Can we really declare whose definition of harm is correct?

The absolutized human rights approach can be found in Audrey Osler and Hugh Starkey's (2005) approach to Global Citizenship Education, which states: "As teachers we are likely to find our everyday professional lives easier to manage if we have firm principles on which to base our judgements and decisions. . . . These transcendent values are expressed in declarations and conventions on human rights" (p. 21). Human rights are taken as absolute, as "firm principles" and "transcendent values." This approach often overlaps with the previous utility approach, where teachers assert that the denial of rights automatically constitutes a "harm." The problem with this approach is that it denies the politicality, historicity, and overall complexity of the idea of human rights. As Kymlicka has mentioned, rights were the result of incomplete political agreement. Thus, some have argued that rights have a western, liberal, even Judeo-Christian bias. (For example, see Mori, 2015, pp. 200. Mori strongly advocated for rights-based education *while* conceding this bias.) In order to make rights more inclusive, they have been revised and appended repeatedly, and it appears unlikely that this process of political renegotiation will ever be complete. Finally, even if we came up with an exhaustive list of human rights that everyone agreed with, different cultures *justify* these rights differently through an *overlapping consensus*. Even in its best form, rights cannot easily become the firm, transcendent absolutes that educators and theorists may mistake them to be.

The justification approach is employed when teachers do not necessarily offer a clear criterion for right vs. wrong, but instead have people of differing views discuss and hopefully come to some tentative conclusion. Ninomiya (2007, ch. 3) suggests such an approach. Interestingly, he suggests that when students debate about ethics, it is not the resolution that matters but the process of coming to terms with the other. This resonates with Gaudelli's application of care ethics to cultural-moral difference. Instead of learning a principle-based

morality, one learns to care for many different kinds of others by talking with them and engaging their lived context. This is a promising approach, but one problem that remains is the parameters of “justification.” If people have differing views of harm and benefit, the “rational” justification Lukes expects is not possible. Perhaps a “reasonable” (but not rational) dialogue is possible, but it must keep in mind the impossibility of this rational closure.

Finally, a fourth approach is Kymlicka’s two-level approach. Teachers can employ this by valuing and protecting the preservation of human rights, but also exploring elements that go beyond human rights—how people find a sense of transcendent meaning, different modes of relating with others, et cetera. One limitation, however, is that this approach does not fully overcome the critique of human rights posed above. Furthermore, on the “second” level of culture, there seems to be no room for deep, moral exchange to occur between cultures. It is as if outside of the shared universal ground of rights, all we have are particular manifestations that, while important, are disconnected and irrelevant to the ways of life of others.

Simple universalism is untenable for Global Education—without considering the intricacies of culture, it degenerates into Imperial Education. But simple relativism is also untenable—it would imply that we leave others to their lot, making it impossible for us to criticize others on moral grounds, or to participate in the moral struggles of other cultures. I argue that Global Education requires an engagement with others that is at once respectful of culture but morally critical, and for this we need an alternative approach.

3. An Alternative Theoretical Framework

For such an alternative, I turn to Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960), the leading ethicist of modern Japan. He was the founder of the Japanese Society for Ethics, and was peripherally associated with the famed Kyoto School of Philosophy.³

There are three main reasons why I wish to consider Watsuji. First, his research focused heavily on the interplay of ethics and culture. His two most academically influential works are *Climate and Culture* (1935) and *Ethics* (1937, 1942/46, 1949)—the former an argument for cultural difference, and the latter for moral universality. Second, Watsuji wrote about these themes from a non-western, non-liberal, Confucian-Buddhist point of view, but attempted to bridge these ideas with western ethical theories. Third, Watsuji had a considerable amount of influence on post-war Japanese educational thought, particularly as a representative of traditional Japanese mores and a doorway to their proper modernization. He was particularly cited by educationalists theorizing on moral education. For example, Katsube Mitake (1916-2005), who was Watsuji’s student, and Mori Akira (1915-1976) both had proposals for moral education that drew heavily from Watsuji’s relational ethics (see Oshitani, 2016, pp. 41-46 and Mori, 2015).

For these three reasons, Watsuji can provide a worthwhile approach when considering moral issues in Global Education. While newer theories may abound (ex. Kymlicka and Biesta) and while established western philosophers can suggest similar ideas (ex. Johann Gottfried Herder), Watsuji provides an approach that can bridge the gap between liberals and communitarians, progressives and conservatives, as well as western and eastern philosophical approaches.

There are three questions to which Watsuji can provide a unique perspective for Global

Education: First, is there a shared moral ground? Second, how do we interpret the moral actions of other cultures? Third, how do we construct our classes in a way that shapes moral agents?

The Search for a Moral Ground

First, Watsuji is strongly critical of simplistic approaches to universalism. These approaches attain “universality” by ignoring the particular contexts of each human being, setting the individual directly before an absolute principle (Watsuji, 1991-1992 [heretofore WTZ], vol. 23, p. 164). But he found this to be an impoverished view of ethics.

In Watsuji’s writings on the relationship of climate and culture, as well as in his magnum opus on *Ethics*, Watsuji presents a very different picture of ethics. Moral life is carried out not by a solitary individual intuiting an ethical principle. Rather, it is carried out by a person who is embedded in relationships. This is a similar point to Aristotle’s idea of “*zoon politikon*,” but Watsuji describes these communities as “layered,” beginning from the family, to the town, to cultural community, to the nation-state, and finally to the international space. Each layer has its own trust relationships and its own forms of “virtuousness.” (This is patterned after the Confucian classic, *The Great Learning*.) Furthermore, each community is not merely subjective, but formed by its own objective/material milieu (the family’s house, the layout and natural surroundings of a town, the climate of a nation) and its history of the community’s dealings with its milieu and with others (WTZ, vol. 10).

In other words, one cannot evaluate morality from the point of view of the individual alone. Morality can only be understood from the context of the human being in relation to various communities (with their various cultures), their histories, and their environments.

However, Watsuji was not a simple relativist. In “A Theory of National Morals” (1930) Watsuji criticizes moral relativism on several points: First, it is methodologically impossible to champion any one way of life as “moral” within a culture, because culture always contains a plurality of ways of life that will be seen as moral or immoral depending on one’s point of view. Second, culture changes through historical development. Third, a *merely* particular morality has no sense of legitimacy (WTZ, vol. 23, p. 95).

To summarize, in Watsuji’s view, anti-relativism is guilty of ignoring the importance of groups, histories, and environments in situating morality. Relativism, on the other hand, is guilty of presuming a monolithic, static culture, and ignores the problem of moral legitimacy. He thus seeks out a middle way: “The universal shows itself only in the particular, and the particular is only the particular as a realization of the universal” (WTZ, vol. 23, p. 95). Similar to cultural psychologist Richard Shweder (see Vozzola, 2014, p. 77), Watsuji argues that while there is a universal core to all morality, this core is *never* expressed independent of culture.

For Watsuji, the moral universal is the *dynamic* of *ningen sonzai* (human existence). (In Sevilla 2016A, this is referred to as a “structure” or *kôzô*.) As he details in his magnum opus, *Ethics* (Watsuji, 1996, pp. 15), *ningen* (the human) is both “individual” (*nin*) and “relational” (*gen*). It is only in the unity of individuality and relationality that we can understand human life. But the actual relationship between these two is *negative*—one can only realize one’s individuality by going beyond what is given by society, and one can only realize one’s communal aspect by giving up one’s separateness as an individual. Therefore the “moral universal” is a tensional dynamic of needing to balance individuality and community.

However, as one might guess, this dynamic does not give any clear specifications. Unlike Kymlicka's view of human rights, it does not have moral *content*. Rather, it is an empty structure. Watsuji (1997, p. 23) writes:

The true reality of an individual, as well as of totality, is "emptiness" . . . Out of this ground, from the fact that this emptiness is emptied, emerges *ningen's sonzai* as a movement of negation. The negation of negation is the self-returning and self-realizing movement of the absolute that is precisely social ethics (i.e., *Sittlichkeit* in German). Therefore, the basic principle of social ethics is the realization of totality (as the negation of negation) through the individual, (that is, the negation of totality).

What makes us human is our ability to realize "emptiness" by letting go of the safety of the whole in order to realize our individuality, and letting go of the independence of the individual in order to realize totality.

This is our shared moral "ground"—but rather than a solid ground, it is an empty space.⁴ Because it is empty, it has no explicit, unchangeable content, like absolutized human rights. Thus, Buddhist meditation, Papua New Guinean moral customs, *even human rights*—all of these realize emptiness in their own unique way. That means that while they are all relative, they are also all expressions of the same universal. Thus, it becomes possible to take a dual attitude of both respect for moral differences, as well as a critical attitude of learning from and learning with cultural others.

Watsuji found this critical openness to be particularly important in the face of the nationalistic arrogance of World War II. He wrote,

Thinking of it in this way, the *realization of moral difference* in each nation is indispensable for the fulfillment of the universal socio-ethical path (*jinrin no michi*). It saves each nation from *conceit (unubore)* and spurs them to work to overcome their *individual limitations (seigen)*. (WTZ vol. 11, p. 348)

Perhaps this conceit is something we have yet to overcome, even 72 years after the war.

Hermeneutics of Moral Acts

How then do we understand the moral acts of people from different cultures? The first question people naturally come to when they are presented by a disturbing practice is, "*Why would anyone do this?*" For example, in the case of female infanticide among Eskimos, students see infanticide as a matter of personal preference, as if Eskimos lived in the same conditions Japanese students live in. This is what John W. Cook (1999) calls the "projection error." However, what might the reasons be for those actually involved? According to Rachels (2003, pp. 24-25), female infanticide is required in the face of high male mortality in hunting, in order to preserve a livable ratio of hunters to consumers. What students realize here is that many revolting practices are, upon deeper inspection, different means of achieving ends that we ourselves value.

While these first steps are valuable, Watsuji cautions us of the danger of ending with these. Aims may reveal the intentions of other "rational beings," but it does not reveal the complex web of meaning and significance into which each particular act is woven.

The ordinary description of the act in traditional ethics proceeds in such a way: to extract a fragment or a horizontal section from the systematic relation of acts, thereby eliminating human relationships, and then to deal with it as an activity of individual consciousness, simplified as much as possible. Consequently, an act is characterized in

terms of rational activity, inclusive of the consciousness of purpose, the knowledge of means, and the choice or decision of will. . . . But I am doubtful whether *ningen's* act can be described in terms of psychological activity in such a simple manner as this. (Watsuji, 1996, p. 244)

Rather than this abstract approach, Watsuji suggests a hermeneutic interpretation of acts (Watsuji, 1996, ch. 2). It begins in a way similar to Gaudelli's (2003, p. 133) care ethics. Let us say a mother has decided to leave her female child to die. We need to ask not only what she is thinking, but what she is *feeling*. Also, we have to look at the relationships around her. How is this action a response to her husband? Her family? Her community? (Here, we are going beyond Gaudelli.) Temporally, how does it respond to trust relationships? Is it trying to maintain a relationship? Destroy it? Build or change it? Also, we see her embodied relationship with the environment—the demands of the cold, the practices of hunting, and so on. As we go deeper into the hermeneutics of acts, perhaps we will start to see how the dynamic of human existence is manifest in different ways. In what way does this act reflect an attempt to realize herself as an individual? Or an attempt to harmonize with a community?

One way to appreciate the unity and diversity of the dynamic of individualization and unification is through neuroscientist Jonathan Haidt's "six foundations of morality." Haidt (2012) found that human beings are evolutionarily predisposed to value care and avoid harm, value fairness and avoid cheating, liberty over oppression, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subjection, and sanctity/degradation. However, culture can greatly influence how we *prioritize* these six foundations. For example, his empirical research on political culture suggests that American Democrats tend to prioritize care, fairness, and liberty at the expense of loyalty, authority, and sanctity. But Republicans, similar to other traditional cultures, have their attention more evenly spread out among the six foundations, resulting in a relative stress on the latter three.

If we interpose this with Watsuji, one can argue that each foundation suggests a particular approach to individualization/unification. Thus, one might say that the Democrat version of individuality is realized through success in competition and freedom from constraint. Unity is realized through caring for the other and active citizenship in an equal society. The Republican version, however, would see individuality as power, authority, and status within a social order. Community would be through group identification in a tightly bonded society.

The important point is that Democrats and Republicans (we have both in perhaps every culture, a key form of intra-cultural difference) have a very hard time recognizing each other's versions of individuality/communalness as individuality/communalness. But by learning about how actual people think, feel, and act, seeing how that is emplaced within relationships with family, friends, and fellow citizens, and seeing the histories and cultures at play, perhaps one begins to see how it is the same dynamic at play in a remarkably different way.

Relational Class Construction

Having begun to understand a cultural practice and grounding oneself in a shared sense of realizing both individual autonomy and collective harmony as fellow *ningen*, how might we then approach the other? As Lukes and Gaudelli both point out, there is a danger in merely imagining what a culture is and unilaterally imposing what you believe to be a better way. Jürgen Habermas' most important point was that people ought to go beyond solitary

moral imagination and come into dialogue with each other, rationally justifying one's own practices.

Watsuji has been criticized for being unable to account for this sort of argumentative, rational discourse (See Sakai, 1997). Watsuji focused on trust and a more corporeal, intuitive sense of connectedness between people, rather than overt discussion (WTZ, vol. 10, ch. 2.6). However, Haidt's suggestions on political debate might suggest the need to reconsider Watsuji's stance. Haidt (2006, chs. 1, 4) argues that, for the most part, moral decisions are made by fleeting bursts of emotion (intuitions) that he likens to an elephant leaning toward or away from something. Reason is like the rider on top of that elephant—while the rider can influence the elephant in the long run, most of the time, it is the elephant that has control. Reason merely functions as a way to explain and argue for the actions of the elephant. The result of this is the tendency for opposing arguments to have no effect whatsoever on the stance a person takes, because arguments talk to the rider, not the elephant.

Given this, perhaps Watsuji was right in focusing on trust and intuitive connections between people over rational ones. Haidt suggests, and I think Watsuji would agree, that in times of conflict, it is necessary to “talk to the elephant” first. Global Education is not necessarily about teaching students to give and receive rational justification (although that also has its place). Instead, perhaps what is necessary is giving students an opportunity to encounter cultural difference, catch the initial revulsion of the different “elephants,” and try to build trust and mutual concern, as a space where mutual learning might occur.

4. Application Via An “Ethics and Cultural Difference” Class

How can these insights from Watsuji be applied? I have designed a class entitled “Ethics and Cultural Difference” (heretofore ECD), that aims to help students 1) develop an attitude that is culturally sensitive but morally engaged, 2) be able to examine cultural practices that they conflict with, 3) have the cognitive framework necessary to find common ground despite cultural difference, and 4) develop a basic approach to conflict resolution across cultural lines.

I have developed this class over several years. I first taught it in the Philippines in 2013. The class had 15 students, a mix of undergraduate and masters students, studying for 48 hours over six weeks (five days a week). I then taught it in Japan in 2015 to undergraduates. I had three classes, each class having 50 students and meeting for 12 hours over four weeks (once a week). Finally, I taught it in Japan in 2016 to high school students. The intensive seminar had 18 students and we met for 15 hours spread over 3 consecutive days, with one preparatory day a month in advance.

The ECD class progresses through the following four questions, which form the four phases of this class: 1) What attitude do we take toward moral relativism? 2) How do we understand particular practices? 3) How do we find a common ground with others? 4) How do we pave the way for trusting dialogue? In the following paragraphs, I provide a brief sketch of each phase, but much of the details are embedded in the previous discussion (see Section 3).

In the first phase, I explore students' attitudes toward cultural difference. I begin by making them aware of the idea of culture and the plurality of cultures, through photos, vide-

os, and discussions, starting with the “palatable” forms of cultural difference—costumes and food—and progressing to more contentious aspects of culture: different languages (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that states that the way of seeing the world is organized by language), different communication styles and how this confounds negotiations, et cetera. The class also highlights differences within a nation—between regions, age-groups, genders, and socio-economic classes. Finally, students discuss particular cultural practices that are morally difficult to accept. Points of contention frequently tend to arise regarding how women, children, and sex are treated in various cultures.

The general response to cultural-moral difference tended to be one of interest and shock. Some students took a relativistic stance—“Well, that’s their culture,”—while others took an anti-relativist stance—“That’s just wrong.” I take this as an opportunity to provide input on the philosophical ideas of relativism and anti-relativism, focusing on the *limitations* of each stance—we live in relation with each other, but at the same time, we are different—both detached relativism and imperialist anti-relativism are untenable in global society.

Aware of this tension, I proceed to the second phase: Students are assigned to groups, and they do research on a particular (disturbing) cultural practice of their choice. Students have chosen topics like the following: gun politics in America, whale and dolphin hunting in Japan, the Islamist response to *Charlie Hebdo*’s satire, et cetera. They gather data on the details of these practices, and then express their own intuitions toward these practices—intuitions that usually include a considerable amount of “projection error.” Students are made aware of this danger, and are encouraged to try to see the rational, as well as cultural-historical context behind a particular act, in order to try to understand these acts from the point of view of that culture. The process is as described in “Hermeneutics of Moral Acts.”

In the third phase, students try to go beyond shock and awe toward a more constructive phase of finding common ground with other cultures. Students are made to compare and contrast their own culture with that of the target culture, and see *both* points of contrast as well as similarities. Through lectures on research on cultural difference and morality, students are encouraged to reframe these differences as particular expressions of a shared dynamic—all cultures need to value individual freedom and social unity, but all cultures have their own way of doing these.

This awareness of unity-in-difference paves the way for the last phase: Dialogue. Students begin by examining their own attitudes toward morality—their preferential valuation of Haidt’s six foundations of morality. (I used Jonathan Haidt’s moral foundations questionnaire, see Moralfoundations.org, n.d.) Then, by partnering and discussing with a student with contrasting attitudes toward morality, each student becomes aware of *intra*-cultural difference. Students then take this dialogic attitude of openness (to both rational and emotional elements) in their discussions about the practice they are researching, with a revised approach to “constructive controversy”: teams are split into sides, those who lean toward condemning the controversial practice, and those who lean toward tolerating it, and try to *come to an understanding* of each other’s positions.

As a final project, these students present on their findings. This allows their team’s dialogues to expand to a class dialogue on how to respond to this particular practice.

5. Analysis and Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that Global Education and KRK either avoid the problem of cultural-moral difference, or dismiss it using utilitarian, absolutized human rights, justification, or “two-layer” approaches to moral universalism. I have suggested that these approaches are limited, and that Watsuji can offer an alternative. Watsuji suggests finding moral unity in an empty *dynamic* of individualization and harmonization that is then *expressed* as culture. This allows an attitude that has the openness of relativism and the critical capacity of universalism. This “common ground” is sought through hermeneutics, which seeks to understand moral acts within multiple relational contexts (in space and time). And teaching this hermeneutic approach goes by way of building intuitive connections, openness, and trust, rather than rational discourse. Finally, these ideas were applied in the designing of a class on “Ethics and Cultural Difference.”

While I have discussed cultural-moral difference in the context of internationalizing Japanese education, I do not mean to suggest that the class above is for Japanese students *only*. As my application of this class in the Philippines suggests, Watsuji’s theories may provide valuable lessons for Global Education around the world. Perhaps there is a need for “internationalizing Japanese education” in a second sense—the discourse on Japanese educational ideas needs to be opened up beyond the borders of “*Japanese Studies*” and “*Japanese Philosophy*” into a global discourse on what it means to be/become human in a global space.

One such discourse is that of human rights. They have played an integral role in resisting oppressive governments across the world. But absolutizing human rights can lead to interrupting the deepest form of intercultural encounter. Perhaps Watsuji’s unique approach to “empty” ethics can provide us a new way to approach Global Ethics and Global Education—not as antagonistic to human rights, but as something that can relativize human rights and reinvigorate it as a dynamic discourse.

Notes

- 1 This paper has been written with the aid of funding from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), project number 17K13988.
- 2 One exception to this can be found in Sano, Mizuochi, Suzuki (1995, pp. 73-75). They take a primarily relativistic approach of adopting that country’s morals so long as one is in that country.
- 3 For more on Watsuji, the Kyoto School, and education, see Sevilla (2016B).
- 4 Details of Watsuji’s ethics can be found in Sevilla (2017).

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