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Doing Educational Research by Taking Seriously Chen's Account of "Asia as Method": In a Korean Case of Modern Schooling

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to exemplify how Chen's idea of "Asia as method" can be employed in a case study on Korean experiences of modern schooling.

Design/Approach/Methods: It does so by focusing on the author's personal experiences of modern schooling as both a student and a teacher in modern Korea. In this description, the author makes two seemingly contradictory moves: a move toward decolonialization by keeping a critical distance from her own native culture and a move toward deimperialization by keeping her distance from the West.

Findings: This shows the challenges and tensions in the Korean experience of modern schooling as a student or teacher dealing with different moral languages such as Confucian and rationalist or rationalist and post-rationalist.

Originality/Value: This experimental work suggests the possibility of forming a uniquely East Asian subjectivity while showing how educational research in East Asia can be performative in the sense that it changes the way East Asians understand themselves and the world around them.

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Introduction

In this paper, I ask whether it would make sense to talk about the task of philosophy of education as a discipline in East Asia and explore its potential through Kuan-Hsing Chen's idea of "Asia as method." What do I mean by "the task of philosophy of education as a discipline in East Asia"? This phrase seems to assume a regional identity or commonality that could already be problematic for some of us. Setting aside its conceptual feasibility, what I mean here is to see if there is something we East Asians can learn from each other to better understand and tackle our educational problems. Why among East Asians? I think this may be explained in terms of so-called postmodern conditions in which something universal sounds epistemologically problematic and something global sounds politically suspicious; thus, it seems like a high time for something particular and something local/provincial to emerge as a new path for our intellectual inquiry. Therefore, regional and cross-cultural studies have flourished.

However, a more historically specific account of the necessity for Chen's regional study would be more appealing. He claims that knowledge production in (East) Asia depends heavily on the West, as the latter is taken by the former as a reference point against which to measure itself or as a goal it aspires to; this is the heritage of Western colonialism in the modern history of (East) Asia. Interestingly, Chen's idea underlying "Asia as method" is that, in a response to this tendency of East Asian academia to be colonized, taking an anti-West path, such as raising a nationalist resistance against it, is not a promising answer. In fact, the nationalist voice is a part of Western imperialism, which actively contributes to or reinforces the dominance of the West by reinforcing binary constructions of a theoretical framework for Western imperialism, that is, the West and the Rest (Hall, 1990) or universality and particularity. Chen's strategy for decolonization is to warn Asian scholars of their obsession with the West and reposition it as one of the many sources that have historically shaped the modern minds of Asians through the process of modernization. In other words, he asks Asian scholars to provincialize Europe, not universalize it, to focus on the ways Asians have experienced their own traditions and the West in the process of modernization. And his idea of "Asia as method" is designed to do this job as a theoretical proposition. His proposal reveals, in a sense, some confidence on the side of (East) Asians in (re)shaping how they are, which seems to be the fruit of the successful economic modernization of this region.

On the other hand, along with their economic success, educational practices and research studies in East Asia tend to draw the world's attention due to their high rankings in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Many scholars tend to attribute this to the unique culture historically shared by East Asian countries, especially the Confucian culture of collectivism, elitism, and intellectualism (Tan, 2018; Zhu, 2021). Even if the way Confucianism historically developed varies among different countries in East Asia, it can reasonably be said that there are some common agendas or sensibilities among East Asians in their *understanding of educational practice*.

Therefore, I propose that one task of philosophy of education in East Asia should be to find new ways of *conceptualizing* and *making sense* of people's educational experiences and practices in East Asian countries. Educational practices in East Asia are often seen as stereotyped, in contrast to the Western style of exam-centered, rote, passive, and authoritative learning versus free, creative, active, and interactive learning. This perception may have been created by Westerners, but East Asians have long internalized it. The dominance of this deep-rooted, stereotyped self-perception has deprived East Asians of the chance to understand the nature of their *actual* experiences in educational practice; namely, their inner conflicts and confusion, and the ways in which they have struggled in the process of modernization. East Asians have never considered what educational practices could mean to them *from their own inner perspective*, not just as seen in contrast to the West, nor as viewed only from their instrumental contribution to the national economy. This way of posing the question assumes some distance to be taken, not only from the uncritical acceptance of the stereotyped dichotomous perception but also from the politically motivated unconditional defense of its legitimacy *as their own*. I am interested in understanding East Asian educational practice and culture in terms of how it has affected them and how they as children have adapted it in modern schooling (i.e., by looking at how it has actually shaped them as young children or adult teachers and what it has meant to who they were as East Asian intellectuals in general or Korean scholars in particular). I think this task would demand a change in the way East Asians do philosophy of education by requiring them to become more self-aware and self-reflexive in their educational practices and experiences in the local culture.

Methodological comment

What underlies this may be described as a theoretical ambition toward articulating so-called East Asian subjectivity. What, then, is subjectivity? According to Hall, subjectivity is a critical concept that "invites us to consider the question of how and from where one's identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control" (Hall, 2004, pp. 3–4). It is a concept about the self that is conscious of how we become who we are, with a sense of self-understanding, which is already a form of self-transformation.

The ambition about East Asian subjectivities is well supported by Charles Taylor's idea of "self-articulation" (1989, 2004) as a way of understanding who we are; we are supposed to articulate, making explicit in words, our own experiences *against* our cultural horizon of meanings. According to Taylor, defining who we are is made possible only by making sense of one's own experiences against the larger moral and cultural horizon from which we were born and raised. Two aspects of this idea are very insightful, especially from an educational perspective. First, it assumes self-interpreting agency; thus, how one interprets oneself is part of who one is. Second, the self-interpretation process changes according to who one is. This means that when East Asians attempt to make sense of their educational experiences in their own historical and cultural contexts, they do not just describe how they are, but, in fact, choose to describe themselves that way. By choosing to do so, they are transformed into it while *widening* their cultural horizon against which they make sense of themselves.

When Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) proposes the idea of "Asia as method" for a decolonialized or deimperialized form of knowledge production, he seems to have this sense of subjectivity for East Asians in mind. This is why he makes a bold suggestion for the methodological practice of this modern subjectivity in Asian studies in the context of Asia, not only for *self-understanding* but also for *cross-cultural understanding*. This approach aspires to conduct Asian studies in such a way as to *transcend* Asia, not just dissolve into Asia or Asians. That is, it is a way of understanding Asia *from inside out*; that is, without Western eyes as its reference point, yet it is a way of mutually *relativizing* both Asia and the West through a mediating process of self-objectification. Here, we should note two distinct methodological moves in Chen's proposal. The first is to maintain a distance from one's own culture so as to be critical of it, which is a way for East Asians to *decolonialize* themselves, undercutting unconditional loyalty to their own *indigenous* culture. The second move is to keep distance from Western culture so as to be critical of it, which is a way for East Asians to *deimperialize* themselves, undercutting loyalty to the Western empire in such a way as to support the marginalized, help the troubled, and resist internal imperial desires (2010, p. 197). Ultimately, these two seemingly contradictory moves are supposed to lead Asians to understand themselves and the world in completely different ways. What is fascinating about these two moves is that they suggest a methodological *practice* in the form of self-transformation. This means that it can exemplify a form of *educational* research practice *through* the gradual transformation of researchers into agents of *new subjectivities* by way of *coming to view* the world in different ways.

Thus, in what follows, I will attempt to show one possible way of practicing Chen's idea of "Asia as a method" by making the two moves described above to articulate and understand my educational experiences as a school student and college teacher in modern Korea. My question is whether it is possible to conduct educational studies in East Asia in the form of *decolonialization*

and *deimperialization*, which could lead to the formulation of new educational subjectivities in East Asia.

The case for reflexive cultural decolonialization

The idea of decolonialization has usually been considered in the context of restoring the indigenous worldview in past colonies after their political independence from imperial rule. In fact, this turning to *nativism* came as a response to the obsession with the material modernization of newly independent regimes after World War II, which devoted all their energies and resources to political and economic independence at the expense of *cultural autonomy*. In other words, the idea of decolonialization was a post-colonial outcry for cultural independence on the part of former colonies. But Chen calls this line of thought on cultural decolonialization into question since it can be "uncritically supportive of the ethnocentric nation building project" in past colonies (Chen, 2010, pp. 65–66). Instead, he calls for a *reflexive* form of cultural decolonialization, especially in East Asian countries. This requires East Asians to be critical of their native culture when it comes to the formation of East Asian modernity. In this section, I propose a way to practice reflexive cultural decolonialization by exploring my own school experiences as a young student in Korea.

I will briefly describe my inner journey as a student, which is a way of exemplifying Taylor's idea of self-articulation for self-understanding-cum-transformation. There may be something that resonates with East Asians, and thereby, it may be one way of supporting the proposal described earlier. The story touches on my learning experiences during my schooling in Korea. When I was in primary school, the formal school curriculum consisted of modernized subject matter based on the principles of Western rationality. However, the informal school culture had a Confucian ethos. I did not notice any tension between these two completely distinct orders of morality until I was in my second year of junior high school. I was a student who seriously considered what she learned from textbooks at school. One day, I happened to pose an innocent question to one of my teachers who was giving us a moral lesson on the Confucian spirit, which I found contradictory to what he had just taught in his social studies class on democracy. Upon raising the question, I was severely scolded and beaten for my "improper" conduct (by Confucian norms), that is, making an objection to a teacher or shaming him in front of others. I presumed at the time that this was why I was punished, but he did not explicitly explain why I deserved the punishment.

After that unfortunate incident, I learned how to internalize double standards in my conduct, that is, by doing one thing on official exams and doing another in my ordinary behavior. The logic of Western rationality seemed to make sense only in textbooks; the way things ran in reality was governed by Confucian moral grammar. So, I had to learn to secretly master two different moral languages that ran quite parallel and never overlapped each other. This split obviously had a

considerable effect on the way my moral identity was shaped, being a constant source of inner conflict throughout my adolescence. Textbook learning constantly alienated me as it was detached from my everyday experiences in a Confucian culture. It did not make sense to me, as I was ruled by the unshakable power of conventional norms.

In modern Korea, raising objections against parents or teachers is neither forbidden nor punishable any more. These days, it is sometimes encouraged, but only verbally. Good students know how to behave in this way. They have already internalized the double standards mentioned earlier. This means that objection-raising students are not punished, but are considered impolite or distasteful; there is a psychological cost they must pay. They are not supposed to raise questions that could embarrass or make their elders uncomfortable, but the elders could do so to the youngers in the name of Confucian morals. However, how can children know which questions are appropriate and which are not? Developing this sensibility is essential to Confucian self-edification. Children are taught to be attuned to the minds of their elders and *attentive to* their psychology from early in their lives. Therefore, when students raise unusual questions or objections to teachers, it is often considered a deliberate challenge to teachers' authority; students' innocent questions out of sheer curiosity are likely to be judged as being out of context, and classrooms are perceived as morally charged contexts where teachers' authority is regarded as absolutely superior.

Now let me give you another example of how the "parallel" moral languages caused inner conflicts for me as a young child. Harmony in human relationships is one of the most important Confucian virtues. I learned this by heart from my family education as well as from my school life. A strong emphasis on human relationships creates a tendency to not cause trouble for others or the community. Thus, if you witness someone around you causing injustice to others or even to yourself, you tend to ignore or suffer it, as any reaction on your part could disrupt the harmony of the entire community. Harmony can be considered an essential virtue for the good of a community when the community culture is relatively just. However, when this is not the case, maintaining the community's status quo perpetuates its unjust order. In facing numerous unjust cases in my childhood, I tended to be a "coward" by modern rationalist moral standards. I mostly chose to follow the grammar of the Confucian moral language for social survival because I found it to work better with social reality. However, I often secretly felt guilty, slightly despised myself, or felt unsure about who I was. This can be described as a common form of self-split that I often suffered in the early years of my life. As I grew up, I still struggled between these two different moral languages that governed everyday reality, even if I was more self-conscious and self-reflexive about the condition.

Looking back on this, I wonder what the source of my guilt was, or what made me guilty about my self-split. I used to think that it was the modern rationalist principles I had learned from textbooks, so I took a critical stance on harmony-centered Confucian morality. However, modern

rationalist principles were not a living standard for me back then; they were just a vaguely understood, abstract set of norms used for textbook exercises. Although they certainly affected my moral judgment through epistemological objectivity, they were unlikely to exert full moral authority over me. Thus, I suspect that the main source of my inner conflict or guilt might have been a basic demand for Confucian morality, which says that what we know is supposed to be inseparable from how we are. This demand might have led me to be aware of a disagreement between what I knew—that is, awareness that something unjust has been done—and how I act—that is, keeping silent about it to ensure harmony in the community. This disagreement may have suddenly left me lost between two moral languages. In other words, the reason I felt bad about myself might have been the idea that I could not live up to the Confucian moral ideals at another level—that is, the inseparability of knowing and being. When this sort of experience is repeated, people tend to feel disoriented and find themselves unworthy. My inner suffering was so deep that the academic life I chose to pursue later always tended to return to the philosophical question of how to recover my lost union with myself or the world, in my sense of being.

What I tried to say here regarding the idea of doing philosophy of education to make sense of East Asian educational experiences in modern schooling was twofold. First, the oppressive form of Confucian morality, which has been dominant in East Asian school culture, at least in Korea, can be criticized not just from the Western rationalistic moral perspective, but also from its own moral standard, such as the principle of inseparability between knowing and being in a moral person. Second, making sense of East Asian educational experiences for self-understanding reveals a unique East Asian way of developing a *modern consciousness* in relation to tradition. We tend to think that Western modernity in modern school curricula was simply imposed upon East Asians by an external colonial power, and it might be so. However, the way East Asians, as self-interpreting agents, took it onboard may not have been a simple one-way process from top to bottom.

In pursuing an academic career in the field of the philosophy of education in the Western tradition for my PhD, there were many potential difficulties, both personal and professional, that sprang from being educated in the Confucian moral tradition. However, what drew me in to the Western tradition of education as self-transformation through my doctoral work on Stanley Cavell was not a pure accident. Of course, my education at a university in the United States was quite revolutionary in its own way; I was finally able to see where and how modern textbook knowledge had meaninglessly accumulated in my head throughout my school years in Korea. This discovery changed not only my understanding of what academic life was supposed to be but also my understanding of who I was. What was so fascinating about this inner revolution was that it taught me how the two questions, what being an academic means and who one is, could or should be interconnected: *Being a serious intellectual* (in academia) *is to be always in touch with who one is*.

This simple formula, the very source of my idea of education as self-transformation, was originally derived from my Confucian upbringing. Confucian teachings on the necessary relationship between knowing and being re-emerged here, yet with a different variation in my life (or we can say that I happened to take seriously Cavell's idea of education as a first-person inner journey for one's own voice by means of speaking for others because it resonated with my Confucian sensibility) (Cavell, 1976; Kwak, 2012). It is not that I did not know the core spirit underlying the formula before; I knew it, yet in a vague or abstract form. But now, I came to know what it *could* mean *to me* through my own experience of self-transformation, that is, as a lived experience, as I read and wrote. This form of knowing as a lived experience, or knowing from the inside, was something I had not experienced during my education in Korea. Somehow, this enlightened my self-discovery, allowing me to deal with my experiences and life in a more intelligible way. We can call this the discovery of my "subjectivity," or "my voice" in Stanley Cavell's words. What was so powerful about this experience, especially from an educational perspective, is that it gradually allowed me to realize the authority of my voice, which I could claim and take responsibility for making myself intelligible to others, as well as to myself. This shows that my modern subjectivity as an East Asian was cultivated through interactive encounters between two cultures, Confucian and Western (Cavellian). In the formation of this subjectivity, my relation to my own Confucian culture was never one way; we may describe it, drawing upon David Hansen's words, as *reflective* loyalty and *reflective* criticality to local values and origins (2013, p. 39).

The case for reflexive cultural deimperialization

Now, let me move to another description of my inner journey, this time as a teacher in modern Korea after I returned from a long stay in the West. This may be the methodological practice of the second move in Chen's idea of "Asia as method," which I described earlier as a move toward reflexive cultural *deimperialization*. According to Chen, "the process of imperialization is wider in scope than the process of colonization (in the colonies) because imperialist expansion (to the other colonies) is always based on domestic mobilization, which is itself a process of imperialization" (2010, p. 200). This means that the imperialization of the people in an empire is always the basis of the colonization of the people in the colonies; these two phenomena are interrelated. Thus, in Chen's view, without a deimperialization movement in the imperial center, there would be no completion of the decolonialization movement. This is why, according to Chen, Fanon says that "there is a symbiotic and intimate relation between the colonizer and the colonized" (Chen, 2010, p. 200).

What does "a symbiotic and intimate relation between the colonizer and the colonized" mean here? This may be interpreted as a relationship in which a *sense of superiority* on the part of the

colonizer is intertwined with a sense of inferiority on the part of the colonized. This psychological intertwinement is systematically shaped by the global order of modernist regimes, which tend to adopt Western rationality and civilization as *universal* standards for a developed society. This implies that the "symbiotic and intimate relationship between the colonizer and the colonized" may be mediated by a sense of Western superiority that is deeply rooted in the minds of both the colonizer and the colonized. However, according to Chen, this sense of superiority (or the sense of inferiority paired with it) lies in an imperialistic impulse in the form of cultural and intellectual *domination*. I recently suspected that the same logic may be equally applied to the relationship between me as a teacher and my students under the modernist regime of education in Korea, in which rational autonomy is likely to be cultivated as a consequence of successful modern education. Let me share a specific case to show what deimperialization could mean in the contemporary Korean context, especially from an educational perspective.

I described earlier how modern schooling in Korea forced me, as a young student, to internalize two moral languages, Confucian and rationalist, leaving me internally split between them. However, as a partly West-educated university teacher, I tried to be a reasonable teacher who not only allowed but also encouraged students to speak out in the classroom while respecting the reasons for their speech. My main motivation for accommodating this relatively free atmosphere of classroom discussion was my modernist belief in education, whose primary objective is to foster an independent mind and thinking as opposed to indoctrination. I tried to become an open-minded and non-authoritative liberal teacher. I thought I was doing well until one day when I had to face a student who challenged me with the following provocative remarks:

> I know, professor, that you expect us to freely engage in classroom discussions and seem to respect our freedom to express our opinions. However, to see reality, we are supposed to play a role even in this setting by following the rules **you** set up, such as giving reasons for our opinion. We feel not allowed to say things or in a manner that is off track of the rules; we are already framed in a certain set of grammar to conform to this discussion. We are just socialized into them and consequently exercise the practice of getting into a certain frame of speaking and thinking. The free discussion you mentioned seems to be a sheer illusion.

I was so stunned and deeply betrayed by this abrupt protest that I did not know what to do during the ensuing silence. Then, I barely managed to keep my temper and finished the class quickly by saying something that I cannot remember. However, I remember being psychologically unprepared for this situation.

What does this instance have to do with the idea of deimperialization? This instance disturbed me so deeply that it led me to reflect on my own *practice* of modernist teaching. What was disturbing about it was not merely what the student said but the fact that I was not psychologically prepared

for it. This made me think that I was not that different from the old teacher of the Confucian spirit from my school years, as described earlier. I might be as oppressive as that teacher in the sense of forcing students to conform to a certain set of rules, but this time I had my own self-proud reason, namely, fostering independent and rational thinking. What surprised me the most was the firmness with the convictions about teaching. The painful soul-searching that followed made me go through all the contradictory assumptions, conscious and unconscious, underlying my so-called "rationalist" approach to teaching.

I realized two things from this examination. One is that even the rationalist teaching of modern education, which is supposed to foster and respect students' independent and free minds, cannot avoid being a form of *socialization*; it is about making the young generation conform to a certain set of norms for thinking and speaking, that is, norms of rational discourse. Any modern educational practice imported from the West seems to cultivate the rules and principles of rational discourse, regardless of how tenuous it may seem when implemented in different non-Western cultural contexts. The other is that modern rationalist schooling is by definition *oppressive* to newcomers, such as young students who have not yet mastered rationalist language. This is a kind of language that models scientific language; this means that the rationalist language is interchangeable no matter who says what, as long as what is said makes sense. The rational discourse provides newcomers with a way into communication, yet in a specific way; "It is the way by which one *depersonalizes* one's visions and insights and formulates them in terms of the common rational discourse and speaks as a representative" (Biesta, 2006, p. 56).

Why is this rationalist language claimed to be oppressive? And why was it felt as oppressive by my student? (I think he must have felt that my rationalist approach was intuitively oppressive.) Where did this manifest in my teaching practice? Remember that I tried to be open-minded and not authoritative. However, no matter how hard I tried, the oppressive nature of my teaching may have manifested itself in the way I exercised my intellectual authority over my students, that is, in a subtle way, I led the discussion while suggesting that certain opinions were more acceptable than others. As a teacher, I am also subject to rational rules and principles. But as a teacher, I act as an official epistemological gate-keeper who decides which views are rationally acceptable or even superior to others, as well as what it means to be "rational" in the first place.

However, we can still ask why the role of the teacher as an epistemological gatekeeper in modern schooling should be described as categorially oppressive, as it also sounds legitimate. However, there seem to be some possible sources of the (mis)labeling as oppressive. First, while the teacher's role seems essential to students if modern schooling is supposed to help students *master* rational language, it is based on a (functionally) *hierarchical* relationship between a teacher as a knowledge expert and students as newcomers. Second, we may say that the mastery of rational language (or knowledge acquisition with the cultivation of a rational mind) in modern schooling may inherently

give teachers a sense of superiority over those who are less successful at it. It comes with the demarcation of people by assessment between fully rational thinkers and those who are in the process of becoming so. This means that the rational language of a community tends to divide people into two groups in a hierarchical order; it is an *imperializing* language.

What, then, could be a post-colonial education that goes beyond this rationalist approach in the direction of the deimperialization process? A recent philosopher of education Gert Biesta's critique of modern education, particularly education for a community of rational discourse, offers a good answer. He first asks what is wrong with modern education, which aims at the mastery of rational discourse. Drawing upon Zygmunt Bauman's description of modern society, Biesta holds that modern schooling as a modern institution is supposed to free individuals from *inherited identity* to give them the benefit of an absolute beginning and to set them free to choose the kind of life they wish to live. He continues to say that "the only way of doing was by elevating individuals to something which itself was beyond all traditions" (Biesta, 2006, pp. 57–58). This means that the modern language that youngsters are supposed to master for their new beginning is rational discourse. They must go beyond all local traditions to become a part of the rational community as social members of the modern state. In this sense, according to Biesta, modern schools are *legitimated* to provide students with the voice of the rational community they represent through a (scientific) curriculum.

What are the problems with modern schooling? Again, drawing upon Bauman's diagnosis, Biesta tells us that in giving students such a rational voice, schools legitimate certain ways of speaking while *at the same time* delegitimating other ways of speaking (Biesta, 2006, p. 57). Biesta depicts the problem of this rational language or community as follows:

> What is important about Bauman's depiction of modern society is … to show how … the rational community of modern society, carried with it a very specific approach to what is outside of and other than itself, that is, the stranger. Strangers, according to Bauman, are those who do not fit the cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world … Since modern society was not based on a post-traditional vision, it could give no place to strangers it produced … The first strategy (of modern society for strangers) was one of assimilation … annihilating the strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming them into a tissue indistinguishable from one's own … The other strategy was … the strategy of exclusion … that ultimately results in the physical destruction of strangers (Biesta, 2006, pp. 58–59)

This passage implies two aspects of modern education. First, the mastery of rational discourse as the aim of modern schooling tends to create *psychological and political* consequences, such as producing strangers in the form of subjection or exclusion (with a sense of inferiority), not just epistemological consequences such as mastery or lack of knowledge. Second, modern schooling tends to implement and reinforce cultural imperialization in the minds of young students when the

mastery of rational language is assessed in the name of fair competition, through which the process of assimilation or exclusion of strangers is legitimated.

How should we respond to this to ensure "education for deimperialization"? What form of education should a (postcolonial) school provide? Biesta argues that schools should be concerned with how to make rational languages *coexist* with strangers of different languages. Thus, education for deimperialization may be formulated as something in which the coexistence of two languages is accommodated in the school community: rational and other languages. This means that schools are supposed to allow non-rational strangers or newcomers (young children or immigrants) to develop their own voices in such a way as to coexist with the rational discourse they are about to learn and master. What should be noted here is that Biesta does not underestimate the function of modern education, that is, the socialization of newcomers into the rational community. In his view, the latter (i.e., the acquisition of rational knowledge and skills) is necessary for social survival given the current order of global capitalism. However, the socialization process should be carefully delivered by self-reflexive teachers, given its political malfunction, such as the cultural imperialization of producing a sense of superiority or inferiority in the minds of young students, depending on their success or failure in mastering rational discourse. There seems to be a point to which concerned teachers should pay attention: The way in which the process of mastering rational language shapes the *political* psychology of young students—that is, a sense of superiority or interiority in relation to others.

Going back to the case introduced in the beginning of this section, I may now be in a position to make better comments about it. First, as a politically concerned teacher, I should continue with the sort of teaching approach I have taken, giving young people a chance to engage in rational discourse, yet leaving them room to question who is to be included or excluded by participation in the language game. Second, as a culturally self-reflexive teacher, I should be able to take seriously interruptions by students that are at odds with my rational discourse and be psychologically prepared for their refusal to follow said discourse. Only in this way could I take the instance as a good opportunity to open up the very conditions of our teaching and learning in front of students, so we can start learning from each other's different languages.

This form of education would allow both teachers and students some critical distance from the rational language and community, which we can call a *deimperialization* process, where we learn how not to be obsessed with going ahead of others for rational meritocracy but how to support the weak and resist imperial desires within ourselves (Chen, 2010, p. 197). If it is accompanied by education for *decolonialization* that also requires some critical distance from East Asians' own indigenous language and community, namely the Confucian moral language, it would lead future generations to somewhere in which a new kind of subjectivity is formed. This new form of

subjectivity would be neither West-oriented universalism nor ethnocentric nationalism, which is what Chen acknowledges in proposing the idea of Asia as a method.

What seems to be critical in this new direction of postcolonial educational projects is fostering young people's willingness to dwell on the border of two different communities of languages so that they can live with the tension between them. Given this task and the prospects for future education, the very source of my inner split between the two moral languages, Confucian and rationalist, which was described earlier as an unfortunate inheritance from the colonial past of modern Korea, can now be newly interpreted as an irreplaceable postcolonial resource that reminds us of the productive tension we live with and invites the young to tackle the tension in their educational work. In other words, education for deimperialization and decolonialization depends on educating youngsters on how to master two different languages, rational and otherwise, in such a way as to live with the tension between them.

Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to make sense of my own educational experiences as a student and teacher against my cultural horizon of meanings through the historical development of modernity in Korea. Here, two actual cases of my school experiences were critical in revealing the cultural nature of what may be typical experiences that East Asians, as teachers or students, face in the midst of the rapid implementation of modern schooling imported from the West in the last century. I do not dare assume that these cases are common to all East Asian countries, nor that, even if they may, my account or interpretation of the experiences would be valid to everyone. I invite them to see if there is something that resonates with them as East Asians, and thereby see if it can be one way of supporting my proposal—that is, seeking the possibility of pursuing the philosophy of education in East Asia in pursuit of the articulation of East Asian subjectivities.

Thus far, I have identified the nature of East Asians without questioning. However, the term East Asian itself is contested: Does it refer to a geographical territory, culture, race, or imaginary space? What is the boundary between East Asia and non-East Asia? Any serious attempt to closely examine educational practices in East Asian countries/regions may be surprising, revealing how strange they look to each other in their local cultures and histories. These differences may surpass the similarities or familiarities, especially given the unfortunate and politically complicated historical relations among countries/regions such as the Chinese mainland, Japan, Korea, and Chinese Taiwan in the early 20th century. However, there are undeniable affinities among these countries/regions in their historical experiences of modernization and the ways in which they have responded to it. This is where East Asians can start as a common ground in their collective attempt to make sense of their educational practices and experiences to better understand

themselves by way of learning from each other. I think this will ultimately lead to new knowledge production in a modernized East Asian model of humanist pedagogy, which is indigenous to that regional culture, while contributing to the enrichment of languages for the discourse of liberal education that is in peril in the face of the dominant dehumanizing scientific (Western) model of teaching and learning.

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