

Social Justice in Translation: Subjectivity, Identity, and Occidentalism

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This paper considers the contemporary prominence of the concept of social justice and identifies two influential strands of thought that currently affect thinking about education: John Rawls' notion of justice as fairness and a more emancipatory conception typified by critical pedagogy. With this prominence the term has gathered a rhetorical force and been subject to ideological degeneration. The paper goes on to consider ways in which the notion of social justice has been "borrowed", especially in the light of the hegemony of English in the international research field. Further colonising consequences are examined, with reference to the work of Naoki Sakai, in relation to the development of notions of subjectivity and identity, in what might be described as a new "Occidentalism". In conclusion, the emphasis on cooperation in Rawls is contrasted with a notion of conversation found in Stanley Cavell and Ralph Waldo Emerson. This is epitomised by values of receptivity, openness, and resourcefulness, and is suggestive of a more Eastern sensibility.

"Social justice" is a phrase that recurs with some force in contemporary political and academic discussion, and in many respects this is understandable. One can scarcely imagine a form of human life for which justice does not remain a question, and the effects of the adjective point up the particular pressures to which that question is exposed in an overcrowded and, in some ways, environmentally depleted world. How are we to live together in justice, in our own countries and continents, and in the world as a whole?

But we can move too quickly with the phrase, and it does bear some critical examination. My discussion begins by examining social justice in terms of the ways that as an idea it has become influential in educational research and related fields (section 1). It goes on to show how, in global terms, this influence cannot be separated from the global dominance of English (section 2). This is related in turn to questions of translation (section 3). The particular pertinence of this is then emphasised by turning to a topic that, although it may seem a digression, goes to the heart of thinking in philosophy and social science: the nature of subjectivity, in translation (section 4). And finally a return is made to aspects of social justice considered in section 1 in order to unsettle some of the dominant patterns of influence and to open the way towards a different kind of thinking (section 5).

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1. Concept, ideology, narrative

In the first place, let us look more closely at what the adjective “social” in “social justice” adds. As justice is necessarily justice amongst people, it is inevitably understood in relation to a social world. What other kind of justice can there be? In this respect the adjective does indeed seem to be redundant.

But the modified question “How are we to live together *fairly*?” in fact points to a better defence of the expression, because it cannot be taken for granted that justice means fairness. Thus, a feudal or caste-based society, in which one’s station in life is limited by birth or marriage, may be regarded as aligned with some sense of the right ordering of things, just as it is not *incoherent* to understand as just a society, such as an extreme communist one, in which the individual is but a part in the organic whole of the state—however objectionable we may find such arrangements today. To accept that justice means fairness, by contrast, is to take a step towards a commitment to equality and to the kind of universalism that that implies: we are all equal *qua* human beings.

There is still, however, scope for a divergence of views, for justice as fairness is compatible with commitments to equality of outcome and equality of opportunity, to egalitarianism and to meritocracy. Nor does the principle take us far in solving, for example, such a practical question as whether inheritance tax is fair. In view of this it is right to see politicians and thinkers from across much of the spectrum as committed to justice in this way. Hence, if the addition of the adjective “social” is taken to imply the specific idea of justice as fairness, this may save it from the charge of redundancy, but the purchase of the expression remains very broad.

The most concerted contemporary attempt to reason through these differences is undoubtedly to be found in the work of John Rawls, and his writings have in many respects set the agenda for (at least Anglophone) political philosophy these past four decades. Let me elaborate a little. Rawls understands political philosophy to have four roles in public life. First, it should discover the basis of reasoned agreement, especially in societies where diversity is likely to lead to conflict—that is, in large-scale, modern democracies in general. Second, it should enable the members of a society to understand the political significance of that membership and the rights and responsibilities that reasonably attach to citizenship. Third, it should explore the nature and limits of what is possible in practice. In other words it should be realistic about what real people are like and what kinds of measures will gain their support. And fourth, it should have a reconciliatory role, showing that, for all the frustrations of practical politics, and in spite of human weakness and corruption, it is possible for institutions to function according to principles of reason. What is important throughout is Rawls’ understanding of his own endeavour as advancing the principle of a just liberal society, where justice is understood in terms of fairness. Rawls developed these ideas most fully in his master-work *A Theory of Justice* (1971), but he refined his position in three further major books: *Political Liberalism* (1993), *The Law of Peoples* (1999), and *Justice as Fairness* (2001). Rawls viewed his own work as a practical contribution towards settling the long-standing conflict in democratic thought between liberty and equality. He offers a way of understanding the nature and the demands of citizenship within a fair democratic polity, seeing this as a basis for a sustainable, just constitutional democracy able to contribute to international stability and peace. Individuals are understandably frustrated by the fact that others do not see things as they do and live their lives by different and sometimes conflicting values and priorities. But Rawls offers the robust, realistic, and yet reconciling thought that, given that human beings cannot see the whole truth, this diversity of worldviews may be the healthy result of greater freedom for all.

The evolution of Rawls' work needs to be understood also in terms of a reaction that has been loosely described as "communitarian", and that, during the 1980s, was associated especially with important books by Michael Sandel (1981) and Charles Taylor (1985). Sandel is of particular interest for Japanese readers at present in view of the impact of his more recent *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (2009), the translation of which (2010) became a truly extraordinary best-seller. Perhaps the point should be made, moreover, that, in spite of the nomenclature of "liberalism" and "communitarianism", these critics share with Rawls a strong basic commitment to politics within a liberal tradition, their differences consisting rather in how the good for human beings, individually and collectively, is to be understood.

Let us proceed by considering some remarks in Rawls' later writings, where, in response to the question of in what sense citizens of a democracy can be free, he writes:

One can try to deal with this question by viewing political society in a certain way, namely, as a fair system of cooperation over time from one generation to the next, where those engaged in cooperation are viewed as free and equal citizens and normal cooperating members of society over a complete life. We can then try to formulate principles of political justice such that if the basic structure of society—the main political and social institutions and the way they fit together as one scheme of cooperation—satisfies those principles, then we can say without pretense and fakery that citizens are indeed free and equal (Rawls, 2001, p. 4).

Rawls is alert here and elsewhere in his writings to the ways in which justice as fairness can itself become too easy a slogan, propping up the status quo and in the process becoming ideological. One way in which he resists this is in his emphasis on the pluralism of a democracy and hence its difference from community insofar as the members of the latter share a comprehensive conception of the good. The central organising idea of cooperation is then understood to have three essential features. First, cooperation is not merely a matter of socially coordinated activity but is guided by publicly recognised rules and procedures that those involved accept as appropriate. Second, fair terms of cooperation, the terms that participants may, and sometimes should, reasonably accept are characterised by a reciprocity or mutuality of benefit. And third, cooperation includes the idea of rational advantage to participants from the standpoint of their own good.

With regard to the provision of education in a democracy, there is no doubt that these principles have enormous power, and they have guided reflection and policy on such matters as educational opportunity, institutional diversity, and funding. Here and in political philosophy more generally, such discussions can appear as "footnotes to Rawls", and this is testimony to the importance of his achievement. Let me trail the thought here, however, that the consistency and assurance of this discourse may reinforce a certain conception of the human subject, perhaps foreclosing approaches to social justice via different avenues of thought. Nevertheless, given that the term "social justice" has acquired particular prominence in educational research, I take this Rawlsian philosophical understanding to be one of the two principal ways in which it is currently interpreted and received.

The other set of associations the term carries is more emotive in kind. It relates to the various ways in which campaigns for social justice have sought both to redress inequalities and, in what has become known as the politics of recognition, to acknowledge the forms of human diversity. Thus, it combines elements of neo-marxism and classic egalitarianism with a more recent sen-

sitisation to difference. Critical pedagogy can be taken as a prominent expression of such streams of thought.

What I would like to emphasise is the extent to which these two principal elaborations of social justice are apt discursively to determine educational thought about these matters. That is, they provide the textual reference points, the vocabulary, and the rhetorical codes in which discussion takes place. There is a danger then that they become ideological, in the Marxist sense to which Rawls refers.

In the light of this, it is worth pondering the following point. It is not uncommon for an education or social science department in a university to style its work in terms of “social justice”, whether as the name of its research focus or the title of one of its courses: this becomes part of its “narrative” of itself. Today, as never before, departments are required to have a narrative, and the coherence, plausibility, and political marketability of this may be critical to their success, even to their survival. It is no rejection of those underlying values with which the term has reasonably been associated to acknowledge now the rhetorical force that “social justice” has acquired. In this ideological degeneration it risks becoming little more than a marketing or make-over term. But in fact it is part of the contemporary, globalised, cultural context, and a facet of neoliberalism, that any term, no matter how noble its associations, risks becoming a facile slogan or vacuous cliché, and hence a barrier to responsible thought. Let us pursue this further.

2. Policy-borrowing and the hegemony of English

To see how this works has entailed paying some attention to the nature of the language itself, and inevitably here this means attending to the English language. This is not simply because it is an English term we are dealing with, but because of the effects on academic research of the global hegemony of English. The coincidence of the supremacy of the British and American empires with spectacular, technological change has given English prominence as a language in a way that is unprecedented, that is seemingly self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating, and that, especially in the post-1989 global settlement, we have been inclined to accept as irreversible. It may be that this has a special importance in education because academic research in this field is typically under pressure from a number of sources. Not only is it rightly understood to pursue the questions where they lead and hence, as with more traditional disciplines, to engage in a form of enquiry that transcends national boundaries; it is also expected, quite reasonably once again, to contribute practically to the society in which it is located, through, for example, the training of teachers and the undertaking of research to guide or support national policy. That policy context has now, however, been drastically altered by changes on a global scale. Three factors in this stand out. In the first place, institutions such as PISA mean that countries are exposed to international comparisons in a way that is hard to avoid and that has important internal political consequences. In the second, for many countries policy is constrained because of dependence on international organisations such as the World Bank. And in the third, there are the more general and pervasive aspects of globalisation: the mass media, the Internet, and travel mean that the lives of people generally are inevitably less self-contained, more exposed, more invaded than was the case even in the comparatively recent past. None of these facts seems set to change, and in all of them English is dominant.

In such circumstances it is inevitable that English expressions carry a certain authority. This

has two facets to it. First, they have *practical* authority through being understood more widely in international contexts. Second, they have added *perceived* authority because of the economic power and cultural prestige associated with Anglophone—that is, especially, American—culture. These points are all the more telling in the light of the sheer scale of educational research in North America—witness the size of the annual AERA meeting. Add to this the fact that there has been an extraordinary growth in publication in educational research and that this is predominantly in English. And add to this the fact that measures of research quality typically give priority to publication in English. And, once again, add to this the fact that Anglophone researchers then have an obvious advantage in this process.

Certainly, within Taiwan, for example, there has been some consideration of the significance of these matters as part of the discussion of “policy-borrowing”. Thus, for example, Shen-Keng Yang has examined Taiwan’s following of the global trend towards deregulation, has (most significantly for present purposes) identified this as the “motto” of its education reform, and has drawn attention to the imbalances that have ensued between competition and social justice (Yang, 2000). With similar concerns but in relation to German influence, Wei-Zhi Liu has analysed the dissemination of German pedagogy in China and Japan from 1928–1983 and the attempts of four educationalists to develop a pedagogy that combined German and Taiwanese elements (Liu, 2008). And Wen-Yan Chen has considered different types of policy transfer research, including its historical study, its prospective evaluation, theory-building on its basis, and most importantly the various critiques of it that have been developed (Chen, 2009). My knowledge of these papers is regrettably confined to their abstracts, but I take it that there is some evidence here of a growing questioning of the dynamics of policy-borrowing—as the related terms “policy-travelling” and “policy-transplant” perhaps more obviously indicate. While it is entirely prudent for nations to be ready to look at practice abroad and to seek to emulate or adapt or learn from this in various ways, it seems inevitable that, at least as far as the relationship with Anglophone countries is concerned, the traffic is likely to be one-way. In fact this raises questions about comparative education as a field of study: whereas, in many countries where this thrives, its aims are couched partly in terms of the mutual benefits of learning of differences in practice, in the United States, especially, comparative study is likely to be undertaken out of purely academic interest.

3. Social justice in translation

But my purpose here is not to consider policy-borrowing only in its most literal sense, for there are larger issues that constitute the background to these more specific matters. My remarks about language above have been woven around questions concerning the adoption of the term “social justice”. I want now to speculate further about the experience of, for example, the Taiwanese or Japanese researcher when the term arises. In the first place, insofar as the term is encountered in Anglophone contexts—say, in journals and books or at conferences in the English-speaking world—it is likely to be embedded in cultural circumstances that are alien in various ways and where there are chains of connection that will be only partly understood. Second, in international contexts where there is no shared language—involving participants from, say, Korea and Italy—the default means of communication will most likely be English; or, to be more precise, it will be English-as-a-foreign-language. It is English of this functional but culturally anodyne kind that has become the world language. Third, even in circumstances that involve only native speakers of, say,

Chinese, where English is not being used, it is likely that a certain academic kudos will attach to the command of key terms in English—very much in the way that the incorporation of the occasional German or French or ancient Greek word into academic English can give the native speaker of English an air of sophistication; indeed because of the power and importance of English it may be hard to avoid these terms. I understand that when social justice is the topic of research in Japan, the katakana *sosharu jasutisu* is sometimes used instead of the authentic *shakai seigi*.

Beyond these factors, however, there is a more complex point. Where “social justice” is translated and a corresponding expression in Chinese is used (社會正義), it is likely that the respective terms will have different connotations, opening different chains of association. A Chinese speaker who is sensitive to this will experience a difference between semantic fields. By contrast, for the native-speaker of English, who encounters only the English term, this will not be the case. In both cases the presence and power of English will have its effects, totally and directly in the case of the English-speaker, partially and indirectly in that of the speaker of Chinese.

This is partly to make the familiar point that different languages divide up the world in different ways, engendering diverse patterns of conceptual connection and different possibilities of thought. I say that this point is familiar, but it is also for many of us an uncomfortable matter: it is convenient, especially for native English speakers, to play down or dismiss its importance. This dismissal then leads to the complacent assumption that this is just a matter of translation, that translation is primarily a technical matter, and that differences between languages are merely to be overcome (see, for example, Standish, 2011). Think of this as a suppression of thought, of which the monolingual person may be unaware.

4. Changing the subject

To illustrate more fully the significance of translation, I turn now to a set of terms that is of central importance to the social sciences and the humanities, and that has been addressed systematically and more richly. These concern the notions of subjectivity and the self. To do this I draw especially on the work of Naoki Sakai, a graduate of Tokyo University who pursued doctoral studies, following ten years in business, at the University of Chicago, since when he has been a professor at Cornell.

Sakai is plainly influenced by Foucauldian notions of subjectivation and of technologies of the self—that is, that we become subjects or selves through the discursive regimes in which we find ourselves and that these are historical and diverse. Sakai finds a specific point of departure in Akira Suzuki’s examination in the early nineteenth century of the idea of foreign language learning. Writing during the period of Japan’s closure to the outside world (1600–1868), Suzuki understood such learning in terms of the acquisition of an ancient language, of China or Japan. But the crucial thing for present purposes is that this process was understood to involve an absorption of the textures of a social and political reality different from one’s own; it was, in addition, through this that there would be a “cofiguring” of each. Hence, learning of this kind (and the relation to literature and language that it implies) is of an order somewhat different from that of “literature” or “foreign-language learning” in their current familiar forms: whereas the contemporary study of literature might be conceived in terms of, say, a literary-critical approach, and a language might be studied for instrumental reasons, in Suzuki’s account learning is closer to the experience of the novice monk, where one becomes absorbed in the content and textual practices of the language in

question, including its characteristic disciplining of the body, and commits or submits oneself to its ethos. Such an account of literature is overtly related to the construction of subjectivity, with all the ethical richness that that implies. Sakai takes this to be “an ecstatic project, a project of moving away from and getting out of the selfsame that the figure of a foreign language solicits me to venture into. It is a project of transforming me into that which is not familiar rather than a project of returning to the authentic self” (Sakai, 1997, p. 33). Hence, this encounter with the foreign language realises a possibility of subjectivity on both fronts (the “home” language and the foreign language), and this is transformative in kind.

He explains this in terms of divergent conceptions of subjectivity, realised in two possible translations of the word “subject”, a term notoriously problematic for Japanese and Chinese translators. Part of the background to the distinction he draws is found in the ethics and anthropology of Tetsuro Watsuji, developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Watsuji himself relates his account to Marx’s dissatisfactions with eighteenth century materialism, a metaphysics that divided the world into objects of knowledge, on the one hand, and epistemological subjects, on the other. It was against this that Marx emphasised the idea of *praxis*, where the subject is understood as (bodily) engaged in activities and hence socially and historically located. In the light of this distinction, Watsuji identifies the epistemological subject as *shukan* and the subject of practice as *shutai*. Thus:

主観

shukan

epistemological subject

主体

shutai

subject of *praxis*

(The conceptual field of, and the relation between, the equivalent terms in Chinese—*chu-kuan* and *chu-ti*—is, I understand, slightly different, and in what follows I shall follow Sakai in using the Japanese.) If I have understood this correctly, the popular connotations may be somewhat different from their more philosophical ones. It should be remembered also that their more philosophical use in Japanese is recent: philosophy as an academic form of study was “imported” only with the ending of Japan’s period of closure in the late nineteenth century. Thus, in popular terms *shukan* can have negative associations related to a kind of lack of objectivity, to being too subjective in one’s consideration of things, or perhaps to being egotistical. When Amane Nishi (1829–1927), in the late nineteenth century, introduced philosophy into Japan and created a name for it, *tetsugaku* (哲学), he gave *shukan* more positive connotations by preferring it as the equivalent of “epistemological subject”. According to Sakai, Nishi was not alone at the time in deploring the absence of systematic reasoning in Japan, and the emphasis on *shukan* was presumably intended to answer to this lack. *Shutai* by contrast, a term less visible in philosophy as it was then established in Japan, can imply a kind of independence of thought, or perhaps better a self-reliance or resourcefulness, such that one is not too easily influenced by others. The second part of the Chinese written expression (体) refers to the body, blurring the boundaries of epistemology and ethics, and this helps to show the way that it turns us back to notions of practical engagement and hence brings us closer to Marx.

Sakai’s usage of these terms retains some of these connotations, but he attempts to give them more precision, and in this he is not alone. Kitaro Nishida (1870–1945), for example, makes a distinction along similar lines:

One may automatically assume that poiesis or technology is immediately *shukan-teki*. But ... what may appear simply technological, such as the building of a house, is possible only upon the relevant historical substratum, whereas what may appear unrelated to technology, such as language, must in fact be constituted technologically. It goes without saying that society cannot exist without language. Hence, our dialogue here and now is already a historical manufacturing act, and it therefore is a matter of technology... Technology requires dexterity. Dexterity means the historical formation of the individual's habits. However, the habits are not formed by the individual's subjective [*shukan-teki*] act: they are formed as historical manufacturing acts. Otherwise, we would never be able to manufacture anything by those habits. Our habits, therefore, are the habits of the historical world (Nishida, 1965, p. 135, in Sakai, 1997, pp. 198–199, n. 10, Sakai's translation).

While the anticipation of Foucault is evident here, what also needs to be registered is the proximity in these reflections of subjectivity to notions of identity. To make things clearer, let us touch on Sakai's critique of Watsuji.

While it may seem, as Watsuji implies, that *shukan* is the mode of subjectivity of "the West" and *shutai* that of "the East", Sakai is eager to show that the Japanese are also *shukan-teki* in their construction of the West.¹ Thus, the "interiority called Japan" in Watsuji's anthropology ends up being thoroughly "Western" —the grafting of an image of Japan on Japan determined by Western notions of identity.² In the same way subjects are apt to become *shukan* in confronting cultural difference insofar as, in this process, the other is objectified. To identify *shutai* as the *defining characteristic* of subjectivity in the East is ironically self-defeating. So these are questions about what can be understood by identity itself. Sakai's response to this implies that the wrong kind of emphasis on identity here involves "a repression of the singular eventhood of historicity, of what cannot be arrested in the phenomenality of the representable within the economy of chronological temporality" (p. 149). It is important then that these terms are asymmetrical: there is a difference between what can be accommodated in a general economy of universality and particularity, and what flees as soon as any attempt is made to arrest it. "By *shutai*, therefore," he continues, "I like to suggest the impossibility of full saturation of any identity and, particularly, of the agent of action, as well as an undecidability that underwrites the possibility of social and ethical action. Yet the *shutai* is not the agent of action possessing free choice as it is understood in liberal humanism because freedom is neither owned by it nor in it" (p. 150). The resistance here is, I take it, against the idea of freedom as either a possession of a subject or as internal to an ego, and the reason for this is that freedom is "out there", in the engagement of ethical action and with the absence of any final settlement. Plainly the metaphysics implied by Sakai's remarks here is at odds with assumptions that pervade the Rawlsian discourse of rational choosers, and plainly then this must have its bearing on the ways in which social justice is conceived and realised.

It was said above that the word "subject" presents problems for translators, and this exploration of *shukan* and *shutai* helps to show why this is so. Inevitably in philosophy and social science, not to mention practical politics, this is a peculiarly pivotal term, and so the cross-cultural consequences of this translational problem should be plain enough. But in fact this exemplifies a more general difficulty. The translator normally confronts a gap between meanings for which there is no ultimately satisfactory resolution. As a result the translator experiences the space for judgement—precisely that space where there is no rule to resolve the difficulty she faces. There is then an inherent openness and "ab-solution"³ in what she does. Thus, translation, as Sakai claims, is a

shutai-teki technology *par excellence* (p. 198, n. 10). In this respect the monolingual may be morally blind.

The fact that subjects become *shukan-teki* in the objectification of the other, and that this can happen at an intercultural level, is amply evident in the familiar forms of Orientalism. Sakai exposes, in his account of Japan's response to the West, what might be called a corresponding Occidentalism, and it would seem then that this reciprocates with the West in the process of cofiguring that Sakai describes. But in my view there remains a difference. The West's Orientalism is born out of a sense of superiority coupled to an (ethnocentric) universalist metaphysics. While Japan has its own sense of superiority, even if this falters at times, there is a crucial difference in that its Occidentalism is not derived from an indigenous universalist metaphysics. Of course Occidentalism is not confined to Japan, and this latter point applies also, I believe, to its manifestations elsewhere.

I confess that I do not know quite what to make of this, if it is true, but it does strike me that whereas Orientalism may be a "natural", though objectionable outgrowth of Western ways of thinking, Occidentalism has the character of a double-grafting: it is grafted on a borrowed notion of subjectivity and of identity.⁴

This, I think, reinforces the bad aspects of policy-borrowing and reduces the possibilities of exchange between countries. At the same time it foregrounds *shukan-teki* ways of thinking and being at the expense of the greater openness and possibility of the *shutai-teki*.

5. Towards a new conversation

Of course I want to bring together my exposure of the problems of monolingualism with my critique of dominant conceptions of social justice and the way these play out in educational research. The experience of translation, which has been illustrated with reference to *shukan* and *shutai*, does not occur only between languages: as has been widely recognised, it occurs also in an intra-lingual way.⁵

My frustration or disappointment with the familiar expressions of social justice that I identified in section 1 has two aspects. First, I think there is a continuing need to be sensitised to the rhetorical inflation of this and similar terms, as found, for example, in critical pedagogy, in statements of policy, and in mobilisations of narrative. Second, while I do not doubt the worthiness and value of much of the work undertaken in the wake of Rawls, research that addresses questions concerning, say, the fair distribution of educational opportunity, I find that this tradition of thought has less to say about certain central aspects of education—that is, about the substance of teaching and learning, and about its transformative place in human life—and that its discourse is apt to hide the importance of these matters. The dominance of *shukan-teki* ways of thinking suggests that there is much to be learned from the different semantic fields that Japanese and Chinese open.

My reaction in this respect has a parallel in Stanley Cavell's criticism of Rawls's emphasis on cooperation, a central democratic virtue at the heart of justice. In a comparatively recent iteration of this, he writes:

"Cooperation", as a general state of social interaction, suggests the idea of society as a whole either as having a project or, at the other extreme, as being a neutral field in which each can pursue his or her own projects. Intuitively these extremes are analogous to aspects

of the interesting institution of competitive games...

The idea of “conversation”, in contrast, emphasizes neither a given social project nor a field of fairness for individual projects. (Nor, as I have insisted, does it deny the importance of these ideas.)

Conversation is then the field within which I might discover what my projects might be. Cavell continues:

What it emphasizes is, I might say, the opacity, or non-transparency, of the present state of our interactions, cooperative or antagonistic—the present seen as the outcome of our history as the realization of attempts to reform ourselves in the direction of compliance with the principles of justice. The virtues most in request here are those of listening, the responsiveness to difference, the willingness for change. The issue is not whether there is a choice between the virtues of cooperation and of conversation. God forbid. The issue is what their relation is, whether one of them discourages the other (Cavell, 2004, pp. 173–174).

My issue then is that the dominance of particular kinds of discourse, in critical pedagogy and political liberalism, perpetuates monolingualism of a kind. A better idiom for educational thought requires the release of language, and this can be realised in both inter-lingual and intra-lingual ways.

Cavell finds in the second syllable of “conversation” (“-vers-” —cf. reversal, diversion, averse) the suggestion of a turning of thought such that it cannot proceed solely, and in many respects does not proceed best, when it travels along straight, systematic lines: openness to conversation, a readiness to be turned (to be shaped, fashioned, sometimes diverted, sometimes rebuffed), requires that I do not seek to shore up my own identity but rather am ready for new possibilities—that is, ready to become.

Plainly this is to take conversation not as just any kind of verbal exchange between people but to idealise it as something to be aspired towards. And plainly, given that Emerson is never far from Cavell’s account, the readiness to be fashioned cannot be an acquiescence in conformity. Emerson says of conversation that its laws are “analogous to the laws of society” and that it is the “first office of friendship” (Emerson, 1961, p. 292), where the friend is not someone who merely reinforces my identity, who secures me where I am, but rather someone ready to challenge me towards my next, best possibility. Transformative rather than informative, conversation requires a listening through which, as Branka Arsić puts this, I forget “the texts, codes, and judgments that constitute the conversing ‘I’; it happens only as self-abandonment” (Arsić, 2010, p. 196). The interruption that the friend in conversation represents has the character of “the singular eventhood of historicity”, in Sakai’s phrase. It is in this spirit that Emerson advocates a kind of self-reliance, not as individualistic autonomy but as the kind of receptivity, openness, and resourcefulness that is achieved in the act of abandonment (see, for example, Saito, 2005, p. 147).

There is nothing arbitrary about turning to Emerson here, for he was deeply influenced by East Asian thought. Hence, this 19th American philosophy, in partial reaction against Europe, finds some company with the East. Ancient Confucian teaching emphasises the necessity of the growth of moral sensibility within the student. That the Chinese character for *shutai* incorporates the symbol for the body (体), and that this body cannot be understood in terms of any oppressive mind/body dualism, emphasises practical engagement: hence, far from being an immunisation against the turbulence of the world, this is the realisation of conduct that remains appropriately earthed—

call this developing resourcefulness a conducting of the energies of experience.

But it is not surprising then that this aspect of Emerson's work is itself repressed: he is more conveniently championed and contained as the prophet of American individualism. I am drawn by the thought that the parallels between this repression and that of *shutai* extend to symmetries between them in respect of resourcefulness and self-reliance. Repression of this kind is itself a distortion of the possibilities of social justice, even its violation, as well as of the possibilities of learning from one another. Does academic research in education in some way collude in this?

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Notes

- ¹ It should be obvious that these terms are used in a discussion such as this as short-hand expressions. There is no suggestion that countries in East Asia and countries in Europe or North America divide in such clear-cut ways. And of course so much of what is referred to as "the West" permeates the East, just as countries and people in the West are affected by influences from "the East" in multiple ways.
- ² Watsuji's latent Sinophobia is said to bear the features of a certain anti-Semitism, indicative of a repression of anxiety, an anxiety over identity. This is a repression, Sakai claims, from which Asian Studies has never entirely been free (p. 151), and I venture to suggest that it is a potential threat more generally to comparative education.
- ³ Sakai's term here has multiple senses, but at the least it should indicate that the task she faces cannot be understood in any simple logic of problem-solving. The difficulty she faces is irreducible, although she still must exercise judgment and act.
- ⁴ In other words, the East's construction of the West is grafted on a Western construction of the East, but the origin of such identity-construction is in Western forms of representation and objectification, and Western notions of identity.
- ⁵ This is readily evident in the writings of, for example, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida (see Standish, 2011).

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