Research Paper

Engaging with the More-Than-Human and Decolonial Turns in the Land of Shinto Cosmologies: "Negative" Comparative Education in Practice

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Abstract

Purpose: In this explorative, self-reflective article, I attempt to extend the methodological discussion of a "negative" approach to comparative education that I have recently articulated elsewhere. Here, I demonstrate how I attempted to put in practice negative comparative education by drawing on my experience at the Shanghai workshop, *Beyond the Western Horizon in Educational Research*, organized by Iveta Silova, Jeremy Rappleye, and Yun You at the East China Normal University.

Design/Approach/Methods: I conceive my participation in the Shanghai workshop as a disruptive moment wherein my previous forms of knowing and being were challenged. More specifically, I discuss how my attempt to situate the ecofeminist and decolonial literature, the two of the three main bodies of literature introduced through the workshop, within the context of Japanese education triggered me to reconsider the role of Shinto in Japanese education and question my own firm identification with the liberal–left politics within Japan.

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Findings: I reflect upon how the initial sense of discomfort and the remaining sense of ambivalence took me on a journey of unlearning and relearning about the limits of my knowing, my own political subjectivities, and the place of Shinto cosmologies in Japanese education.

Originality/Value: I conclude the discussion with a few provisional thoughts that point us to an approach to comparative education that makes our research "a matter of concern" across multiple linguistically bounded, national and regional scholarly communities.

Negative learning

As someone who researches Japanese education and publishes both in English and in Japanese, I have always been keenly aware of the linguistic, cultural, and epistemological gaps between the body of international scholarship written in English, on the one hand, and the Japanese language scholarship of education, on the other. It is certainly not my intention to suggest that these two language-based scholarly communities are mutually exclusive and respectively monolithic. Indeed, many Japanese scholars are attuned to the current debates and new theoretical developments in the English-language scholarship, and there exist considerable differences in methodology among Japanese scholars. However, the irrefutable fact remains that the majority of Japanese education scholars write in Japanese only (Yonezawa et al., 2018), though a small number of scholars have been attempting to break this trend in recent years (see Okitsu et al., 2018). By and large, Japanese scholarship is virtually invisible in the English-language scholarship of education due to the fact that it remains linguistically inaccessible to international scholars (Yonezawa et al., 2018). By contrast, written mostly in English and drawing on the conceptual and theoretical discourses of the international scholarship, my writings have gained considerably more traction from the broader international scholarly communities than other Japanese scholars who write primarily in Japanese.

As many scholars argue, writing in English for non-English-using researchers is not just a matter of linguistic translation. To have one's research recognized and published in the so-called international journals, one is expected to accept the style of argumentation, a particular form of logic, and the conceptual/theoretical languages accepted in the English-language scholarship dominated by Anglo-American scholars and institutions. That is, the question of research rigor is often conflated with epistemologies in the so-called international scholarly field (deWaal, 2003; Takayama, 2011a; Tierney, 2018). Much of my recent writings have explored the tensions,

possibilities, and challenges of writing across multiple language-based scholarly communities in comparative education (see Takayama, 2011a, 2011b, 2018, 2019). Writing across different national/linguistic communities of scholarship, especially when they are not in sync, requires us to take multiple epistemological positionings, that is, to assume different expectations, read-erships, and scholarly conventions. It requires us to play different "truth games" to make our research accepted by and meaningful to different epistemological communities.

The promises and challenges of this linguistic and epistemological "crisscrossing" work remains under-explored in the field of comparative education (Sobe, 2018). This is partly because many comparative education scholars write about "other" education in English only, despite their abilities to speak more than one language. Very few scholars attempt to write to and across different linguistic communities and to have their scholarship recognized in multiple national and language-based scholarships, including the countries and regions in which they specialize. In the case of the international (English-language) scholarship of Japanese educa-tion, for instance, hardly anyone who researches Japanese education in English writes in Japanese for a Japanese readership. Hence, the English language scholarship of Japanese education has been largely absent from the domestic scholarship and policy debates within Japan. As a result, little attempt has been made to explore the epistemological possibilities and challenges inherent in the act of writing across different linguistic communities. As I will demonstrate shortly, writing across different national and language-based scholarly commu-nities forces us to confront a set of complex epistemological and political issues, and this article tries to illuminate what doing so might look like and what methodological insights can be developed from the exercise.

In this article, hence, building on my earlier works (Takayama, 2011a, 2011b, 2018, 2019), I try to deepen my reflection on the potentials, risks, and contradictions involved in such linguistic/epistemological crisscrossing work, this time, engaging with the current intellectual shifts triggered by the more-than-human ecofeminist and decolonial turns. Drawing on these recent intellectual shifts witnessed in the broader international scholarship of humanities, social science, and educa-tion, I explore what they actually mean in the context of Japanese education research and what tensions these theoretical positions might bring to my scholarship.

Continuing on with the idea of "negative" comparative education, which I articulated recently (see Takayama, 2019), I see this article as another opportunity to "learn through disruption" (English, 2013). Drawing on Herbart and Dewey, English (2013) argues that the experience of what she calls discontinuities or "negative" experience—"difficulty, perplexity, doubt, suffering, and struggle"—is constitutive of learning processes (pp. xxii–xxiii). Reflective inquiry into dis-continuous experience enables us to explore and experiment with new ideas and new modes of practice that had been rendered unintelligible within the previous horizon of understanding. Here

negativity of learning is understood not in the usual pejorative sense but negativity in its philosophical sense, in the sense of confronting the limits of previous knowing and opening oneself up for new ways of knowing and being (see Takayama, 2019). It is a process of learning that involves a simultaneous process of unlearning the previous way of knowing and being so that one achieves relative freedom from it (Nishihira, 2019).

Taking on board this idea of negative learning, I illuminate how this journal special issue offered me a disruptive opportunity, where my previous political and epistemological positions were unsettled, and forced me to think beyond my familiar horizons. The subsequent discussion is purposefully personal, as it aims to use my own experience as a starting point for methodological reflection around the kind of epistemological-cum-political contradictions that the crisscrossing work might bring to those who position themselves at the intersection of multiple national and language-based research communities.

In May 2019, a moment of pedagogic disruption was created for me, when Iveta Silova, Jeremy Rappleye, and Yun You organized a 2-day workshop at the East China Normal University in Shanghai on the theme of *Beyond the Western Horizon in Educational Research: Toward a Deeper Dialogue About Our Interdependent Futures* (see Silova et al., 2020). Setting the work of South American decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo as its central theoretical underpinning, the workshop also encouraged the participants to explore links to other bodies of intellectual work, including ecofeminism and East Asian (Chinese and Japanese) thought, to explore collectively the alternatives beyond Western epistemic and ontological horizons. Having written some articles on postcolonial and decolonial approaches in comparative education (e.g., Takayama, 2016, 2018; Takayama et al., 2017), I was expected to contribute to the discussion from this particular theoretical position. Among all the readings assigned for the workshop participants, however, I was drawn to what was least known to me at the time, the posthumanist ecofeminist literature represented by Plumwood (1993), Rose (2005, 2013), and Stengers (2012), as well as the education scholarship that builds on their theoretical projects (e.g., Silova, 2019; Taylor, 2017).

My attempt to think through the implications of this new body of literature, however, soon led me to realize the complexities of this task. I was struck by the similarities between ecofeminist philosophies and Japanese Shinto cosmologies in terms of their shared stress on the agentic notions of nature as well as decentering of humans in the world. But I was also keenly aware that the domestic discourse of Shinto in education has been dominated by nationalist politics. I have always aligned myself politically with the liberal–left camp for whom the inclusion of the Japanese Shinto cosmologies and animism in school curriculum is part of the nationalist politics of returning to the romanticized imperial past (see e.g., Takayama, 2008, 2010a, 2010b).

International and intranational relativism

Reviewing the international sociological scholarship of Japanese society, Sugimoto (2003) identifies two different kinds of sociological scholarship of Japanese society written in English. On the one hand, scholars use the Japanese "case" to challenge the Eurocentric premises of sociological theories, hence promoting international relativism. In such studies, particular features of Japanese societies are highlighted to suggest a need to revise or extend the existing theoretical framing and categories. On the other hand, other scholars focus on the domestic politics of difference in terms of gender, social class, sexuality, and "race"/ethnicity, hence challenging the static and monolithic view of Japanese society as culturally homogeneous or consensus oriented. Such studies help promote intranational relativism in that it recognizes power and control exercised by those in dominant social positions as well as internal diversities and conflicts within Japan. Sugimoto points to the inherent tensions between the two in that the attempts toward international relativism have the risk of leaving unaddressed the problem of intranational relativism, hence rendering international comparative studies less relevant to the domestic political struggles. Vice versa, the studies that focus on intranational relativism fail to grasp the overall national patterns that can be mobilized to relativize the dominant Western paradigms and theoretical presuppositions.

In the case of the international scholarship of Japanese education, this balance has been rather lopsided in favor of international relativism (Takayama, 2011a, 2011b). Much of the international scholarship of Japanese education positions Japanese education as a "denaturalizing" other. For instance, U.S.-based anthropologist of Japanese preschools Tobin (2000) argues that Japan's empirical differences allow Western researchers to call "into question the ethnocentricity of our commonsense understandings and our social scientific theories" (p. 1155). Likewise, another U.S.-based scholar of Japanese education LeTendre (1999) states that "studies of Japanese education and schooling are excellent sources of data that expand a general pool of theoretical and practical knowledge about education" (p. 43). This tradition of the so-called Japanese problem approach remains current among comparative researchers of Japanese education today (e.g., Komatsu & Rappleye, 2017; Takayama, 2018).

While the "denaturalizing" potentials of comparative education research are important, this work tends to reinforce the binary national framing of differences, often in the form of West–East binary. As I have argued elsewhere, it not only falls short of addressing the domestic politics of schooling but could potentially present the hegemonic educational discourse as part of the Japanese cultural pattern of schooling, hence reinforcing the existing uneven power relations within Japan (Takayama, 2011a, 2011b). There is a concern here that the very cultural patterns of Japanese schooling, which international scholars identify and mobilize to relativize

the universalist premises of "theories," might serve to marginalize minoritized students in terms of "race," gender, class, and sexuality within Japan. As will be shown in the subsequent discussion, this tension between international and intranational relativisms emerges in my subsequent attempt to situate the ecofeminist and decolonial literature within the context of Japanese education.

Ecofeminist and decolonial turns

In a nutshell, both ecofeminist and decolonial literature attempt to open up space for different epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies that have been suppressed by the global spread of Western modernity–coloniality nexus and global capitalism. Ecofeminism recognizes the more-than-human worlds and stresses the need for the coexistence of humans with multispecies communities. Triggered by the human-induced ecological challenges of planetary scale and learning from the Indigenous communities of Australia, Deborah Rose, for instance, rejects the human exceptionalism of the Anthropocene era and rearticulates humans as a member of multispecies communities. Rose (2005) draws on her anthropological work with the Australian Indigenous People in Northern Territories to unsettle the human centric premises of Western philosophy. By describing how the Indigenous concept of "country" operates upon the mutual entanglement of benefits that cuts across the human–nature dualism, for instance, she puts forward an alternative vision of philosophical ecology that decenters human agency, knowledge, and intentions.

In addition to anthropological studies with Indigenous People, historical studies of the world that once existed is another source of wisdom. To encourage us to remember what has led us to the current epistemological and ontological conditions of modernity and what has been done to those who dare to be different, Stengers (2012) asks us to remember "the smell of burning witches." It is an evocative reminder that there existed social worlds where witches and fairies were embraced as part of the "real" world of humanity and where the distinctions between science and superstition were left opaque and constantly transgressed (see also Silova, 2020). The hegemony of scientific rationality and its underside, the eradication of "other" worlds, were not a natural consequence of human progress but of ontological violence. By smelling the burning of witches' flesh, we could develop "our closeness with those who have already been destroyed in the name of rationality, objectivity, and the great divide between nature and culture" (Stengers, 2011, p. 58).

Much of this literature has been taken up in recent "common worlds" educational scholarship, in particular within early childhood education (see Blaise, 2015; Taylor, 2017). These scholars push us to imagine education where humans learn to decenter themselves and reposition themselves as part of multispecies common worlds and to recognize the agencies of nonhuman others (see Silova, 2020; Taylor, 2020). They raise important questions about the current articulation of education for sustainability which preserves the central humanistic assumptions, including the logic of human

exceptionalism. Taylor (2017), for instance, challenges the positioning of children as environmental stewards, and humans, in general, as the sole agents for solving the current ecological crisis. Furthermore, these post-humanist and ecofeminist studies call upon us to recognize how existing early childhood pedagogic practices already allow for transgressive space where children disrupt the nature–culture binary and where children interact with the more-than-human worlds (Taylor, 2017). Silova (2019) also suggests the tenacity of the "creature communities" today and how social science, including education scholarship, has been blinded to numerous students' encounters with the more-than-human worlds during their schooling (see also Silova, 2020).

Decolonial scholarship, represented by Mignolo (2011) and other South American thinkers (e. g., Grosfoguel, 2011), raises a similar set of questions about the powerful genocidal effects of the global spread of Western modernity–coloniality nexus, which began in the late 15th-century European colonization of America. The South American decolonial project historicizes the current structure of knowledge and recognizes the centuries of Western colonial violence as the constitutive aspect of its "epistemicide," the obliteration of other epistemologies and ontologies from the surface of the planet (Grosfoguel, 2011). It problematizes the modernist, Cartesian premises of science and knowledge that set up the hierarchy of knowing and being and privileged four European countries as the only legitimate source of knowledge and science. On the basis of this historical critique, it calls for the resuscitation of marginalized epistemologies and ontologies in colonized parts of the world that have been pushed to the limits by the Eurocentric geopolitics of knowledge. It is a call toward the world of "pluriversality," where multiple epistemologies and ontologies coexist side by side (Mignolo, 2011).

In a number of places, Mignolo (2011) uses de-westernization and decoloniality to distinguish between different levels of critique of the West's modernity–coloniality project. According to Mignolo, de-westernization is a shallower critique of the West in that it rejects the West while maintaining its allegiance to its fundamental logic of modernity. In economy, for instance, De-westernization refers to the rejection of U.S. or World Bank interventions in South America, while still aspiring for a regionally- or nationally-based model of "development" and "progress" that accepts the same economic rationality and exploitative logic of modernity toward the planet. In the area of epistemology, de-westernization refers to the rejection of knowledge generated in the West, while still accepting the fundamental philosophical foundations of Western knowledge, namely its epistemology and ontology. In historiography, this distinction corresponds to the difference between "local" and "localized" histories that Hokari (2011) points to in his discussion of the historical practices of the Australian Indigenous People. Hokari (2011) explains that proponents of local histories assert local histories of minoritized populations to be included so the national history will be more "complete." By contrast, localized histories, as represented by the historical practices of Aboriginal People in central Australia for instance, blur the distinction between facts

and myths, foregrounding the roles of spiritual figures, both aminated and non-aminated, in the construction of their histories. The localized histories reject the very premises of modern empiricism underpinning the hegemonic national history and demand a reconceptualization of what counts as history itself. Drawing on Mignolo (2011), Silova, Rappleye, and You (see Silova et al., 2020) recognize that the most penetrating critiques of the modernity/decoloniality nexus are to be found in the decoloniality, not the de-westernization, project, particularly in the realm of spirituality and ontology.

Needless to say, the decolonial critique of Western modernity–coloniality resonates closely with ecofeminist scholarship. Most crucially, both identify the role of culture in constituting the violence of modernity/colonial nexus, more specifically in securing the hyperseparation between adults and children, humans and nature, men and women, civilized and barbaric, and science and myth (see Plumwood, 1993). The Western Enlightenment notion of "Reason" provides the logic of hyperseparation with the former terms defined as the embodiment of "Reason" and the latter as absence. Both decolonial theory and ecofeminist theory encourage us to imagine different ways of being and knowing that have been suppressed, or even erased, by a set of cultural norms and practices of modernity and imposed through colonial violence. In this sense, ecofeminist scholarship is part of the broader decolonial rethinking of Western modernity and exploration of "other worlds" that take us beyond its limits.

Shinto's decolonizing potentials

As Jensen and Blok (2013) points out, "Japan is probably the only major industrialized country in which widespread discussion of animism is still a part of ordinary intellectual discourse" (p. 97). Indeed, the Shinto-inspired, animated worldview pervades all of Japanese society, underpinning mundane aspects of life as well as art forms and cultural practices (Carter, 2013; Nakayama, 2019). Shinto values and practices are so enmeshed in Japanese people's everyday life that they have become their second nature (Kasulis, 2004). Central to the Shinto cosmologies is the reverence toward "mother" nature (Kamata, 2003). Shinto stresses the greatness of the universe and the relative insignificance of human presence in its entire history. It also recognizes the agencies of the more-than-human worlds and their spiritual impacts on humans. Common to any form of animism, Shinto locates spirits in both humans and nonhumans, including stones, rivers, trees, foxes, thunder, ancestors, rice, and waterfalls, that is, radical personalization of the universe (Jensen & Blok, 2013). According to Shinto principles, "gods, men, animals, plants and inanimate objects are mutually permeable entities, appearing as a unified and dynamic field of existence, characterized by particular forms of immanence and vitalism" (Jensen & Blok, 2013, p. 97).

The Shinto cosmology continues to influence the meaning of the term *shizen*, the Japanese translation of nature, the Western concept introduced to Japan in the late 19th century. As

Nakayama (2019) explains, the Japanese concept of nature does not contain the hierarchical Christian idea, where the creator of the world God exists at the top, then man created in the image of God, with all the other creatures comprising nature at the bottom. Here, "God as a transcendent being does not exist within nature, nor are human beings a part of it" (p. 8). This dichotomy between human beings and nature was central to the emergence of the new science in the 17th century, further developed via Francis Bacon and Descartes into the Cartesian worldview and subsequently the conceptualization of nature merely as an object to be controlled by humans. In contrast, the Shinto animistic view of nature recognizes something sacred in all the creatures who are both physically and spiritually a part of nature. Hence, it defies the usual "opposition . . . between human subjectivity and natural objectivity" (Nakayama, 2019, p. 9).

The same reverence toward the more-than-human worlds is central to the Japanese thought and philosophy, according to Carter (2013). In explaining the central component of the Zen/Shinto philosophy, Carter quotes a Japanese landscape architect/Zen monk, Shunmyo Matsuo:

> I wonder just what kind of spirit a certain stone has and how it would prefer to be set out. This is also true of plants and I always consider how I think the plants would like to be displayed. I always feel at one with the plants, when I am planting them, and with the stones, when I am arranging them. (p. 34)

Carter (2013) refers to Matsuo in his illustration of the key thinkers of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, Kitaro Nishida and Keiji Nishitani, who were likewise influenced immensely by the Zen and Buddhist thought (see Sevilla, 2016). Matsuo's approach to landscaping epitomizes the kind of empathic identification with non-animated objects that transcend the modernist culture–nature, subject–object dualism. Through self-cultivation, one learns to be one with an object (flowers, stones, and trees); it is a state of nothingness where one comes to know a thing not through reason and language but through intuitions developed through direct experience. The same worldview is now recognized as a part of the broader East Asian cosmology, juxtaposed against what is putatively Western (see Komatsu & Rappleye, 2020). Here, the Shinto animism and the body of thought developed out of it are mobilized to relativize the very ontology and epistemology of Western thoughts often received as "universal."

Much of this Shinto-informed view and attitude toward the more-than-human worlds are not explicitly taught in Japanese schools (Nakayama, 2019). This is because teaching such sentiments and dispositions toward the worlds beyond human is considered religious teaching, hence violating the principle of secularity underpinning modern education (see Inokuchi, 2005 for such a view; see also Edwards, 2020). Moral education, introduced in 1958, tended to focus on moral, cultural, and civic virtues, while carefully removing any indications of religious connotations and sentiments. However, research has shown that the Japanese curriculum, most notably in the Japanese language textbooks, implicitly teaches children emotional identification with nonhuman creatures and their

worldviews (Gerbert, 1993; Ishihara, 2005). More recently, the Ministry of Education introduced moral education supplementary texts to counterbalance the increasing (Western-inspired) emphasis on critical literacy (Ishihara, 2005). What follows is an excerpt from one of the moral education booklets, *Kokoro no no-to* (*Notebook for Heart*):

> Humans are moved by beauty.
> When faced with the magnificence of nature, we feel moved and hold our breath.
> Calm, great ocean that spreads endlessly,
> Vast hills and fields, and towering mountain ranges.
> It feels as though they mercifully embraced us, as though we melted into them.
> But, would this be true?
> When nature bares its fangs,
> it engulfs us with its overwhelming might.
> Thundering noise of crashing waves, the volcanic smoke that shuts out the sky,
> and the massive earthquake that shatters the earth.
> A feeling of awe and respect towards the existence of matters beyond human control springs up.
> (MEXT, 2002, p. 65)

Here, children are to leave behind the modern scientific form of learning where they are to understand, comprehend, and control the awesome. Instead, they are to cultivate "a feeling of awe" (*ikei no nen*) by simply standing "under it, feel themselves to be inherently part of it and it part of themselves" (Kasulis, 2004, p. 167).

The moral education text represents a mixture of the traditional Shinto, Zen, and Buddhist views of the unity of all forms of life. Children are expected to learn to assume a passive attitude toward nature so they gain spiritual depth through careful observation of natural phenomena and personal identification with it. Fujiwara (2005), a nationalist intellectual, goes as far as to argue that

> the Japanese have long lived with appreciation for (nature's) greatness and in harmony with it. We used to have such a wonderful attitude towards nature. And that is why Shinto was born. In a sense, this sensibility has resulted in the humility of the Japanese as a nation. (p. 108)

The humility of the people that Fujiwara stresses contrasts with the modernist notion of human exceptionalism. In his as well as other nationalist critics' views, this humility and reverence toward nature have been deemphasized in a series of school reforms, beginning with the U.S.-led complete remodeling of Japanese education during the Allied Occupation (1945–1952).

Shinto and internal coloniality

Endorsing the Shinto cosmologies in Japanese schooling, however, is a complicated matter, at least from the point of view of someone like myself who has been involved in domestic political struggles in Japan. This is because of the highly politicized context within which Shinto has been

articulated within Japanese education throughout its postwar history (see Koyasu, 2004). The use of Shinto beliefs in schooling has been intensely contested since the end of the Pacific War. During the wartime, Shinto was incorporated into the state apparatus and played a central role in inter-pellating the people into the wartime imperialist ideology. Public education was the key state mechanism through which the widely accepted Shinto beliefs in nature were mobilized for ideo-logical indoctrination (Shimazono, 2003). The postwar U.S.-led Occupation ordered the complete removal of Shinto religious elements from state apparatus and put in place constitutional mechan-isms to ensure separation of church and state and freedom of religion (Koyasu, 2004). The Occupation's hunt for any remnants of the ostensibly Shinto-informed wartime ideology was so comprehensive that it even included Japanese martial arts, calligraphies, and other benign cultural artifacts and practices (Shibata, 2004).

The U.S.-led Occupation's radical "demilitarization" of education planted the seed for the postwar political struggles in Japan. Since Japan's formal independence in 1952, those on the political right have consistently demanded the resurrection of the traditional Shinto cosmologies and patriotic values back within formal schooling (see Takayama, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). They call their political agenda the "normalization" of Japanese education, that is, normalizing the "unusual" situation left by the Occupation's imposition of liberal values, which has arguably detached the postwar generations from the nation's cultural "essence." By contrast, the Japanese liberal and left see such a move as a retrogressive desire to reinstate the imperial state and its ideology. They insist on protecting the liberal, democratic and pacifist principles, and constitutional frameworks intro-duced during the U.S. Occupation. Constitutional arguments were frequently made to prevent Shinto-informed values and any patriotic teaching from entering into education, with liberal critics arguing that they violate the constitutionally guaranteed separation of church and state and free-dom of thought (Koyasu, 2004; Nishihara, 2006). The wartime indoctrination through education and the people's general remorse for its consequences were the broader historical backdrop against which this concern has been expressed by liberals and supported by the broader public (Takayama, 2008, 2010b).

Situated within this highly politicized policy context, the seemingly benign Shinto-informed concepts such as "awe and respect towards nature," or "matters beyond humans," and "the insig-nificance of humans in the whole universe" assume highly contested meanings. Liberals argue that teaching the Shinto-informed worldview reinforces students' passivity toward nature and by extension toward the authority and the state. It is the unquestioned devotion to nature that was then politically appropriated to generate people's allegiance toward the emperor/imperial state and the catastrophic "sacred" war for the imperial household. Instead of teaching children to be passive, hence, the liberal–left critics call for teaching the principles of rationality and critical reason that are central to democratic citizenship (see Irie, 2004; Miyake, 2003). To those on the

political left, the Shinto-inspired moral education supplementary text, quoted earlier, is nothing but an expression of neo-conservative desire to render people obedient at the time of neoliberal economic restructuring. This is exactly the argument that I made in my assessment of the 2006 revision to the Fundamental Law of Education (see Takayama, 2008).

As someone who supports the decolonial project toward the pluriversal world, I see the Shinto cosmologies as a great resource with which to explore ways to take Japanese schooling beyond the limits of Western modernity. Along with other marginalized epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies of the world, Shinto cosmologies can contribute to our reimagining of what constitutes education and articulating what "more-than-human" education in this time of global ecological crisis might look like. They can contribute to serious critiques of "human exceptionalism" and to furthering the idea of "common worlds" (Nakayama, 2019; Taylor, 2017). At the same time, however, staying open to Shinto's potential contributions to the international conversations about decolonizing and de-centering "the human" of Western epistemologies will force me to challenge my earlier political position on the role of Shinto in Japanese schooling. I fear that my position will become indistinguishable from that of cultural nationalists who demand Shinto in schools for different political reasons. As Grosfoguel (2011) points out, nationalism, as a response to the Eurocentric colonial imposition, "reproduces an internal coloniality of power within each nation-state and reifies the nation-state as the privileged location of social change" (p. 23). When Shinto is so tainted with the discriminatory nativist politics, could it be "conceptually freed from its historically over-determined connotations of political regression" (Jensen & Blok, 2013, p. 94)?

Learning through disruption

This explorative writing has brought me to a few important realizations. First, the decolonial and ecofeminist literature has highlighted the limits of the postwar liberal political discourse in Japan from which I drew considerably in my earlier writings. The literature has shown that the whole Japanese domestic debate over the place of Shinto cosmologies in education remains trapped within the discursive legacies of the Occupation and the Cold War. The liberal principles of rationality, freedom, and progress were made powerfully appealing to the Japanese people in the immediate aftermath of the oppressive war and the subsequent devastation. The secularization of the state, including education, was part and parcel of the postwar aspiration to remodel the country from its imperial past into a future of democracy, pacifism, and economic development (Koyasu, 2004). This postwar narrative of "rescue and conversion," however, was shaped heavily by the geopolitical alliances between U.S. and the Japanese conservative power elites (Dower, 1999; Igarashi, 2000). During the immediate postwar period, the Eurocentric historicism was largely accepted, and the underdevelopment of modern statehood and modern selfhood was identified as

the primary cause of the rise of Japanese fascism. According to conservative intellectual Saeki (2014), this assessment was taken directly out of the U.S. postwar narrative of rescue and conversion, suggesting that the U.S. and its democracy freed Japan from the irrationality and dogma of fascism.

In education, Western political liberalism, introduced through the U.S.-led Occupation's reform, was welcomed by the majority of intellectuals at the time. The immediate aftermath of Japan's political independence witnessed some attempts to revert back to the pre-U.S. Occupation state of education, but by and large the egalitarian and democratic mechanisms instituted by the Occupation remained intact. The 1947 Fundamental Law of Education, in particular, became the cornerstone of the Japanese liberalism in education and a focus of intense political struggles thereafter. A polarized political deadlock was soon put in place between those who endorsed liberal principles and those who saw them as U.S. imposition, reminiscent of the broader Cold War geopolitics of the time (Takayama, 2008). Most forms of politics were pursued along this ideological divide thereafter. In their struggles against the conservative romanticism of the imperial past, the liberal and left ended up withdrawing from any legitimate attempt to resuscitate the country's Indigenous cosmologies from the tainted imperial past, hence leaving the Shinto-inspired ideas and values the exclusive properties of retrogressive nativists.

This is the discursive context of postwar politics of Japanese education within which my previous political position was shaped and my whole political subjectivities were constituted. As someone who grew up in Japan and raised by a politically active, liberal mother, I was immersed in the liberal political discourse of rights, reason, justice, and democracy. I viewed the conservative aspiration to bring back the Shinto and other traditional values as nothing but a "backward" move, a neo-conservative strategy to reinstitute the imagined sense of national community in the time of neoliberal socioeconomic fragmentations (Takayama, 2008). As part of my professionalization, I was socialized well into the mainstream discourse of Japanese postwar education scholarship, "where Japanese-ness is automatically equated with negative distinctness, prewar myths, and an escape from the responsibility of making Japan 'fully modern'" (Rappleye, 2018, p. 17). As a result of writing this article, I am beginning to see some "good sense" in the kind of conservative arguments that I tended to dismiss in the past and hence to reconsider the usefulness of the "either/or" postwar political divide (see also Takayama, 2017, for an earlier indication of this shift in my thinking).

I have come to see that the nationalist political discourse offers a more radical critique of the Western modernity and its political and pedagogic discourse. Infusing the Shinto cosmologies into Japanese school curriculum might help extend different onto-epistemic premises of Japanese schooling that some international scholars identify as a viable alternative to those of Western schooling (e.g., Komatsu & Rappleye, 2017; see also Komatsu & Rappleye, 2020). Paradoxically,

some nationalists whom I have always thought to be politically conservative were pursuing a form of decolonial, as opposed to de-westernization, project in that they refuse to accept the fundamental premises of modern schooling, reason, and rationality and insist on the localized—as opposed to local—differences. By contrast, the liberal–left political discourse has accepted the cultural logic of Western modernity and used it to keep the "irrational" nationalist agenda at bay. They were not even pursuing the shallower version of de-westernization, given that the very tools they employed to counter the imperialistic nostalgia were shaped through the Enlightenment logic of rationality drawn from Western modernity.

But of course, this sort of argument remains constrained by the artificial binary of West and East. I am highly cognizant of the reification effects of such unreflective decolonial projects as recently pointed out by some scholars (see Vickers, 2019), and I have elaborated upon its limitations elsewhere (Takayama, 2016; see also Lee, 2020). Here it is ironic that my attempt to move beyond the limits of postwar political bipolarity relies on yet another form of binary, West versus East, which in and of itself is a colonial construct.

While recognizing the need to rethink the usefulness of postwar binary politics, I remain deeply ambivalent about crossing the political boundaries altogether. This is because I am skeptical of some of the points that the nationalist authors make about other politically contentious issues. For instance, I find disturbing the way in which Saeki (2014), from whose work part of my discussion has thus far drawn, uses Kyoto School Philosopher Kitaro Nishida's concept of nothingness to explain the Kamikaze pilots' rationalization of self-sacrifice for their loved ones and the country during the wartime. Saeki (2014) deploys the notion of nothingness to reject the common interpretation of their self-sacrifice as a result of coercion or ideological brainwash, which he sees as part of the postwar U.S.-led narrative of "rescue and conversion."

Here I am acutely reminded of the dangers in transferring purely philosophical arguments to the domain of politics that Davis (1998) highlights. In discussing the historical role of Japanese philosophers in promoting Japanese cultural nationalism, Davis makes the following point: "The collapse of subject and object, thought and action—long the aim of Japanese philosophers—may be innocent enough as epistemology or Buddhist soteriology—but it can have a devastating effect when applies to politics" (p. 183). Like Davis, I am worried about the political implications of the Shinto cosmologies in Japanese schools today, when Japanese scholars identify the rise of retrogressive nationalism as well as the depoliticization of education as the major concerns and call for resuscitating the roles of education for democratic politics (see Hirota, 2015; Kodama, 2013). And yet again, underpinning my concern here is another form of binary; my reservation is expressed through the either–or choice, either politics or philosophy.

Would it be possible to salvage "the multivalent ethico-pragmatic character of Shinto" from the nationalistic overtone that has dominated its domestic articulation (Jensen & Blok, 2013, p. 108)?

In a sense, Shinto is a placeholder for multiple interests within Japan. The dominant, nationalistic discourse of Shinto, or what Kasulis (2004) calls the highly normative and prescriptive, "essentialist" Shinto spirituality, is certainly with us. But there is also the ad hoc, flexible, and descriptive form of Shinto as a popular praxis, or what Kasulis (2004) calls the "existentialist" Shinto spirituality, which pervades much of place-based invocations of Shinto cosmologies in festivals, rituals, and mundane life moments. The distinction between local and localized histories that I introduced earlier, drawing on Hokari's (2011) work, seems to correspond to Kasulis' existentialist–essentialist differentiation. It is the localized, as opposed to local, Shinto—the existential Shinto praxis that is not incorporated into the modernist metanarrative of national progress—that can be salvaged toward truly decolonial work. The localized, existentialist Shinto spirituality gives us a way to be radically different today that centers on immanent connectedness of humans and nonhumans, hence with considerable implications for reimagining education for sustainable futures. As Jensen and Blok (2013) argue, the localized/existentialist Shinto embodies "an alternative politics of the polymorphous enchantments of nonhuman agency" (p. 108) that can help broaden the theoretical horizon on the entanglements among science, technology, ecology, and cosmos.

However, as Kasulis (2004) reminds us, the two forms of Shinto spiritualities—essentialist and existential—should not be treated as another form of binary. They are "not separate religious traditions but instead overlap in an internal relation with each other" (p. 153). The history of Shinto in Japan has been infused with the tension between these two forms of spirituality, which remains unresolved today (Kasulis, 2004, p. 6). To complicate the matter further, this distinction is not available in the Japanese vocabulary for talking about Shinto, according to Kasulis (2004). Partly because of the nationalist political dominance in the domestic discourse of Shinto, the language of Shinto necessarily implicates essentialist assumptions. This poses immense challenges in terms of "reclaiming" Shinto (Stengers, 2012), that is, teasing out and mobilizing the existential, localized form of Shinto without invoking the essentialist form of Shinto spirituality that has exclusionary effects on the domestic political front. For now, all I can do is sit with the enormity of the conceptual and political challenges and suggest that this conundrum is not necessarily particular to Shinto and Japan. This discussion has wider international implications for education for sustainable futures, given that the political appropriation of nature and the popularized form of animism has been central to the modern formation of nation-state and its physical, epistemic, and ontological violence.

Second, this reflective exercise has helped me appreciate how a given national context dictates the extent to which one can meaningfully engage with the broader international scholarly discourse and draw implications from it. To put it differently, it has shown that the internationally circulated scholarly discourse (decolonial and ecofeminist turns) is not necessarily readily accessible and

useful to everyone, especially to those for whom the "application" of the ideas drawn from the international literature comes with a set of contradictions to carefully work out. Especially for those of us who try to remain attentive and, more importantly, accountable both to the politics of intranational and international differences, it is a task not as straightforward as it seems.

Here, it is instructive to compare the Japanese situation around Shinto with the Australian situation around Aboriginal cosmologies as articulated in Rose's (2005) lesson drawing from the Aboriginal People's ecological knowledge. Rose (2005, 2013) seems unconcerned about the possible political and epistemological contradictions in her project; her articulation of international, decolonial potentials of Australian Indigenous "metaphysics of connectivities" is assumed to be in sync with its multicultralizing implications within Australia. It is assumed, rather straightforwardly, that the Aboriginal metaphysics serves as a denaturalizing agent both within Australia and across international borders. In contrast, I have shown that while the Shinto cosmologies can be a denaturalizing agent internationally, it can be a source of oppression within Japan unless carefully treated. Here lies the source of paradox in using the nationally dominant discourse to promote transnational relativism and denaturalization of what is putatively universal. In a country where the "Indigenous" animistic cosmologies have been incorporated, albeit never completely, into the dominant metanarrative of nation-state, it requires such a careful discerning work as explored earlier so it would not be implicated in the process of internal colonization. It requires the kind of intellectual stance, called for by Chinese thinker Sun Ge (2015), that "is equally attentive to intracultural differences and intercultural differences" (p. 107).

Lastly, the above reflection helps me point to the lack of methodological discussion in the field of comparative education about the very political and epistemological tensions explored in this article. As I speculated earlier, this omission has to do with the fact that most of the researchers in the field do not publish their research in the language of the targeted countries. They can afford to remain oblivious to the possible implications of their research to the domestic politics and scholarship. This piece, I hope, will encourage us to think deeply about the potential limitations and dangers of the decolonial knowledge project, for instance, that focuses rather exclusively on relativizing and denaturalizing the assumed universality of Western modernity and its theoretical projects. Comparative education research must hold itself accountable for the political and epistemological consequences of its own research not simply at the level of international scholarly discourse where an anthropological approach to cultural relativism is valued but also at the level of domestic (national) political struggles where the internal coloniality of power operates to create serious material consequences on the basis of various "differences."

I am going to leave you with these provisional thoughts, while I stay with the lingering sense of discomfort and ambivalence. Embracing the notion of negativity as a catalytic moment of learning, I tried to look inside myself and shared some reflective accounts as to the nature of emotional,

epistemic, and ontological disruptions caused by my participation in the Shanghai seminar. In an ironic way, my attempt to articulate the international implications of Shinto cosmologies as part of the broader ecofeminist and decolonial critique of Western modernity has deeply unsettled my own unquestioned commitments to the liberal–left side of Japan's postwar political divide. I hope that this piece will serve as a humble invitation to think through what the "dual strategy," as suggested earlier by Sun (2015), might look like in our comparative education research. To put it in the language of Stengers (2011) (and Bruno Latour), it is an invitation to make our comparative education research "a matter of concern" across multiple language-bound, national and regional scholarly communities. But it is also an invitation to do comparative education "in negation," that is, to become attentive to and embrace affective moments of discomfort and ambivalence to open ourselves up for radical differences. If comparison is not just about learning about others but more importantly about having oneself affected by and transformed through the differences that we encounter (Stengers, 2011, quoted in Silova, 2020), then we should be able to demonstrate how the process of learning about others can unsettle our existing horizon of knowing and result in a process of unlearning and relearning. That is, how the encounter with others profoundly shifts who we think we are, how we see the world, and how we position ourselves within it.

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