

ROUTLEDGE CRITICAL STUDIES IN ASIAN EDUCATION

# Asia as Method in Education Studies

A defiant research imagination

Edited by  
Hongzhi Zhang,  
Philip Wing Keung Chan and  
Jane Kenway



# Asia as Method in Education Studies

Unlearning and reinventing the theoretical frameworks of Intercultural and Asian Studies is central to this book, as it is to Chen Kuan-Hsing's evocative *Asia as Method*, this book's inspirational source. Chen insists that studies of Asia move beyond their paralysing fixation on the West as either a positive or negative referent, and that they develop their own standpoints, reference points and research agendas. *Asia as Method in Education Studies* is, therefore, a provocative and suggestive exploration of educational ideas imported from the West. Chen's challenge provokes the writers in this collection to consider the implications of colonial and imperialist forces for education systems, policies and practices, as well as for educational research itself. The writers offer examples of what it means to rethink and re-examine education in Asia beyond both the Western imperialist eye and the post-colonial 'politics of resentment'. *Asia as Method in Education Studies* combines the diverse research of scholars from various countries of Asia, as they consider, for example:

- Struggles to construct new research imaginations in response to Chen's challenges;
- East–West dialogue: three cases of educational research in China and Australia;
- 'Asia as [a] method' of complexity and dialogue;
- Vietnam, the West and the generalized Self in transnational education;
- Against Asia-centric methods: Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production.

Highly anticipated for its novel contemporary perspectives, this book offers researchers specialising in educational studies and policy-making fresh practices of thought.

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 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

 **NIE**  
NATIONAL  
INSTITUTE OF  
EDUCATION  
SINGAPORE

First published 2015  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Asia as method in education studies/edited by Hongzhi Zhang, Philip Wing Keung Chan, Jane Kenway.

pages cm. – (Routledge critical studies in Asian education)

1. Education – Research – Asia. 2. Educational change – Asia.

3. Education – Asia – Western influences. 4. Postcolonialism – Asia. 5. Chen, Kuan-Hsing. Asia as method. I. Zhang, Hongzhi (Research assistant), editor of compilation. II. Chan, Philip Wing Keung, editor of compilation. III. Kenway, Jane, editor of compilation.

LB1028.25.A78A75 2015

370.72095 – dc23

2014030448

ISBN: 978-1-138-78596-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-76750-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

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delivers her deepest gratitude to Monash University for granting her a Postgraduate Publication Award for the period of August to October 2013, upon the completion of her thesis. This publication is also dedicated to the Higher Degree Directorate General of Indonesia and the State Polytechnic of Malang, who provided the scholarship for her doctoral degree in Monash University. Siti Rohani is also indebted to her supervisor, Dr Jill Brown, for all the hard work supervising her thesis, and to her colleagues, Paulus Kuswandono and Isti Gandana, who made this publication possible.

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# Acknowledgements

The theme of *Asia as Method in Education Studies: A defiant research imagination* was energized by a remarkable group of experienced scholars, emerging researchers and doctoral candidates. As editors, we express our sincere gratitude to all those who joined us in our enquiries. We are particularly grateful to all the final contributors for their enthusiasm and persistence over several years.

There are other organizations and people we would also like to thank for their support while we researched and wrote this book.

We thank Professor Kuan-Hsing Chen, the author of *Asia as Method: Toward deimperialization*, for being the discussant of our invited symposium at AARE-APERA Joint International Conference in December 2012. He very generously shared his insights on this theme and responded thoughtfully to the papers presented. We also thank Professor Michael Singh and Dr Jing Qi for their critical and valuable peer reviews of the chapters.

We thank the Faculty of Education at Monash University for financing this project. We are indebted to Professor John Loughran (Faculty Dean) for his moral and financial support, and Mayur Katariya (Manager of Faculty Research Degrees Office), for his effort and timely assistance. We also acknowledge Ms Diana Langmead's detailed copy-editing.

We express our gratitude to all of those at Routledge who contributed, in a professional and congenial way, to bringing this book to completion. We thank Professor Wing On Lee and Professor Saravanan Gopinathan, series editors of the Routledge Critical Studies in Asian Education series, for their feedback on our proposals for this volume. We thank Jarrod Chun Peng Tam for his efficient liaison with us.

## Preface

Can a spider weave its way out of  
the web that it is being woven into,  
just as it weaves?

The editors have invited me to write a preface to this groundbreaking book, and it is with both excitement and trepidation that I have embarked on this task. To write or speak necessitates one's recognition that one is writing or speaking from some location. This location is not just geographical but also sociohistorical, sociocultural and sociopolitical. Given the history, subjectivity and sociocultural and geopolitical position of someone who has grown up in former British colonial Hong Kong, has received education from the English-medium University of Hong Kong (first established in 1910 to 'transmit' cultural and linguistic knowledge from the 'West' to the 'East' (Lugard, 1910)) and has travelled to the University of Toronto in Canada on a Commonwealth Scholarship to do her doctoral studies in education in the early 1990s, what I can do, at most, is like a spider spitting out 'strands' that are both (partial) product and medium of the sociohistorical power structures that have worked through me, constituted my subjectivity and permeated my discourse. Can I exercise my agency as the spider weaves its web, not totally constrained by its own biophysiological structure and habitus?

Chen (2006, 2010) proposes an alternative strategy. Instead of reproducing the West as the Other, an alternative discursive strategy would be to see the West as participating in local social formations in a systematic but never totalizing way, while recognizing that the 'West' and the 'East' are always discursive constructions and never homogeneous. It is true that the modernization of various societies in Asia includes important elements of the West, but it is not fully constituted by it. As Chen puts it:

Rather than being constantly anxious about the question of the West, we can actively acknowledge it as a part of the formation of our subjectivity. In the form of fragmented pieces, the West has entered our history and become part of it, but never in a totalizing manner. The task for Asia as Method is to multiply frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward.

(2010, p. 223)

Chen Kuan-Hsing's project (Chen, 2010; Lin, 2012), like this book's project, is, perhaps, not too far removed from what I conceive as the spider's project of weaving its way out of the web that has constituted it in the first place. We have, at least, been partially constituted by the institutions of modern schooling systems, higher-education systems and academic institutions, of research publication, tenure and job appraisal systems. In short, the visible and invisible political economic structures of academic knowledge production, circulation and consumption need to be recognized, if not fully analysed and problematized, if we are to be upfront about the locations from which we speak/write and produce academic knowledge that struggles to 'matter' (or carry currency) in the education field in which the authors of the chapters in this volume are situated.

Chen (2009) is acutely aware of the need for (young) scholars from diverse locations of the Asia-Pacific region to publish in 'international' journals in order to survive in academia, to find an academic job and to continue to contribute to knowledge production. 'International' journals are, in fact, code words for English-language, Anglo-American-based journals (Lin, 2009). In recent years, with the relentless incursion of global neo-liberalist discourses and policies in academic institutions, many South East Asian universities (e.g., those in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore) have been drawn into the international university ranking game and have started to use academic publication in so-called 'internationally indexed' journals as the major criterion for academic hiring, review, tenure and promotion decisions.

The authors of the chapters of this book are, thus, speaking and writing against the grain by initiating dialogues both with Chen's ideas and with each other, in a critical project to break through the hegemonic knowledge structures that have dominated the processes of academic publishing and writing in education, with the aim to multiply the frames of reference in education research and knowledge production. As the editors, Zhang, Chan and Kenway, put it in their Introduction to this book:

The asymmetrical relationships of power between graduate students and their supervisors [in Australian universities] cannot be overlooked, and such relationships can be particularly fraught for international students who pay exorbitant fees, who feel an intense pressure to complete on time, owing to this or owing to scholarship and visa requirements, and who may be seeking work and/or permanent resident status in the host country. The requirement to write and talk in the English language adds to the pressure such students are under . . . We all feel its force in our research projects, hence our hope to have the book published in various Asian languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian.

I sincerely hope that the wish of the editors will come true and that this book, after making its first appearance in English, will appear in many other languages and continue to inspire more and more scholars, both located in the

Asia–Pacific region and beyond, to continue the dialogue with Chen and with one another, multiplying our frames of reference as we interconnect to weave multiple webs of knowledge, both in Asia and beyond.

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# Introduction

## Struggles to construct new research imaginations in response to Chen's challenges

*Philip Wing Keung Chan, Hongzhi Zhang  
and Jane Kenway*

### Starting points

In considerable numbers, research degree students from various parts of Asia are undertaking research degrees in the field of education, over much of the world but particularly in the USA, the UK, Europe, Canada and Australia. Our conversations with graduate research student colleagues from diverse Asian locations indicate that they often, but not always of course (see O'Sullivan and Guo, 2011), confront similar problems to those that we (Philip and Hongzhi) confronted when we came to Australia, from Asia, to undertake our PhDs – Philip from the New Territories in Hong Kong, and Hongzhi from Shandong Province in mainland China.

What are the problems that we have observed? Graduate students from Asia tend to focus their research on educational issues in their home, not their host, countries. They often utilize what, for the moment, we call 'Western' concepts and theories to interpret these issues. Therefore, when they discuss their research back home in Asia, they may have to answer the awkward question: 'Why did you research this topic from overseas, rather than in your own country?' This question makes some feel uncomfortable, and not just because they are studying 'home' while 'away'. Their discomfort also seems to arise because their research about Asian education may also be undertaken 'through Western eyes': when Asian PhD and Master's students come to Australia, they tend to be encouraged to draw on 'Western' perspectives to study their own country's educational practices and systems (see, however, our qualifications below).

How do they react to this? In our experience, some Asian graduate research students appear to accept this situation. Those in this category do not show such disquiet, although they may, privately, feel it. They are at one end of the spectrum. At the other end are colleagues who are visibly and vocally uneasy. Some have identified the problem as seeing 'Western' intellectual values and academic conventions, not only as undervaluing Asian intellectual traditions and practices and 'local knowledge' or 'wisdom', but also as not necessarily suitable for Asian circumstances. Their typical counter-response is to turn to

their local knowledge to interpret local educational issues in Asia. In doing this, however, problems may arise for them. For example, so-called 'local knowledge' is usually not recognized as part of any wider intellectual canon and is not regarded as acceptable knowledge for a PhD. The road these people take is, thus, particularly difficult. Their process of trying to theorize local knowledge in education is a challenge for their PhD project, and not just because of its lack of supposed academic respectability. PhD supervisors may discourage such work, because they know little about their students' country's education system, intellectual histories and local ways of knowing. They may be way out of their comfort zone in terms of their supervision practices and, therefore, see this as risky for both themselves and the student. Whereas some supervisors may relish the risks and provide additional support, others do not. There are yet others who, even if sympathetic, may have epistemological problems with the notion of local knowledge itself, a matter we will return to in some later chapters.

Between these two ends of the spectrum of student responses are those of another group of research students who have found it quite difficult to specify the exact sources of their discomfort, let alone how best to deal with the issues that arise for them. In the Education Faculty at Monash University, for example, there are many students from various countries in Asia, and our informal conversations with many of them have, often, been about the dilemmas they face around these issues of knowledge and location, of universalism and relativism and much else, besides.

Obviously, we have been generalizing in the points we have made so far about Asian education students in Western universities, and there are important exceptions, such as the work conducted by Michael Singh and his colleagues at the University of Western Sydney, as illustrated in Chapter 9 of this collection. We acknowledge that some PhD supervisors do such things as encourage students to engage with post-colonial theory, with debates about the geopolitics of globalization and the implications for knowledge production, circulation and consumption, and with the research and theorizing of scholars from their home country and region. And, of course, some research students are particularly agential and seek to resist the intellectual practices we have referred to. However, in our experience, these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Further, the asymmetrical relationships of power between graduate students and their supervisors cannot be overlooked, and such relationships can be particularly fraught for international students who pay exorbitant fees, who feel an intense pressure to complete on time, owing to this or owing to scholarship and visa requirements, and who may be seeking work and/or permanent resident status in the host country. The requirement to write and talk in the English language adds to the pressure such students are under, as does the necessity for many of those we know to undertake the additional work of, for example, translation of interviews and documents into English. The globalization of English is such a political issue, as Widin (2010) makes

clear, and we all feel its force in our research projects, hence our hope to have this book published in various Asian languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian. The pressure to perform through conformity is quite intense.

Given all this, you can imagine the excitement at Monash when we came across Kuan-Hsing Chen's *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Chen, 2010). Many Asian students felt validated by its title alone and flocked to it, 'like moths to a flame'. They held animated reading groups exploring how it might help to clarify their concerns and address the knowledge problems they were experiencing. And it has – but only to some degree. What they did not realize at the time was that it would create new problems: problems for which they were rather unprepared and that continue to bother them. We will tell this tale shortly, but first, a little more about *Asia as Method*.

Chen points to what he sees as the disrespectful, one-way flow of knowledge into 'Asia', associated with former Western colonial histories and imperialism. He also points to the manner in which knowledge production in Asia is constantly either positively or negatively referencing the West, always looking to it as either a positive or negative referent. He argues, instead, for 'Asian studies in Asia'. Such studies, he says, must pay due attention to the manner in which colonialism, imperialism and the cold war influenced, and continue to influence, knowledge, even in post-colonial nation-states in Asia – states that try to move beyond such influences. They must also, he argues, avoid the often-subtle traps that those who attempt to decolonize knowledge in Asia often fall into. Chen argues for a *new research imagination* that extends such constant referencing of the West towards alternative perspectives, with Asian history, politics and culture as key reference points. He offers, instead, a range of standpoints and concepts to assist scholars to move beyond such impasses. An overview of the core ideas in Chen's book is provided in Chapter 1. Some of the traps he refers to will be mentioned throughout, traps all of us in this collection have had trouble avoiding.

Through our student and staff reading groups on *Asia as Method*, it became much clearer to us that, in many Asian educational contexts and in much research on such contexts, so-called Western theories are often adopted in an unproblematic manner, with far too little attention paid to where such ideas come from and how they are mediated in Asian educational contexts, and with insufficient attention paid to so-called non-Western educational thought and practice.

On the other hand, we became particularly aware, through Chen, that, in the name of post-colonial national education, people in some such contexts may unproblematically oppose Western knowledge and mobilize somewhat restricted notions of local knowledge and wisdom.

What became clear to us is that no concepts or ways of thinking are as straightforward or innocent as they may first appear. Such meta-notions of West and East and Asia have to be treated with particular suspicion, because of the complexities they obscure. Clearly, there is no single or cohesive West or East or Asia, and, thus, there is no single or cohesive Western or Eastern

or Asian knowledge. Further, avoiding binary logic (which is potentially reproductive) about East versus West and, also, recognizing that knowledge can flow in multiple directions became necessary. So, we should say at this point that, even when we use the hard-to-avoid concepts East, West and Asia, they have to be understood as always potentially under erasure.

It should also be noted that Chen comes from the field of cultural studies, not education. Indeed, he does not address institutional education at all in the book. Many of the issues and debates he focuses on were quite new to most of us at Monash, as they would be to many education research students. They are not educational researchers' conventional starting points, which are usually teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment, policy and education institutions with a practical impulse, which leads to the predictable query posed by our peer reviewers about whether Chen can provide 'workable tools' for such educational research. The question, obviously, becomes 'given its cultural studies orientation, what does *Asia as Method* have to offer education studies specifically?' This question becomes more insistent, given the fact that there already exists a body of educational research that addresses education and globalization, education and post-colonialism, education and culture. So why turn to Chen? Indeed, why turn to Chen, when there are other books in the social sciences doing the sort of work he has done (for example, Alatas, 2006)? And, of course, there already exists a great deal of research on education in Asia; why not simply stick with this? Answers to these questions are not straightforward. However, in the case of the latter, such research is often very country or topic specific and does not have the scope and scale of Chen's book. Beyond that, it is hard to say why *Asia as Method* fired up our research imaginations in ways that other such publications did not, but it made us especially eager to speak to the wider struggles of Asian research students who are studying in the West, but researching education in Asia.

Our tasks then, we decided, were, first to try to understand Chen's main ideas, second to see if and how they might be useful in education studies and, third, to clarify the potential difficulties and, possibly, limitations of his work for educational researchers.

### **Difficult dialogues**

When we first read Chen's *Asia as Method*, we were excited because it inspired us to try to develop a fresh research imagination, one we thought might help us to clarify and address our concerns about 'East and West' in education studies. The enthusiasm aroused by our reading group meetings led us to organize other, more open-access activities in the faculty and to involve other academic staff (see our Acknowledgements). We sought to involve any interested parties and were mindful of Chen's arguments about the importance of 'deimperializing' research: in other words, the importance of encouraging the 'colonizing or imperializing population to examine the conduct, motives, desires and consequences of imperialist history that has formed its own

subjectivity' (Chen, 2010, p. 4). We did not wish to descend to the sort of hard-to-justify essentialism that leads to the view that only 'Asians' can do 'Asia as method', and that white, non-Asian scholars should not be part of such a project. Our view is that such scholars should be seriously involved, in order to deimperialize their own supervision practices as well as their own scholarly enquiries. Neither do we subscribe to the territorial essentialism that implies that, to do 'Asia as method', one has to be *living in* Asia. However, we do acknowledge that who one is, where one lives and the directions of one's travels need to be factored into one's enquiries. Given that, for example, students have relocated to the West from Asia, how does the very fact of this relocation impact on their interpretations? What paradoxes are involved?

Our activities included a half-day faculty seminar in late 2010, where several groups of graduate students presented their rudimentary ideas in relation to their particular PhD research projects. These groups were organized by country, as few of us were doing inter- or transnational research. Those few who were, were exploring the educational links between their home country and Australia. Altogether, this event and our subsequent activities have involved a multicultural and multilingual set of people and, thus, all the rich resources this implies. At this event, we sought and received feedback from those attending. These included academics from Asia, or those who had worked and researched there, as well as those who had read and were inspired by Chen. All were keen to see how we were working with and against Chen's ideas. We all felt exhilarated, but, also, rather out of our depth. At the end of the day, it was clear we needed to further clarify our thinking. Undoubtedly, *Asia as Method* was new and rather difficult theoretical territory for many of us. Actually, it is difficult *per se*.

A further meeting was held in early 2011, where, with the help of the Asia education specialists in the faculty, we sought to answer the following questions: What is 'Asia'? What is 'method'? And what, then, is 'Asia as method'? At that point, we decided that we needed to develop our own views. Specifically to us, then, the meaning of Asia as method involves, first, working with concepts, ideas, thinking or theories that have originated, been modified or indigenized in Asia. Second, Asia as method involves Asian-oriented studies, not just Asian scholars' studies. In this regard, it is not just studies produced in the Asian geographical location, nor is it anti-Western research conducted from an Asian perspective. We decided that it refers to a dialogical process of integrating the influence of Asian cultures and contexts in such a way as to complement existing theories in Western educational circles and widen the knowledge base. The significance of Asia as method is to draw attention to Asian knowledges and to create a platform for a dialogue between Asia and the rest of the world. These insights represented the second stage of our thinking. And, at the time, we felt quite pleased with them.

We then decided to widen our efforts and our audiences and to subject our work to outside peer review. In December 2011, we presented two symposia (six peer-reviewed papers) at the Australian Association for Research in

Education (AARE), two symposia at the third *Engaging with Vietnam: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue Conference* at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and the second *International Conference on Popular Culture and Education* at Hong Kong Institute of Education. In a sense, this was the first time that the specific idea of Asia as method in education studies was formally presented at international conferences, and, as such, our presentations attracted quite a lot of interest and further invitations, eventuating in an Invited Symposium invitation from AARE for the conference of 2012, where Chen, himself, gave a keynote address. We have, since, presented our work at many academic conferences and in various university settings. Along the way, our work has attracted critical scrutiny too, reminding us that we still have a lot of work to do.

Buoyed by the external interest our work attracted and by the enthusiasm of many people in the faculty, we decided to launch a book project. We sent out invitations to the PhD students in the faculty, and twenty-one students coming from eight different Asian countries joined us. We divided them into eight working groups with a chapter each, according to the participants' PhD foci, which, as already indicated, were, by and large, nation bound. We invited those Monash scholars who had been working with us to write chapters, too. Some of those who accepted our invitation stayed with us; others drifted away for various reasons. These included completing their studies and returning to very busy working lives back in their home countries.

We were cognizant of Chen's call for new intellectual alliances between 'Asian scholars in Asia' (and that we were not actually *in Asia* so much as *of Asia*) and of his concern that a national focus can descend into an unreflective nationalism. We were, thus, more than aware that our starting points were open to criticism from a purist perspective. However, we had to deal with the fact that most of us were doing our PhD studies in terms of specific countries. None of us was in a position to start afresh. We thought we could find ways to work around this difficulty. However, some critics of our project believe that this was a design fault that doomed us at the outset. We were accused of not doing what Chen argued for, of ignoring his first principles. We should have been trans-Asian from the start. They argued, too, that constituting the project in this country-by-country way undermined our claims to be working in an *Asia as Method* mode more generally, as did the fact that we were doing Asian studies in Australia, not 'Asian studies in Asia', another first principle of Chen's. We will return to these points, but note, at this stage, that there is great deal more to Chen's method than is implied in such critiques of our work. However, it should also be noted that Chen's idea of inter-referencing through trans-Asian projects does not shed much light on the difficulties involved in the processes of such collaboration, let alone on what pedagogies might be most helpful to undertake them.

Having started our book project, we held several events seeking to deepen and refine our understanding of the different concepts in Chen's notions of Asia as method and to clarify exactly how, in various ways, we are working

with them. In this respect, we read and commented on each other's chapters, teaming more and less experienced researchers together. Over this time, it became clear to us that, in organizing the chapters around individual countries, we had dug something of a hole for ourselves. Certainly, for the research teams working on each chapter, this national focus provoked some very generative discussions, but, it, nonetheless, meant that the cross-national intellectual conversations and alliances suggested by Chen did not happen to any great extent, at least not at this stage of writing and not at first. However, we certainly acknowledged the importance of inter-referencing and using Asian references, while, at the same time, acknowledging that this is not all there is to the notion of inter-referencing, as argued and illustrated in the evocative collection edited by Ong and Roy (2011). Focusing on the urban, Ong argues in her Introduction (2011, p. 12) that inter-referencing refers to 'practices of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison and competition'. This suggests the importance of avoiding reductionist notions of what inter-referencing might mean. Further, it has to be said that, in focusing on inter-referencing only in Asia, Asian and Western collaboration seems to be forsaken, while, concurrently, the binary logic we referred to above is implicitly reinforced. Inter-referencing is about multiplying our conceptual resources, not restricting them to one part of the world in ways that may, unintentionally, reinforce modes of territorial apartness.

As indicated, when some of us began the project, we were quite unfamiliar with the concepts and debates that guide Chen's thinking. Coming to grips with what they meant for our own research projects was not easy. Indeed, it was too much for some of our peers, and they withdrew, especially after they received feedback from our fiercely helpful peer reviewers. However, the matter runs deeper, because what Chen calls for is a direct challenge to the many ways of thinking that our education in the West and our Western education have taught us. In a sense, it requires us to unlearn what we have been at great pains to learn, uprooted our lives to learn and have paid considerable sums of money to learn.

Further, Chen does not propose a simple reversal to so-called Eastern thinking or just going back to local knowledge. Neither does he encourage the mobilization of nationalistic/regionalistic fervour as we try to move away from the dominance of Western knowledge. So, for us, it was not merely a matter of returning to what we had hitherto understood as our intellectual roots in our home countries. Indeed, we had become very conscious of how those roots are entangled with the wider geopolitics of knowledge and the diverse routes that knowledge takes, not just into the East from the West, but the reverse, a point powerfully argued by Hobson (2004). The fact that the global traffic in knowledge is not a one-way, or even a two-way, street certainly became clear to us. It has expected and unexpected itineraries, stopovers and delays and a wide range of baggage handlers, so to speak.

Given the sorts of difficulty we were having, we figured that our future peers who later venture down this same road might well have similar problems.

We, thus, thought very hard about the pedagogy of our book. How might we best help our readers to undertake similar work? After all, the disproportionate influence of Western thought and the importance of nationalism to various countries in Asia have meant that adopting an Asia as method perspective is a major challenge intellectually, politically and, importantly, emotionally. We decided that each writing team would write a reflective postscript to their chapter in which they make explicit the thinking processes they went through, the difficulties they experienced and, of course, what they consider the ultimate benefits.

The other issue we had to address, pedagogically, was the national focus of most of our chapters. How could we encourage, between ourselves, the cross-border conversations, new intellectual alliances and solidarities that Chen believes are necessary, if 'Asian Studies in Asia' are to flourish? And, then, how could we share this with our readers? In some ways, the fact that we had been working together for some time helped to create a trusting environment to enable such discussions. Indeed, they had begun even though we were not writing about them. For example, we, as editors of the book, chatted about the tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China that are discussed at the beginning of Chapter 1. But, we also felt the need to have more structured conversations that would help us to write collectively about what it means to work across national borders. Through this, we developed the themes for our final workshop for the book. In turn, this led to our collective final chapter, 'A collaborative postscript: Imagination, aspiration, anticipation and hesitation'. This is not an attempt to 'fudge' the issue of our starting points, as one critic has argued, but, rather, it is to take the next step in learning how to start to have these conversations and to help us to consider what might come next for our research agenda.

### **Our thoughts overall**

We can say, with hindsight, that this book project has, in a way, developed an overall pedagogy to help to cultivate a new research imagination in Asian education research, involving graduate students and interested academic staff. It is not perfect by any means, but it suggests the value of *starting where people are*, not where theory or critique would like them to be. It also points to the fact that different institutional and personal situations offer different affordances for this sort of research, and that these need to be taken into account. For instance, a largely student-led endeavour, as was this one, has different possibilities from those projects that are formally institutionalized in PhD programmes. International graduate students are usually subject to time limits and are also, usually, cash-strapped. The project points to the benefits of dialogues about *how* to shift away from Western perspectives, towards more Asia-centred perspectives, in educational research about Asia. We believe that this provides a useful pedagogical starting point for deployment by researchers in other similar circumstances who face the knowledge problems and dilemmas

that we at Monash University's Faculty of Education have faced. Of course, there are other models, with other purposes and sources of inspiration. For example, the University of Western Sydney project is directed towards the development of 'Australia–Asia modes of theorising'. As they have explained to us, they explore how diverse, non-Western thought can advance 'anglophone, Euro-American education' and its internationalization (Singh and Chen, 2012, and also Singh's chapter in this volume).

To the researchers in this book, *Asia as Method* is not simply 'studies of education in Asia' or 'studies by Asians of Asian education' – there are plenty of books that fit this category. Drawing on the research of scholars from many different Asian countries, this book responds to Chen's invitation to move beyond an obsession with the West and to, instead, undertake studies of education in Asia that acknowledge the complex links between history, geography and knowledge in and about education. In other words, it offers Asian education studies from Asian perspectives – acknowledging, fully, the manner in which Asian education systems, policies and practices have differentially mediated Western knowledge in relation to their own specific evolving cultures, contexts and politics.

## Chapter outlines

In the opening chapter, called '“Asia as method”: Chen's conceptual openings', Kenway provides education scholars with an accessible introduction to Chen's notion of Asia as Method, especially for those who are unfamiliar with the ways of thinking and bodies of thought that have been inspired by Chen's ideas. This chapter serves as the central theoretical understanding of the book. It identifies the standpoints, concepts and practices that seem to be central to Chen's thought and provides some beginning explanations of them. The chapter draws out other concepts, too, which include Chen's particular notions of translation, base entity, cultural imaginary and critical syncretism. These notions are referenced in the following chapters. Readers should note that this is an introductory chapter and does not compare Chen with other, related scholars. Although we believe that this is an important exercise for subsequent work, this is not the focus here.

The second chapter, called 'East–West dialogue: three cases of educational research in China and Australia', by Zhang, Chan, Wang and Yang, goes deep into the practical and operational level to show the explanatory power of Asia as method through three different Chinese cases in the field of education, namely *Mohe* in Chinese education policy-making, Chinese international students in an independent school experiencing 'Australian education', and reinvestigation of *guan* and *xiao* in Chinese–Australian parent–child relationships. Their approach to Asia as method lies in localizations of Western theories with regard to various Asian political, economic, cultural and social contexts, an engagement with transnational experiences between Australia and China, and the employment of and emphasis on local theories that go beyond the

nationalism, nativism and civilizationism of which Chen is so critical. The chapter concludes that, although Asian studies have a long history, Asia as method is still a new terrain in educational research that needs many more educational researchers' critical involvement.

Silence is a sociolinguistic mode of social communication. Dat Bao argues, in Chapter 3, 'The Japanese perception of silence in the Australian educational context', that the degree of nonverbal expression plays a role in Japanese sociocultural behaviour. Paralleling Chen's proposal to approach the subject of research by moving away from the imperialistic perspective and by multiplying theoretical frames of reference for an in-depth understanding of issues under study, Bao discovers new ways of research using multiple frames of reference. His chapter discusses the question of the Japanese internalized modes of learning through the lens of ten Japanese students in Australian universities, bringing out an experience of Japanese individuals who follow neither Japanese nor Western views, but prefer to judge the value of their silence in a new academic environment, such as in Australia.

Wu's chapter, titled "'Asia as [a] method" of complexity and dialogue', engages one of Chen's key ideas – geo-colonial historical materialism – to discuss intricate trajectories of geographical space and historical and cultural contexts in relation to colonial and imperial consciousness. She provides examples from the New Zealand context to illustrate the dichotomy of the 'West versus Other'. Her chapter argues that Asia as method can promote dialogue within Asia, 'the Rest' and the 'Third World'. Such dialogue can enhance awareness of minority cultural knowledge and resources, the complexity and richness of which would then gain momentum and create currency to achieve genuine cultural responsiveness. The chapter also argues that Asia as method should be treated as a dialogue with 'the West', with an 'open, free, and informed' manner.

In their chapter called 'Vietnam, the West and the generalized Self in transnational education', Nguyen and Leihy argue that Chen's idea of Asia as method requires a reorientation of the so-called peripheries dependence on theories originating in imperial settings. Their chapter suggests and demonstrates ways of departing from incumbent framings of ideas of 'the self' through the incorporation of Asian dimensions. It draws on George Herbert Mead's generalized Other, an eastward extension of Edward Said's orientalism and Michel Foucault's technologies of the self. The authors believe that the possibilities and implications of Asian narratives and renditions of self offer new theoretical insights. The chapter reports the experiences of students of a Vietnamese background studying in Western offshore programmes and reassesses the ways the formation of the self is expressed from a viewpoint that is 'Asian', in the Chenian sense.

Chapter 6, 'Towards deimperialization of instructional strategies: cases of task-based learning and reflective practice implementation in the Indonesian context', by Kuswandono, Gandana and Rohani, problematizes the adoption and adaptation of Western concepts in the Indonesian education system. For

example, Indonesian education stockholders are constantly faced with difficulties and challenges in understanding the Western education reform agenda and putting it into practice. Chen's key idea of 'deimperialization' helps the authors raise awareness of the impacts of colonization and Western knowledge structures on Indonesia's educational practices, and how his notions of multiculturalism and collectivism operate to shape Indonesia's current education arena.

Vu and Le's chapter, titled 'Problematizing the "East–West dichotomy" through the language practices and values of young English-language teacher trainees in Vietnam', discusses the emergent language practices and values of young people in Vietnam after the end of the cold war and recent expressions of globalization. Their paper values Chen's idea of Asia as method, but they place their emphasis, not on deconstructing or denying the 'West as method', but on referring to the West as an enriching body of knowledge, while also drawing on other points of reference to transform our subjectivities worldwide. Their two cases are anchored in some notions of Chen's works, while carefully avoiding both a total reliance on the West as a primary point of reference and a joyous celebration of Asian wisdom.

Chapter 8 is prepared by a group of Bangladeshi scholars (Roshid, Siddique, Sarkar, Mojumder and Begum) and is called 'Doing educational research in Bangladesh: challenges in applying Western research methodology'. This chapter examines the practice of applying West-originated educational research methods in their country. It argues that knowledge-generating tools that are useful in one country may not be completely suitable for another country. More specifically, a research approach originating from Western society may not be well suited to Bangladeshi contexts. They not only argue that Asia as method, as complementing West-generated methods, has potential to generate valid knowledge in Asian contexts, they also use localized Western methodology as a point of reference when they conduct Asian research.

In Chapter 9, 'Against Asia-centric methods: Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production', Michael Singh critically engages certain of Chen's ideas in *Asia as Method*. Drawing on various post-colonial bodies of thought, he explores different possibilities and problems with regard to transcultural knowledge co-production. He offers the Research Oriented, School-Engaged Teacher–Researcher Education (ROSETE) curriculum at the University of Western Sydney, which he leads, as an example of Australia–China knowledge co-production.

The final contribution is Chapter 10, 'A collaborative postscript: imagination, aspiration, anticipation and hesitation', which is provided by the editors of this book (Hongzhi Zhang, Philip Wing Keung Chan and Jane Kenway) on behalf of the *Asia as Method in Education Studies* research collective. This chapter is a collaborative reflection in which we look back. In the chapter, we discuss Chen's driving imperatives and other Chen-related dictates, deliberating on our experiences of working together to write this book and on some of the challenges that arose.

To conclude, this collection is important, we think, because it has provoked and, also, joined conversations that respond to Chen's challenges (for example, Lin, 2012; Rhee, 2013). It does this in four, interrelated ways. First, the chapters speak to and about educational issues in countries in Asia. Second, the authors are involved in the production and exchange of ideas, insights and knowledge dialogically, with and against the dominance of 'Western' academic discourses. Third, this collection emerges from the assumption in all of the contributors' chapters that, as the world changes, the nation-states that constitute Asia change as well and have become mixed and multiply layered. As such, the chapters point to how ideas move across time and space. Fourth and finally, although the chapters are certainly in conversation with the ideas of *Asia as Method*, they do not, uncritically, replicate Chen's ideas. They engage and deploy them, and, yes, some argue against them in whole or in part. This book is, in a sense, an introduction to *Asia as Method* in education studies, a very tentative starting point for future deliberations.

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# 1 ‘Asia as method’

## Chen’s conceptual openings

*Jane Kenway*

The school curriculum was a hot topic in Hong Kong in 2012.<sup>1</sup> At public rallies in July and August, many students, parents and teachers expressed indignation about the proposed introduction of a Moral and National Education (MNE) curriculum in primary and secondary schools. In early September, roughly 100,000 people gathered outside government headquarters in Wanchai, again expressing their outrage. Some Union Jacks were even on display. This MNE curriculum was seen to promote uninformed and uncritical Chinese mainland patriotism and was widely regarded as a form of thought control, political indoctrination or brainwashing aimed at suppressing any Hong Kong dissent towards mainland China. A reference material document for teachers called *The China Model* described the Chinese Communist Party as ‘progressive, selfless and united’. It drew particular hostility, because it was seen to celebrate the one-party rule of the Chinese Communist Party and because of its selective representation of mainland China’s history. Further, issues associated with human rights and the rule of law in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) attracted very little attention. It failed to acknowledge such things as the violent excesses of Mao’s Cultural Revolution and the massacre in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. In Hong Kong, an annual Tiananmen vigil continues to attract big crowds.

From the PRC-dominated Hong Kong government’s perspective, this curriculum was directed towards enhancing students’ awareness of China, building their national identification and nurturing patriotism towards it. No doubt, it was also informed by a sense that Hong Kong’s colonial past needed to be challenged; that the PRC had to *decolonize* the associated cultural imaginary. Although it was to be voluntary for its first 3 years, it was to become mandatory in 2015. However, the scale of the public outrage in early September 2012 forced the government to announce that it had shelved plans for compulsion and that it would allow schools to choose whether to use the materials or not. This announcement was followed by smaller rallies of those who supported the introduction of the National Education curriculum and who were regarded as pro-China in the hotly contested Legislative Council elections of 9 September. In contrast, in the election, those against the National Education curriculum were regarded as pro-Democrat and, thus, also

as pro-democracy. Indeed, the curriculum was ultimately regarded as thinly veiled Communist Party propaganda aimed at suppressing Hong Kong democracy. Democracy is a major concern at the annual 1 July marches that are organized to allow people to voice their political concerns about the government of Hong Kong since its ‘Handover’ to the Chinese in 1997 – on that very same day, Hong Kong also celebrates the ‘Handover’.

This situation in Hong Kong can be thought of as an ‘event’ – understood in the Deleuzian sense as something (a situation, a problem) that provokes thought (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008). But what thought? There are always many possible angles of vision and revision, as all good researchers know. This event can be thought of in terms of geopolitics, colonialism and, indeed, globalization. Certainly, such concepts spring readily to my mind.

But, wait a minute. How do geopolitics, colonialism and globalization impact, not just on this event, but also on how we think about it, or any event, for that matter? What do they mean for our thoughts, for knowledge, for theory?

Such concepts provoke us to ask where our thinking and theorizing come from, and what the implications of global geopolitics are for the directions of knowledge flows and the rise and decline of particular knowledges. In other words, how are knowledge, power, geography and mobility linked? To ask such questions is to challenge habitual practices of thought. It is to adopt a ‘defiant research imagination’ (Kenway and Fahey, 2006).

In the introductory chapter to *Globalising the Research Imagination*, Johannah Fahey and I (2006) offer some pedagogical principles designed to assist PhD supervisors to support PhD students in the development of such a ‘defiant research imagination’. These principles actively encourage the examination of ‘unexamined habits of looking’. They encourage researchers to try ‘to see from elsewhere’ and to welcome ‘uncomfortable thought’. They invite researchers to ‘strive for complexity’.

Kuan Hsing Chen’s book, *Asia as Method* (2010), does all this and more. It seeks to rise above contemporary circumstances influencing the production of knowledge. For those who only see the world through Western, imperial eyes, it insists that they ‘see from elsewhere’. In this case, it unsettles the hegemonic research imagination and provokes discomfort. It insists that Asia no longer be seen as the exception and Europe or the USA as the norm – as the yardstick against which all else is judged and found wanting, alien or alienating.

For researchers from ‘Asia’, the book’s very title potentially provokes another set of sentiments. The title suggests an affirmation of all things Asian. The unwary might immediately imagine that it will endorse anti-colonial and anti-Western antagonism, Asian nationalism and, even, the euphoria of nativist revivalism. However, the book gives such researchers no succour either. Indeed, Chen critiques such practices of thought. I will return to his critiques later.

Overall, this is not a comfortable intellectual project for anyone. In fact, it is not just an intellectual project. Chen talks, not only about decolonizing

knowledge, but also about 'culture and mind, desire and body' (2010, p. x). So, his book cannot be read slightly or taken lightly. Because he links knowledge production to matters of subjectivity, he clearly hopes to change the subject – and that means 'you', whoever and wherever you are.

Although it is couched very modestly, this is no timid intervention. Ultimately, *Asia as Method* seeks to move research beyond what Chen sees as the limits of post-colonial studies, globalization studies, Asian studies, area studies and their various offshoots in different fields.

Certainly, this is a very bold aspiration, and, for those who may have just begun considering the implications of such lines of enquiry for education, this may appear far too 'out there' – threatening even. What he sees as the problems of these fields will become clear as I proceed. Suffice to say, at this point, that he stresses the 'complex ideological relationships between knowledge and power' (2010, p. 29) and points to the importance of tracing these relationships though the fabric of discursive content, argument and form. So read on.

### **What is Asia?**

What is Asia? Some might think this an odd question. But not Chen, who says we need to develop a 'critical distance from uninterrogated notions of Asia' (2010, p. 215). He does not regard Asia as only a fixed geographical reference point or as simply a set of countries and coordinates. Of course, it is tempting to think of it in this way – as East, West, South, North, South East and central Asia. But, to him, Asia is history, politics, culture representation and emotion, as well as geography. Indeed, he recognizes the importance of bringing 'sentiment to the forefront, making it a source of thought and analysis' (2010, p. xvi).

He understands Asia through the historical geopolitical processes that have made it and through which it has made and continues to make itself.<sup>2</sup> These processes include various 'local historical currents' and the subregional politics and power relations that existed prior to the formation of the 'modern nation-state and twentieth-century colonialism' (2010, p. 213). Indeed, he notes that, currently, various 'nations in the region are in the process of creating their own relationship with the concept of Asia' (2010, p. 214). This point is particularly evident in the recently released Australian government document, *Australia in the Asian Century* (Australian Government, 2012), which says:

The Asian century is an Australian opportunity. As the global centre of gravity shifts to our region, the tyranny of distance is being replaced by the prospects of proximity. Australia is located in the right place at the right time – in the Asian region in the Asian century.

(2012, p. 1)

To understand Asia in the manner proposed by Chen is to acknowledge the impact of colonization, imperialism and the cold war. When he talks of

colonialism, he is not only referring to European forms and practices, but also to those of China and Japan within Asia, and to the fact that some countries within Asia are both ‘colonizer and colonized’ (2010, p. 10). And he is equally concerned to understand the implications for Asia of decolonization, deimperialization and what he calls ‘de-cold war’.

The bigger context for much of the more recent Asia, he observes, is neo-liberal globalization. This does not override, but intersects with, the patterns that arose from earlier periods of colonialism, imperialism and the cold war, and, for a significant period after the end of the cold war, US hegemony has been a significant feature. He also notes that capital’s globalization has led to ‘economic and cultural regionalization’, and along with this has come ‘the rise of Asia as a pervasive structure of sentiment’ (2010, p. 214). He calls his overall approach ‘*geo-colonial historical materialism*’ (my italics). Because this perspective is so central to his thinking, I will elaborate on it below.

He wants us to try to understand what these big and intertwined historical processes have meant for Asia; what they have meant for how Asia is configured and imagined by those who see themselves as part of it, those who do not, and also those who view Asia in strategic terms. He wants us to see Asia as an actor in world history, not just as being acted upon by the West. He also makes it clear that one’s location within Asia is highly likely to influence how its centres and margins are imagined. This, too, will impact, he suggests, on what is seen as not Asia or Asian. Are Australia and New Zealand part of Asia, for instance?

Chen wonders and worries about the nature and actual extent of the ‘de’ – in decolonialism, deimperialism and de-cold war. He thinks of these as unfinished projects and believes that colonialism, imperialism and the cold war remain, but in altered forms.

The history of the third word has proven that many colonies have won independence only to become sub colonies, falling prey to their former colonizers once again because of their economic, cultural and political dependency on the new imperial (former colonial) power. The stratified hierarchical construction of neocolonial imperialism is the present phase of global capitalism.

(2010, p. 18)

### **Problematic practices of thought**

Chen talks about the ways in which colonialism, imperialism and the cold war ‘live on’ in the national and regional psyche and in knowledge production, even though most countries in Asia regard themselves as independent nation-states. For instance, he shows that, out of European colonialism, a post-colonial politics of resentment can develop. In turn, this can result, for example, in scholars getting locked into simplistic East/West binaries and simplicities that obliterate Asia’s remarkable diversity and complexity. He also argues that,

despite a sense of being deimperialized, imperial (colonial) identifications can remain and indeed, possibly inadvertently, lead to the support of ongoing imperial projects.

He draws on post-colonial psychoanalytic theory to help explain such apparent paradoxes. I will say more on such theories later. Suffice to say here that they point to the implications of colonialism for the psyche, for human subjectivity and identification. It is argued that one danger is that the colonial subject may get locked into the logic of being the Other, and that this has wide-ranging implications for practices of thought. As a result, certain problems may arise for knowledge production. These include the entangled practices of nationalism, nativism and civilizationism.

In the first instance, though, he explains that all such problems have actually *seemed necessary* for decolonization moments and movements.

*Nationalism* had an active and unifying function during the anti-colonial struggles. *Nativism* brought people's focus from the imperial centers back to their own living environments; in the process of reclaiming tradition it tilted the balance away from the previous, sometimes worshipful embrace of the modern. *Civilizationism*, in providing a cultural-psychic cure for the colonies, challenged the superiority of Western centralism and provided the ideal of mutual respect in a multicultural world.

(2010, p. 81; my italics)

He urges us to be very wary of *nationalism*, *nativism* and *civilizationism* in our thinking and research. Despite their apparent positivity, he believes they need to be critically evaluated and used very cautiously, for they can remain deeply ensnared in the problems they seek to transcend (2010, p. 67). What does he mean by this provocative claim?

Take nationalism first. Isn't nationalism a good thing for new and relatively new nations? Isn't it our job as researchers to produce knowledge that advances the nation-state in which we live? Maybe, but let's be wary, for national identity politics can get into the blood in ways that need to be critically scrutinized.

Nations and nationalism are not self-evidently good or bad. Furthermore, the nation-state is a historical construction, and actual nation-states are not necessarily fixed entities. As Chen says, 'In the third world, nationalism has been a force forged in relation to colonial conquest' (2010, p. ix). As such, it is manifest somewhat differently and has different effects in different locations. Chen also observes that nationalism has erected very 'sturdy walls . . . between countries and people in the region' (2010, p. ix). However, as I will show, this is only one of many problems, not the least being that, if taken to extremes, nationalism leads to excessive patriotism, bigotry and xenophobia. Nationalism can also lead to a focus on one identification only, that of 'my country', to the exclusion of other identifications involving other axes of power, including the operations of 'internal colonization' (2010, p. 23). For all such reasons, researchers should not idealize their own or other nation-states, neither should

they make the nation-state the only analytical focus with regard to matters of identity.

The point Chen wishes to stress is that nationalism in Asia has deep and often quite subtle links with colonialism, the cold war and imperialism, and, if these links are not excavated, understood and acknowledged, then the very forces that new nation-states are trying to move beyond remain and, thus, constrain.

Let us explore these issues further by focusing on Chen's discussion of 'the West'. In post-colonial countries in Asia, the West has played a significant role in 'nationalist discourses' (2010, p. 216), and, as he argues in the following quote, a variety of ways of responding to the West have emerged: 'It has been an opposing entity, a system of reference, an object from which to learn, a point of measurement, a goal to catch up with, an intimate enemy, and sometimes an alibi for serious discussion and action' (2010, p. 216).

In terms of knowledge production about other parts of the world in the West, to put it simply, the West has understood and portrayed itself, to itself and to 'the rest', as 'the best'. For example, it has presented itself as the most modern, mature, developed, progressive, scientific, rational, enlightened and civilized. Such views have informed linear historical narratives that put the West at the front of the rest in a historical queue of its own making. Chen points out that the 'foundational logic of colonialism is racism' (2010, p. 77), and such racist reasoning has been deployed to justify a hefty array of colonial practices – 'civilizing missions', for instance.

Such logics have also been elevated to the level of universal truth. Such 'truths' also travelled to colonized countries and peoples and impacted on how they felt about themselves, as well as their colonizers. Even in newly independent nations, they linger as a form of, often unrecognized, desire. Chen says there is a 'structural flow of desire' towards Europe and North America (2010, p. 225). This may result in self-negation and mimicry at one end of the spectrum and, at the other end, resentment, refusal and a struggle for self-differentiation (2010, p. 87). Indeed, identities might become highly contradictory and be split to include all this range at once (2010, p. 86).

Chen identifies certain dominant strategies of response to the West by previous and current generations of post-colonial scholars, and these may both reflect and effect wider popular and political imaginations.

He draws our attention, first, to certain post-colonial approaches that deconstruct the notion of 'the West' itself. These identify and challenge Eurocentric and/or American-centric practices of thought. These approaches might involve highlighting the binary and hierarchical logics and posturing that are deployed when the West constructs its Others. These logics and poses, the argument goes, create global hierarchies of knowledge and of modernity and, also, involve implicit claims that 'Western' knowledge is universal, when in fact it is provincial or regional. Such approaches alert us to problems of 'translation', asking whether analytical frameworks that have been developed

in Europe or North America are suitable for understanding Asia. They criticize the ready absorption of such frameworks into research about, on and in Asia.

A second broad, post-colonial approach, identified by Chen, rotates around the notion of extraction. This focuses on what the West seized from its colonies, not just in terms of material goods, but also in terms of intellectual ideas and practices. These have been 'copied, applied and appropriated' (2010, p. 224) as the West's own. In some instances, these seized ideas have even been used to analyse the very spaces from where they were, in effect, extracted.

Debates about *civilizationism* often sit within this analytical camp. The purpose here is to 'rediscover cultures and traditions' that have remained 'uncontaminated by colonialism' or to 'reinterpret tradition to create new tradition' – new myths (2010, pp. 91–4). The aim, Chen argues, is to rise above the nation and nationalism to civilization itself. It is to identify and mobilize meanings and moods that can claim to be superior on all levels. These can claim to be of universal value and, most importantly, can also claim pre-eminence over the West's assertions of higher-order universal values. In short, then, the aim is to 'rediscover ourselves and compete with the West, to beat the West in cultural terms' (2010, p. 92). Two obvious problems here are associated with cultural essentialism and an apparent sense that Eastern and Western civilizations are in competition to claim the highest moral ground and to paint the other as lesser, backward, and so forth.

A third broad approach focuses on encounters between the Western colonizer and the non-Western colonized. There are different lines of thought, but here, in this camp, lie debates about various expressions of *nativism*. These, invariably, involve some form of rediscovery, rewriting and remapping (2010, pp. 9, 85), particularly of national history. Some thinkers claim that colonial encounters were not simply outside and top-down impositions but drew on and drew out previous cultures and civilizations. Others argue that indigenous cultures and knowledge have survived intact despite colonialism; that 'authentic traditions and the pure self' remain uncontaminated (2010, p. 85). Yet others argue that colonial knowledges and cultures have been actively appropriated and then owned by the colonized. These different inflections of nativism become a problem when they are uncritically adopted, when they are deployed as a form of ethnocentric nation boosting (2010, p. 65).

According to Chen, new scholarship in Asia needs to be in an ongoing dialogue with such strategies of response to 'the West'. However, he also insists that, from an Asia as method perspective, there is a need to move beyond what he sees as an obsessive, almost parasitic, use in post-colonial studies of the West as the primary referent (2010, p. 222), which 'bounds the field by the object of its own criticism' (2010, p. 1). He acknowledges the very considerable difficulties of doing so, given the incredible power of the West in ongoing global geographies of knowledge. Nonetheless, he asserts the need for 'alternative mappings' that move 'the point of reference' outside such colonial frameworks. He makes similar arguments about the conceptual frameworks that have arisen out of the cold war and North American

imperialism in Asia. Overall, he argues that it is time to change habitual practices of thought. So, where to from here?

### **Asia as method: some standpoints, concepts and practices**

What, then, does Chen mean by the term ‘Asia as method’? Despite the problems that I have just alluded to in the work of critical post-colonial scholars, he still proposes that decolonization, deimperialization and ‘de-cold war’ are central aspects of his Asia as method. If such problems are taken into account, he sees ‘new possibilities for intellectual work’ (2010, p. xv).

The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other’s reference point, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method I believe has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history.

(2010, p. 212)

Asia as method is no straightforward research technology. Chen arrives at each of his central concepts via a rich knowledge of the history of the geopolitics associated with Asia and through intense engagements with the core ideas of some of the most significant post-colonial and critical thinkers of the last two centuries – too many to elaborate upon here. Indeed, his method requires deep dialogues with such scholars from all over the world. But, because he is particularly interested in the intellectual project of decolonization, such dialogues with ‘Third World’ and Asian-studies-in-Asia scholars are regarded as especially vital.

He shows how the ideas of these earlier post-colonial and critical scholars relate to each other, and how his ideas build on and also depart from theirs. In so doing, he explains how and why he has come to think what he thinks. This is very demanding work, and coming to grips with what he means by Asia as method is no less demanding. It is not possible to replicate his reasoning or to fully acknowledge its nuances in this short introduction. Rather, I will offer the reader a working sense of what I see as his central standpoints, concepts and research practices. Inevitably, therefore, I will work at a level of abstraction that loses the compelling power of the examples that Chen uses to illustrate his positions. I, thus, urge readers to make a point of going to his book for these and other elaborations.

### ***Geo-colonial historical materialism***

It is time, now, to further explore his notion of *geo-colonial historical materialism*. It is central to his readings of what has happened and is happening

in Asia and underpins his politics and his method. Fundamental to this are his understandings of the processes of colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, the cold war, capitalist globalization and, particularly, the shifting and competitive, but nonetheless ongoing, relationships between them.

These are very slippery concepts, and I will not try to explain how he defines them, but two points must be made. First, in Chen's view, each process has been and will be expressed and experienced somewhat differently over time and place. Second, the processes usually bleed into each other in ways that are mutually reinforcing but that often involve 'structural continuations and extensions of colonialism' (2010, p. 120). Indeed, the prefixes he uses (e.g., neo-, sub-) and the synthetic terms he deploys indicate exactly this: for instance, 'neocolonial capitalism', 'subcolonies', 'sub-imperialism', 'neo-imperial nationalism', 'internal colonization'. Let us, now, concentrate on how he sees these intersections.

Colonialism was not only about the states of Europe struggling over and claiming direct control over other territories all over the world. It was also driven by the expansionary impulses of capitalism. Colonialism and capitalism tend to operate in tandem. Although decolonization may have meant the end of direct territorial control, it did not necessarily mean that other modes of influence vanished. Indeed, it was often the case that 'new forms of political and economic dependency' emerged (2010, p. 22).

One example of this is what Chen calls *internal colonization* or *sub-imperialism*, whereby the freshly minted governing elites of the newly independent colonies worked hand in glove with the former colonizers, in order to establish their own power over their rivals. This meant that, in certain ways, the colonizer was able to continue to wield an influence. Also, in the process, new subaltern populations emerged within the new nation-state, thereby creating winners and losers from the decolonizing process itself (2010, pp. 22–3).

According to Chen, when colonial powers established nation-states in their colonies, they sought to unify the many differences that they confronted (2010, p. 82). The nation-state was their 'mediating agent' (2010, p. 82). Eventually, the nation-state also became the vehicle for the colonizing state's ejection. We see close ties, here, between nationalism and imperialism, or what he calls *neo-imperial nationalism*.

However, he also argues that the nation-state currently mediates 'old colonialism and new imperialism' to produce *neocolonial imperialism*. For the colonizing country, independence did not necessarily mean a radical break, but a 'moment of readjustment whereby it could shed responsibilities and costs while still maintaining markets and political influence' (2010, p. 82). Chen points out that, 'imperialism involved territorial conquest, military oppression and the direct usurpation of political sovereignty' (2010, p. 22). Under conditions of neocolonial imperialism, although control is more remote, imperialism still exerts its power (2010, p. 110), through such things as 'language, institutions dispositions, habitual rituals, the hierarchy of cultural

categories' (2010, p. 73), and so forth. He, thus, asserts that they 'still operate on the grounds of colonial history' (2010, p. 21).

The process of bleeding mentioned above is also well illustrated in Chen's discussion of the cold war in Asia (Chapter 3). He reminds us that the Second World War was followed, quite quickly, by many nationalist struggles, decolonizing processes and the emergence of new nation-states. However, in Asia, these were caught up in, indeed interrupted by, what Chen refers to as the 'cold war structure'. These decolonizing struggles occurred, he says, in the shadow of US imperialism, with US help, and resulted in highly defensive forms of nationalism. With the emergence of the cold war, the USA became involved in 'the installation of anticommunist–pro-America structure in the capitalist zone of East Asia' (2010, p. 7). The cold war has had long-lasting consequences. Indeed, he calls certain parts of Asia 'American subcolonies', arguing that the USA became the 'inside of East Asia and constituted a new subjectivity' (2010, p. 8). Old forms of colonialism and more recent expressions of European imperialism met another set of structural forces in the form of USA imperialism. The methodological implication here is to 'de-cold war'. This involves 'exploring and confronting the legacies and ongoing tensions of the cold war' (2010, p. 4).

Under current conditions of capitalist globalization, has the situation altered? Chen's view is that globalization is driven by the forces of capital, which 'seek to penetrate and colonize all spaces on the earth with unchecked freedom eroding national frontiers, integrating previously unintegrated zones' (2010, p. 4). The 'operating logic' here, however, is hegemony (not conquest). Hegemonic power is exercised via transnational companies and supra-state organizations, but these are underwritten by both military power and immense capital (2010, p. 22). We see here, he argues, a form of *neocolonial capitalism*: 'through the international system of nation states, global capitalism unifies the plurality of geographical spaces and histories into a single measurable structure' (2010, p. 66). Herein, imperialism is still imperialism, but expresses itself in new ways (2010, p. 4), and new forms of political and economic dependency emerge (2010, p. 22).

It is easy to see why Chen's views lead him to be very suspicious of such notions as the 'Asian century', the 'rise of Asia' and the mood of triumphalism in Asia that accompanies such ideas. As he sees it, with 'the movement of capitalism across the globe, the Asian continent emerges as a central site for political and economic struggle and a focus of global attention, it inevitably triggers among Asian suspended recollections of being conquered' (2010, p. 67).

### ***Translation and base entity***

Although Chen emphasizes these big structural patterns and the forces of domination and hegemony, it would be a mistake to come to the view that his analyses are only 'top down', that he ignores the intersections between these

forces and other matters 'on the ground', so to speak. He is most concerned to explore 'how local history, in dialectical interaction with colonial and other historical forces, transforms its internal formation on the one hand and articulates the local to world history and the structure of global capital on the other hand' (2010, p. 66).

A key concept that guides his enquires here is *translation*. This involves reinvestigation, but seeks to move beyond the sorts of competitive essentialism we have already seen in the discussions above of nationalism, nativism and civilizationism. Translation is so central to Asia as method that I will quote at length what he means by it. He says, in Asia:

Translations on all levels (from analytical vocabulary, to institutional forms to normative concepts such as democracy) have been driven by century long processes of modernization. The object to be translated has to be subjected to existing social forces and must negotiate with dense local histories if it is to take root in foreign soil. What comes out of this long process of negotiation is not what was imagined at the initial moment of translation at all, but a localized product of this blending process. It is something new . . . As they circulate, these ideas are organically embedded in the social space and become part of our histories.

(2010, p. 244)

Translation as a guiding concept brings to the fore the manner in which existing regionally based local society is articulated to, and often over-determined by, the forces of modernity. Or, to put it another way, it invites us to explore the ways in which aspects of modernity are articulated to what was/is already there – all the while keeping in mind that 'negotiation' has not occurred on equal terms.

He employs the concept *base-entity* to assist us to think about how we might best understand what I have referred to above as 'existing local society'. It is important not to romanticize and essentialize such societies, nor to treat them as if they are fixed over time. The concept base-entity seeks to avoid such problems and to deal with the difficult paradox that certain constancies are constantly evolving. He says:

Each geographic space – be it village, city, region, country, or continent – has its own base-entity and local history with different depths, forms and shapes. The methodological questions are: How can these base-entities be analyzed in terms of their internal characteristics? How can we best identify and analyze the interactions between and among different base-entities?

(2010, p. 251)

This focus on base-entities is central to his geo-colonial historical materialism.

***Critical Third World studies***

This all-too-brief discussion of the complexity of broad structural power relations in Asia indicates very clearly why Chen believes that a method specific to the colonized ‘Third World’ is necessary. He argues that this should ‘overcome its own investment in nationalism so as to bring out the complexity of power relations within third world spaces’ (2010, p. 24). In essence, he calls for *critical Third World studies* and for the related development of Third World critical discourses. These would ‘start from a critical subject position and reach out to encompass common third world experience to produce different histories and maps’ (2010, p. 63). Herein, he also argues that we need to think much more incisively about the notion of the Third World itself. And, in relation to this, we need to better comprehend the ways in which certain concepts, such as globalization, work to downplay what is involved in terms of global ‘structural differences of oppressor, oppressed, first and third worlds, capital and labor and state and social subject’ (2010, p. 22). Such differences invite a form of ‘border-crossing’ investigative practice that has the potential to move research beyond some of the problems that nationalism poses for enquiry, but all our discussion thus far indicates why the very notion of *critical Third World studies* is such a very fraught proposition.

By now, the features of Chen’s notion of *geo-colonial historical materialism* are, surely, becoming clear. Very simply, ‘It is a mode of analysis that stresses the historical and spatial conditions of power relations’ (2010, p. 250).

But how did he get there? His first move is to acknowledge the strengths of Marx’s historical materialism as a mode of analysis. He also points to the Marxist critique of empire (2010, p. 69). His second move is to note that, in one way or another, ‘most nationalist independence movements have negotiated with Marxism’ (2010, p. 70), saying they can’t afford to abandon it but ‘have to critically reexamine and reevaluate our heritage of socialist practices’ (2010, p. 71). However, he makes two subsequent, key shifts.

In line with his claims about the ‘epistemic limits of Eurocentricism’ (2010, p. 75), he then sets about decolonizing the concept ‘historical materialism’. He explains that it was put forward at the time of high imperialism in the nineteenth century, but, because it took Europe and European industrialization as its central reference points, it is not necessarily appropriate for other places in the world, particularly those without an industrial mode of production.

To assist him in decolonizing historical materialism, he turns to radical geography, which provides him with a spatial analytic and allows him to give equal weight to space and time. The central insight, here, is that ‘every mode of production produces its own socially organized space’ (2010, p. 105). As he says, the question then becomes, ‘within the imminent historical geographical formation how does a geographical space historically generate its own mode of production?’ (2010, p. 106).

### ***The cultural imaginary***

The *cultural imaginary* is central to his notion of geo-colonial historical materialism. By this, he means the cultural forms and structures of feeling or sentiment that are generated by the 'encounter between colonialism and local historical and cultural resources' (2010, p. 111). This encounter, he says, shapes the imagination of colonizer and colonized, their sense both of 'self' and of 'other'.

Operating in the terrain of the popular, the cultural imaginary structures the system of ideology, links to the concrete experiences of everyday life and forms the direction and boundary of psychological space. Its discursivity saturates popular subjects, official discourses and anticolonial discourse.

(Chen, 2010, p. 111)

The work of the researcher here is to reflexively *decolonize* the cultural imaginary.

The ways in which Chen uses the term 'decolonize' dramatically exceeds the manner in which it has been deployed by national independence movements. He uses it to refer to practices that challenge any of the forms of colonization we have discussed so far, and, hence, it speaks to such things as 'action, subjectivity, thought, cultural forms of expression, social institutions and global political and economic structures' (2010, p. 112). The cultural imaginary is regarded as an important site for such challenging work, which involves analysing, deconstructing, decentring and disarticulating the colonial cultural imaginary that still helps to shape the present. For, as he says, the 'old imperial eye' often re-emerges in unexpected ways and places. An accompanying task is reconstructing and rearticulating new and more democratic imaginings.

### ***Subjectivity and the psyche***

Let us return, briefly, to the intersections between subjectivity, the psyche, colonialism and imperialism. Chen offers us a sense of the psychology of colonization from the perspective of the colonizer. For instance, this includes the practice of regarding people in the colonies as at an immature stage of development and, thus, as needing guidance from the colonizing country to enable them to reach maturity (2010, p. 74).

Against this and other such deficit thinking, alternative analytics arose. These deployed and rewrote existing psychoanalytic theory in support of decolonizing movements and were regarded as a 'weapon in the anti-colonial struggle' (2010, p. 74). There are several key foci in such work. It sought to analyse the psychology of the colonized and pointed to such things as colonial identification, the unconscious yearning (desire) for the colonizer's recognition and the accompanying psychic suffering and resentment (2010, p. 78). It focused, too, on the manner in which colonizer and colonized constitute each

other's subjectivity, and it examined the psychology of decolonization and national independence, pointing to the perverse lingering on of earlier subjectivities (2010, pp. 78, 79). An underlying notion, here, is that the psychic space and the social space are shared, that is, 'desiring production and social production' come together (2010, p. 73).

One methodological implication of this line of analysis is that the researcher's subjectivity and identifications must come under scrutiny. Not least, the research community's 'structural flow of desire' (2010, p. 225) towards the USA and Europe needs to be challenged. Chen calls for a ruthless self-questioning, a process of self-critique, self-negation and self-rediscovery (2010, p. 3). A central aspect of this is dealing with what he sees as the insistent problem of the West as the eternal Other. He says:

Rather than being constantly anxious about the question of the West, we can actively acknowledge it as a part of the formation of our subjectivity, in the form of fragmented pieces. The West has entered our history and become part of it, but not in a totalizing manner. The task for Asia as method is to *multiply frames of reference* in our subjectivity and worldview, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted and productive and critical work can move forward.

(2010, p. 223; my italics)

Nonetheless, he does suggest that comparative studies of the ways in which the West has been imagined and reimagined in various local spaces would be most illuminating. However, the point is not to constantly emphasize differences from the West, but, rather, to assess how aspects of the West have become internal to Asia's base-entities (2010, p. 255).

Alternative cultural practices of identification are required here and, in this instance, Chen proposes the idea of *critical syncretism*. In the first place, this involves acknowledging that the psyche may still be framed in the deleterious ways outlined above, and that moving beyond the limits of such framings is crucial. *Critical syncretism* involves looking outwards to alternative and multiple forms of identification through the practice of 'becoming others'. This involves seeking to take aspects of subaltern groups into the self and, in so doing, to 'move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations in the form of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism or nationalistic xenophobia' (2010, p. 99).

An important feature of 'becoming others' is multiplying the objects of one's identification and, thereby, constructing alternative frames of reference. This enables a movement beyond the limited lens of single-issue identity politics, it challenges the structures just mentioned and makes new affinities possible. Through such practices, Chen believes, it is possible to find a different sense of self. Indeed, he says, 'understanding the other is a way of transcending the self' (2010, pp. 252–3).

### ***New intellectual alliances and solidarities***

Chen argues that new forms of intellectual alliance and new solidarities (2010, p. 2) need to be built. Most importantly, he insists that an essential ingredient of the process of self-transformation is to shift the point of reference towards Asia and other Third World locations (2010, p. 212), to those places with greater resemblances to each other, to those that share and address similar problems. This point is central and leads him to emphasize *Asian studies in Asia*, not Asian studies through geopolitics, colonialism and, indeed, globalization, that is, through European and North American theorizing about Asia. Such theories do not usually, he claims, help people in Asia to properly understand or address local conditions or issues.

Instead, he proposes *international localism*. This is local, but also trans-border and regional. The main point, though, is that it involves *inter-referencing* (2010, p. 223). Here, Asian countries, Asian base-entities, become each other's reference point; they provide each other with new opportunities for comparison, other than the constant comparison with the West.

The purpose of the inter-referencing approach is to avoid judging any country, region or culture as superior or inferior to any other and to tease out historical transformations within the base-entity, so that the differences can be properly explained.

(2010, p. 250)

One possible line of enquiry here, he suggests, would be to undertake comparative studies of modernity as it is experienced in Third World spaces (2010, p. 225).

### ***Deimperialization***

But what of those at the centres of empire and empires of knowledge? What of those who most benefit from Eurocentric and North American-centric epistemologies and ontologies? Post-colonial psychoanalytic theory makes it clear that imperial centres and colonies are mutually constituted. Each shapes the other. For the colony to be constituted as inferior, the centre has to constitute itself as superior, for example. An important ingredient of Asia as method is the *deimperialization* of those who are or have been imperial powers in different parts of Asia: England, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the USA, not to mention those within Asia who have been colonizers as well as colonized. Chen says this deimperializing research starts with rethinking the wrongs and pains of past imperialist interventions.

This must be performed by the colonizer first and then on the colonizers' relation with its former colonies. The task is for the colonizing or imperializing population to examine the conduct, motives, desires and consequences of imperialist history that has formed its own subjectivity.

(2010, p. 4)

## The event

We can now return to the event mentioned at the start. It is not by accident that I began this chapter with an event. Analysing the political and theoretical implications of *concrete events in local spaces* is another feature of Chen's research practice. 'The social and political contradictions manifested in concrete events are always at the center of my analysis' (2010, p. xiv), he says. Trying to generate historically grounded explanations of events propels him into dialogue with different strands of academic and other thought, both within and beyond the event itself.

So, how does Asia as method help us to understand the Hong Kong event, involving so many people protesting against a school curriculum? Let me offer some preliminary thoughts to conclude this chapter. It is apt that I turn to my co-editors, Hongzhi Zhang and Philip Chan, to help me interpret it. Their close association with contemporary China and this book project makes them well placed to comment on and to challenge my 'imperial eye'. Through our work on this book, we have examined our own national subjectivities and identifications and, also, formed an intellectual alliance across our different national locations – we are attempting 'border-crossing' investigative practice. Also, Hongzhi worked with me on his now completed PhD, and Philip has helped my research team in our current research at an elite school in Hong Kong. That research is part of a bigger project examining elite schools around the world and their links to colonialism, post-colonial nationalism and contemporary globalization.<sup>3</sup> I first became aware of concern about this national curriculum when I was undertaking fieldwork for this project in Hong Kong in 2010. At that time, articles were starting to appear in the press about certain church leaders' anxieties about the curriculum. I became intrigued about its genealogy.

Both Hongzhi and Philip have discussed with me the extended historical period, from 1842 to 1898, during which various parts of Hong Kong were handed over to England by China, and the 1997 deadline by which Hong Kong had to be handed back again. It then became a special administrative region of the PRC. A Basic Law promoted the idea of 'one country, two systems', providing quite a degree of legislative, administrative and judicial autonomy to Hong Kong for 50 subsequent years. However, this model expires in 2047, and it is not clear what rights and freedoms will remain after that.

Hong Kong has never gained national independence and has gone from being a British colony to what might be thought of as a Chinese 'subcolony'. The language of handover suggests that its history has been in the hands either of England or China – that its influence over its own history has been closely intertwined with these two countries' histories and relationships. In this sense, then, it has never actually been decolonialized, never been a primary determining force of its own history. This curriculum event suggests that the 'structures of sentiment' associated with being a British colony have lingered on since 1997, and that certain colonial identifications remain. Certainly, the appearance of the British flag at the rallies is symbolic.

As a British colony, Hong Kong's school education system was modelled on the British system. Its students sat the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (equivalent to British O level) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (equivalent to British A level) up to 2010 and 2012. It was not until 15 years after the 'handover' that Hong Kong developed its own curriculum for schools. The new local public examination system, named the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, in the new 3–3–4<sup>4</sup> education system, was introduced in Hong Kong secondary schools in 2009 and replaced the previous examinations from 2012.

I know, from my own research, that even this curriculum has attracted the suspicion of some of Hong Kong's elites, who, fearing it may disadvantage their children's access to Hong Kong University, are sending them to boarding schools in England so that they can access elite universities there. This is one example of a continuing identification with England and its elite education system, which only the rich can afford, and not just the rich in Hong Kong. Our elite research school in England attracts girls from well-off and politically well-connected families in mainland China who want the advantages that a Western education is said to offer. For these girls, expensive English boarding schools have become objects of desire.

Hongzhi mentions that, during his own schooling in the PRC, he was exposed to curricula similar to the MNC; these are named 'political education' and 'human history'. He claims he was no more 'brainwashed' than students in any country who are subjected to civics and citizenship education programmes, sometimes in the guise of history programmes. He insists that various forms of national patriotism are always taught in schools and wonders about the colonial historical scholarship that informed earlier such curricula in Hong Kong. Was this considered brainwashing? He takes a longer view of the curriculum and expects that, eventually, Hong Kong will accept that it is part of an evolving Chinese education system. This, of course, is what the protesters fear and is exactly why citizenship remains such a vexed issue. They want to be citizens of Hong Kong, not citizens of the People's Republic of China. Clearly, a great deal of national and subnational border work is associated with this event.

As the three of us discuss this curriculum controversy, we wonder what hierarchical dispositions towards China the British colonial education system helped to instil in Hong Kong students. What cultural and political categories were involved? Certainly, answering this question requires empirical research beyond the scope of this chapter. However, each of us is familiar with the current views of some in Hong Kong that the mainland Chinese are less educated and civilized than themselves, and that the mainland's power elite is prone to corruption. Such anti-mainland sentiments suggest a form of xenophobia, not arising from nationalism, but, rather, from a Hong Kong cultural imaginary developed, in part at least, on the grounds of colonial history. Philip mentions its generational inflections that have arisen from those older people who are in exile from China owing to Communist China's possession

of their riches; others may have used Hong Kong as a refuge from the Japanese during the Second World War, or from Communism itself.

More recent resentment is felt about the 'new rich' from China, who are said to be buying up prized real estate in Hong Kong and driving up prices. The flow of 'pushy' mainlanders into the city's limited space, their buying sprees in its luxury shops and their presence in its maternity wards is a further source of ill feeling. There is a fear that the PRC will overpower Hong Kong and extract its wealth, as well as its identity. Signs are already evident, it is said, in what is seen as media self-censorship and in shifting patterns of language use in public places on billboards. This small territory, on the inside edge of China, is certainly in an asymmetrical relationship of power, and, in this sense, its defensiveness is understandable.

However, we also note that, from the perspective of geo-colonial historical materialism, the tensions between Hong Kong and the PRC also arise from their differing economic and ideological systems – one capitalist, one socialist, albeit a socialism that is increasingly 'opening up'.<sup>5</sup> On 18 December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee re-established the ideological, political and organizational lines of Marxism. The main task of China shifted from 'taking class struggle as the key link' in the period of the Cultural Revolution to constructing socialist modernization, implementing economic reforms and opening up the country to the world.

This, of course, raises questions about the psychic and social legacy of the cold war's anti-communist-pro-American hegemony and the extent to which Hong Kong's resistance to the PRC has become something of symbol of a long-standing struggle in Asia between competing political and economic systems. Certainly, for some time, Hong Kong has been a small but powerful Asian space for thriving capitalist, particularly financial, industries and has been ranked the world's freest economy by the Heritage Foundation for the eighteenth consecutive year since the index was first published in 1995. It has been enormously successful at articulating its history and future to the shifting structures of global capital. And, in this sense, one wonders about the extent to which, for some, 'democracy' has become a proxy for free enterprise, for the minimal regulation of capitalist enterprises and practices.

Also, however, Hong Kong cannot be thought of as all of a piece, and one obvious question is how the elites of Hong Kong have adjusted post-1997. There is certainly some scuttlebutt about the too-tight relationship between Hong Kong's tycoons and Chinese government officials, about old and new elites working hand in glove and shoring up their power and wealth. And certain strata of Hong Kong society have certainly benefited from the mainland's booming economy. So, I wonder about the subtext to these protests, what less obvious elements are involved.

This all too brief, historically and politically grounded discussion of this event points to at least some of the contradictions involved. However, that has only been part of my intention, which, mainly, was to offer a preliminary example of the practice of Asia as method. As I have shown, it calls into play

historical, political, sociological and cultural, as well as educational, enquiry and, in so doing, offers, potentially, very rich readings. Any scholars with an interest in educational politics in 'Asia' will find their own work considerably enriched through Chen's conceptual openings.

## Notes

- 1 For a fascinating collation of the coverage of the issue and of the fears expressed, see: [www.commentary.com/chronicles/reject-chinese-communist-brainwashing.htm](http://www.commentary.com/chronicles/reject-chinese-communist-brainwashing.htm) (accessed 12 May 2013).
- 2 In thinking this way, he has much in common with Roy and Ong (2011) and the authors in their edited book.
- 3 This project is called *Elite independent schools in globalising circumstances: a multi-sited global ethnography* (2010–14). This project is funded by the Australian Research Council (DP1093778) and also by Monash, Melbourne, Roehampton and Illinois Universities, the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the National Institute of Education of Singapore. The project team consists of Jane Kenway and Johannah Fahey (Monash), Fazal Rizvi (Melbourne), Cameron McCarthy (Illinois), Debbie Epstein (Cardiff) and Aaron Koh (HKIED and NIE), and PhD students Matthew Shaw, Howard Prosser (Monash) and Mousumi Mukherjee (Melbourne).
- 4 The 3–3–4 education reform is the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education in Hong Kong; 3–3–4 means 3 years junior secondary education, 3 years senior secondary education and 4 years higher education.
- 5 A Socialist state is a nation with a socialist ideology and one-party system. In 1984, Deng Xiaoping proposed 'building socialism with Chinese characteristics', which, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and adopting basic national conditions, takes economic construction as the centre; maintains the four cardinal principles and Reform and Opening-Up policy; emancipates and develops social productive forces; consolidates and improves the socialist system; and constructs a socialist market economy, socialist democracy, socialist advanced culture and socialist harmonious society, to build a prosperous, democratic, civilized and harmonious modern socialist country.

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## 2 East–West dialogue

### Three cases of educational research in China and Australia

*Hongzhi Zhang, Philip Wing Keung Chan, Yujia Wang and Cunzhen Yang*

#### **Introduction**

Western academic discourses play a dominant role in social science research. Most researchers outside Western cultures usually utilize Western concepts and theories to interpret sociopolitical issues in local (non-Western) contexts. ‘Many people in Asian societies still have the deep-rooted mindset of looking to the West and the often unconscious desire to emulate the West in all pursuits including knowledge production and the seeking of “modernity”’ (Lin, 2012, p. 158). Randomly open a social science textbook and you will likely find that the core concepts the authors use, the theoretical frameworks they construct, the methodology they choose and even the strategies they use to analyse their data succumb to the influence of Western academic discourse. These phenomena are not isolated to work in the context of China. It is common to see that Western academic discourse plays a dominant role in social science research in each corner of the world. Scholars tend to ‘picture the world as seen from the rich capital-exporting countries of Europe and North America – the global metropole’ (Connell, 2007, p. vii). The Global North has been the centre of knowledge production in social science. ‘Southern theory’ has been relegated to the world’s periphery. To Chen, ‘Western-centralism has constituted a solid structure of desire and knowledge, a structure that is indeed difficult to shake loose’ (Chen, 2010, p. 221).

Cultural conflict and integration have been the salient features of cultural globalization in the twentieth century. In the context of globalization, it has been found that more and more issues cannot be adequately explained by the Western academic paradigm, and the values of multicultures are being rediscovered and re-respected, worldwide. Increasing numbers of scholars from non-Western cultural traditions are directing their attention to traditional cultures and local wisdom to explore the process of knowledge production. Transcultural studies have gradually become one of the hot areas in social science research. Furthermore, Western scholars have also begun to rethink and re-evaluate the position of Western culture in the world. Theories or cultures belonging to the Global South (Asia included) are now regarded as a serious research topic, forming an important part of cultural globalization.

Just as Connell (2007, p. vii) indicated, ‘only knowledge produced on a planetary scale is adequate to support the self-understanding of societies now being forcibly reshaped on a planetary scale’. Thus, Chen (2010) believes critical studies of experiences in Asia might offer a new view of global history. According to him, self-analysis provides a new strategy for scholars in the Global South to overcome the limits imposed and shaped by Western academic discourse. He suggests using Asia as method to rethink the process of knowledge production in sociocultural research.

The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other’s points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity may be rebuilt. On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history.

This indicates that using Asia as method is to ensure that Asian localities, rather than Western theories, become a reference point for each other. Theorists can counteract hegemonic knowledge production by shifting the reference points for Asia away from the West and towards local sites that share similar sociohistorical processes. In other words, Western discourse is not the only reference resource in the social sciences generally, and in Asia-related research in particular. Our approach to Asia as method lies in the localizations of Western theories with regard to various Asian political, economic, cultural and social contexts, an engagement with transnational experiences between Australia and China, and employment of and emphasis on local theories through and beyond ‘nationalism’, ‘nativism’ and ‘civilizationism’.

Inspired by Chen’s work on Asia as method, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an alternative perspective from which to rethink educational research in China and Australia. Through rediscovering traditional culture and local wisdom, we attempt to establish an arena for dialogue with Western academic discourse in educational research. This chapter delves deeply into the practical operational level to show the explanatory power of Asia as method by utilizing three different research cases in the field of education.

### **Asia as method – how to deal with the West?**

Given the dominant role of Western academic discourse in knowledge production, ‘How to deal with the West?’ is an unavoidable question in post-colonial studies. Chen (2010) also interprets ‘the question of the West’ in his study. Different from those post-colonial scholars who regard ‘the West as the Other’ and trap themselves awkwardly, he provides ‘an alternative discursive strategy [that] points the West as bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalizing, way’ (Chen, 2010, p. 223). He further indicates that:

The local formation of modernity carries important elements of the West, but it is not fully enveloped by it. Once recognizing the West as fragments internal to the local, we no longer consider it as an opposing entity but rather as one cultural resource among many others.

With regard to the problem of the West, Chen's strategy avoids putting the West in an antagonistic position and, further, employs the notion of 'internationalist localism' to help us deal with the problem of the West. He indicates that, 'Internationalist localism acknowledges the existence of the nation-state as a product of history but analytically keeps a critical distance from it. The operating site is local, but at the same time internationalist localism actively transgresses nation-states' boundaries' (Chen, 2010, p. 233).

As he says, internationalist localism 'looks for new political possibilities emerging out of the practices and experiences accumulated during encounters between local history and colonial history – that is, the new forms and energies produced by the mixing brought about by modernization' (Chen, 2010, p. 233).

As we know, theories arising from different cultural backgrounds need to be localized in a specific cultural and historical context. Chen's view of internationalist localism is not only an alternative strategy for dealing with the West, but also provides a lens through which to rethink and reinvestigate the role of local wisdom and traditional culture and the relationship between the local and the West. In this chapter, a case study of how the Western term 'network governance', localized in the process of Chinese education policy-making, was discussed. We argue that it is necessary for the localization of Western theories to adapt to local cultural and historical traditions. In this way, the localized Western theories can be rooted in local soil and, eventually, become one of the compositions of local culture.

In order to avoid cultural essentialism and Western antagonism in the process of localization, Chen (2010) emphasizes that:

Internationalist localism respects tradition without essentializing it, and will not mobilize the resources of tradition simply for the sake of opposing the West. Its point of departure is not to reify the value system (which has happened in the Asia-values debate), but to reinvestigate it and its practice.

(p. 233)

Based on this interpretation, our study here focuses on the dialogue between East and West from a transnational perspective, to build a platform that is not nation-state based but that blends the knowledge of both 'inside' and 'outside'.

Besides the localization of the Western paradigm, Chen's idea of 'internationalist localism' encompasses a parallel process regarding different directions of knowledge flow. From this perspective, the knowledge does not flow from Western countries to China. In contrast, Chinese cultures and traditions are brought out in the context of globalization. Consistent with this,

in our work, the experiences of Chinese international students in Australia are regarded as one form of transnational knowledge flow. This is influenced by the mobility of Chinese students, together with their cultural backgrounds and educational experience. How to integrate their cultural backgrounds and educational experience into a different cultural context and education system is a big challenge for Chinese international students. In this process, some students stick to their Chinese cultural roots and find themselves at variance with the new education system, some students adapt to the new cultural environment and accept the new education system, and some students absorb the positive aspects of these two different cultures and education systems. In this chapter, two case studies explicitly discuss how this form of knowledge flow happened, both from education and parent–child relation perspectives.

To assist us to rethink and reinvestigate traditional cultures in the dialectical dialogue with the West, Chen provides the notion of ‘translation’ that, ‘gives us a way to conduct reinvestigations that allow the organic shape and characteristics of local society and modernity to surface’ (Chen, 2010, p. 244). How does translation play its role in the dialectical dialogue between exotic cultures and local tradition? Chen explains that:

The object to be translated has to be subjected to existing social forces and must negotiate with dense local histories if it is to take root in foreign soil. What comes out of this long process of negotiation is not what was imagined at the initial moment of translation at all, but a localized product of this blending process.

We can see, therefore, that the object of translation has to be subjected to both the ‘local’ and the ‘foreign’, and the process of translation usually involves dialogue and negotiation between exotic cultures and local traditions/wisdom. How, then, does translation actually happen? Chen (2010) posits that translation is a progression of both ‘negotiations’ and ‘blending’ between the ‘local’ and the ‘foreign’, rather than a simple act of one toppling the other. It occurs through two-way, simultaneous processes. First, an exotic culture has to adapt to local historical contexts. Second, the traditional culture has to be reinvestigated and re-read dialectically. Then, an equal dialogue between the two results in the changed and changeable ‘base-entities’ shown in Figure 2.1.



*Figure 2.1* The process of translation

Based on our understandings of Chen's idea of Asia as method, the process of translation is interpreted in Chinese and Australian contexts, respectively. In the context of China, the Western paradigm, as an exotic culture, adapts to the Chinese cultural context and then engages in dialogue with the reinvestigated Chinese theories. This perspective of translation is examined through a discussion of how negotiations transpire between the Western term of 'network governance' and the Chinese term *Mohe* (磨合) in Chinese education policy-making. In the context of Australia, Chinese international students' traditional thoughts and education experience become the exotic culture, which requires them to adapt to the the local (Australian) cultural context and education system. However, how actively reinvestigated the Australian cultural context and education system are in order to equally dialogue with the exotic Chinese culture and education system obviously requires more particular attention. Through the two case studies, we elaborate on the necessity and importance of building the platform to enable equal dialogue between the two cultural traditions and education systems when operating in an Australian context.

### **Asia as method in educational research**

Asia as method has strong explanatory power in sociocultural research. However, in educational research, few people have focused on this area. On the one hand, this presents a challenge for us to enter a new academic territory in educational research. On the other hand, because there are no rules to follow, it is also an opportunity for us to explore this space freely and from different directions. In order to show the inclusivity and adaptivity of Asia as method, in various fields and in different contexts, we explore the explanatory power of Asia as method at the specific operational level. Based on our own research fields and interests, how Asia as method is implicated in educational research is discussed through bringing traditional Chinese culture to the West. This process takes place through the analysis of three different research foci on Chinese education: (1) the role of network governance in formulating and implementing Chinese education policy; (2) interpreting 'Australian education' – a case study of Chinese international students in an independent school; and (3) reinvestigating *guan* and *xiao* in Chinese–Australian parent–child relationships.

### **Case 1: *Mohe* in Chinese education policy-making**

In the West, network governance is a major theory that provides a lens for examining interactions between groups that make up networks involved in policy-making. There is a substantial body of work concerning the way governance has affected the contribution of central government policy to the policy process (Kjær, 2004; Pierre and Peters, 2005). Rod Rhodes possibly offers the most prominent and persuasive account of the governance concept.

His most influential writings, especially the book called *Understanding Governance: Policy networks, governance, reflexivity and accountability* (1997), employ governance to explore the institutions, actors and processes of change within the core executive in Britain. He defines network governance as ‘self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by inter-dependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state’ (p. 15).

Scholars have examined various Chinese public policies by localizing the network governance theory. These policies include reforming taxation in rural areas (Tang, 2004), Chinese politics in the provincial legislatures (Xia, 2008), housing and estates (Zhang and Lou, 2007; Zhu, 2008) and public health insurance reform (Zheng et al., 2010). They argue that ‘significant autonomy from the state’ may not suit China, as the role of the Chinese central government is still dominant in policy-making. The government is still highly resourced and has a range of powers with which to retain influence over public-sector agencies. Indeed, in educational policy, Ball does not suggest the ‘giving up by the state of its capacity to steer policy’ (2010, p. 748). In light of Chen’s idea of Asia as method (2010), we can see that, when Western theories are translated to local communities, existing social forces and dense local histories need to be adopted. The base-entity in each continent, country, region, city and village is different. Therefore, it creates different forms of localization in each geographic space. Consequently, scholars in each country will search their local theories, thoughts or daily language to explain current local phenomena. China is no exception.

The Chinese daily language term *Mohe* provides an alternative way to study policy-making processes. It supplies a method for coordinating various autonomous actors to accommodate each other to solve social problems and achieve collective goals. Xia Ming (2000) uses the emerging concept of *Mohe* to echo the network governance. He explains that:

In Chinese, *Mohe* combines two words: *mo* means ‘friction’ between two objects or conflict between people. *He* means ‘cooperation’ or ‘congruence’. *Mohe* is often interpreted as a ‘grinding process’ as happens to new cars or machines in which new parts adjust themselves in order to accommodate each other and work in harmony. Its best equivalent in English is ‘co-petition’ (a combination of cooperation and competition, coined recently by a scientist) which also has accurately connoted the crucial meanings of *Mohe*: it is a process in a time frame. Friction exists, but it does not grind an entity (either a group, a system, or a machinery) apart. Rather it helps each part to smooth its jarring quality and form an everlasting coexistence. Since in this situation all actors lose part of their original qualities which cause disharmony, there is no actor with an absolute hegemony to impose its will upon other actors completely, it is hard to argue who is a winner and who is a loser. The more important feature is the reciprocation of cooperation and mutual restraints.

(p. 194)

Importantly, the concept of *Mohe* does not exclude the role of the state in a policy-making process. It indicates a continuing process of cooperation through friction and mutual adjustment.

In this case, we will analyse two problems that have been overcome by the actors' participation when the state-owned railway enterprise school was transferred from the Ministry of Railways to the Ministry of Education. The main actors involved in this education reform were the local Education Bureau, the General Education Department of the Railway Bureau and the principal and current and retired teachers of the school in question. These actors each had their primary goals, perceptions of the issues at hand and preferred strategies to employ when they engaged in two deadlocked problems, namely, excess teachers and retired teachers.

### ***Problem of excess teachers***

State-owned railway enterprise schools have a lower teacher–student ratio than government schools, and, therefore, the local Education Bureau did not receive seven or eight excess teachers for its schools. The vice director of the General Education Department of the Railway Bureau explained the solution to this problem: ‘We used another condition to exchange and fulfil their requirement; we gave them the houses or apartments which are currently used for teachers’ accommodation, they accepted it’ (interview with the vice director of the General Education Department of the Railway Bureau).

The General Education Department of the Railway Bureau offered houses and apartments to the local Education Bureau in exchange for the acceptance of excess teachers in the former Bureau’s schools. This is a clear example of how *Mohe* plays an effective role in exchanging resources within parties to achieve mutual benefit for both parties.

### ***Problem of retired teachers***

This was a difficult issue to solve during the transferral period, as there was a lack of successful cases to follow. Different actors have different views on this matter:

We know it is profitable in the railway enterprise. It is a publicly listed company, so we requested RMB20 million in return to accept their retired teachers.

(Interview with the deputy director of the local Education Bureau)

We had paid a lot of money in this matter [retired teachers] . . . In fact, we have prepared to pay for because we understand if they [retired teachers] will not be transferred to the local education bureau, they will come to our office everyday and it is too costly in administration to keep them.

(Interview with the vice director of the General Education Department of the Railway Bureau)

Similar to the solution to the previous problem, the local Education Bureau and the General Education Department of the Railway Bureau found their ways to communicate with each other through the method of resource exchange.

Between 2001 and 2003, the retired teachers state their views in the negotiation process with the bureaus through the principal . . . and they wrote a lot of letters to claim their rights under the Teacher Education Law to the local education bureau and relevant departments, talked to the media, ask councillors to put their agendas to the Municipal Council, report to the higher level government (provincial government and central government) through the petition system. I believed that the central government had a new document (dated on 1st January 2004) related to their issue because of their effort in bargaining.

(Interview with deputy principal)

They were also fight for their own, such as contact media, they selected 2–3 people as the main contacts, once the matter related to the transfer, they all response and work together. They also get in touch with the retired teachers in other cities to exchange information and bargain together. Everyone knows that there has significantly different retirement benefit between state-owned enterprise school and the government school. The retired teachers can triple their pension to RMB6,600 per month if they are under the local education bureau.

(Interview with senior teacher)

The retired teachers claimed and fought for their rights and benefits under the Chinese Teacher Law, both formally and informally. The formal way was to communicate with the local Education Bureau by direct mail or through the principal. The informal way was to seek help from the media and councillors. Other than that, they formed networks to connect with retired teachers in different cities to exchange information and they gathered together to achieve more bargaining power.

In fact, the final result of this network type of negotiation process in the case of state-owned railway enterprise schools was favoured and accepted by all the actors. All the actors were better off: the local Education Bureau's disadvantage was compensated by RMB20 million. This matches with the claim of Torfing et al. (2009) that, 'the network actors must be prepared to respond positively to constructive proposals, to make concessions, or at least to compensate the losers' (p. 291).

In this case, *Mohe* postulates that actors depend on each other for resources and, therefore, enter exchange relationships. In the other words, it is an explanatory mechanism by which actors deploy resources for other actors in the network, to achieve their goals. *Mohe* is generally useful and fruitful for understanding the policy process in China. It has the potential to provide a framework to analyse the policy-making process in the West, especially for countries where state power is still in place and cannot be excluded.

## Case 2: experiencing ‘Australian education’ – Chinese international students in an independent school

The previous case study is based on Chen’s idea of how Western theories travel and localize in a specific geographical location of China, whereas this case represents a parallel process that examines his notion of translation through how Chinese people’s localized ideas of education travel transnationally and are mediated on foreign soil – in this case, Australia. The transnational experiences of twelve late-teen Chinese international students in an Australian school will be analysed. This case examines the students’ transnational experiences and, through these, the ‘object’ of translation, which is how they interpret their experience of education in an independent school in Melbourne in relation to their understanding of the ethics of an educational self.

Education in Western discourses, originating from Western democracy (Dewey, 1903), is deeply embedded in the philosophy of ‘personal well-being’ and ‘the ultimate well-being of learners’, which pedagogy ‘affects’ (Pring, 2010). In the Chinese context, education has two similar components, *Jiao* (教, equivalent to the function of pedagogy) and *Yu* (育, personal development), but the philosophy of well-being and the correlation between well-being and pedagogy implicit in *Jiao* and *Yu* originates from Confucian ethics. The basis of Confucian thought on education, which, in broad terms, is ‘whole person’-centred education, stressing virtues over knowledge, has a great impact on traditional Chinese education.

It is worth noting that the notion of each valence of *jiaoyu* undergoes change in different historical periods in China, in different sociocultural contexts. The Chinese international students used their own construct of the two valences of education – *Jiao* and *Yu* – to negotiate with their Australian educational experiences.

There are three major nodes of mediation that emerge regarding Chinese international students’ hands-on experience of Australian education. The first is the link between pedagogical practices, teachers’ role in students’ learning and the self-empowerment or self-development of students. The students’ point of assessment and judgement focused on *jiao*, or ‘teaching what’ and ‘teaching how’, but their standard of evaluation was based on *yu*, or the nurturing and empowering effect of education. As their respective expectations for ‘teaching how’ and ‘teaching what’ had been shaped by their past educational experiences in China, some students found it hard to adapt to the new school:

The teacher here spends several classes to teach us how to work out one math question, and there is not enough knowledge taught in the class, which is unimaginable in China . . . Our [his former school in China] education is examination-oriented so teachers organize their class with a focus on past examination questions. They teach us shortcuts and problem-solving strategies.

(Frank, Year 10)

Here the content a teacher teaches in more than two hours is the equivalent to what a teacher in our former school teaches in 40 minutes.

(Natalie, Year 11)

I think the teachers here barely teach. They just introduce in class, say, a maths formula, and the rest is up to you.

(Cindy, Year 10)

Despite the negation and complaints, the students were forced to learn by themselves, without teachers being around and feeding them the extracted knowledge. However, not all students shared these negative views of undesirable academic outcomes: Tracy came to read this way of *jiao*/teaching in the Australian context positively. She realized that the ability to extract knowledge was quite self-empowering.

Besides, Tracy was forced to think about using her own voice as a way of knowledge production. In retrospect, she attributed self-learning and her new role of knowledge-producer as *yu*, or a positive cultivation of herself via specific pedagogies. Tracy said, ‘I learned it the hard way. If I didn’t speak to the point or voice my own ideas, I ended up with very low scores in ESL’ (Tracy, Year 11).

The second node of mediation among the Chinese students is on curriculum design and pedagogical practices, in particular how book knowledge is linked to their everyday life. Cooking, biology and physics classes were well received and rated by the Chinese students as very close to everyday life, which was new to their examination-oriented schooling experiences in China. They expressed a desire to put their book knowledge to use in everyday life settings, or to apply their ‘learning to use logic’ in practice. This logic was endorsed and strengthened by the Chinese students in this Australian school. Natalie, citing her business management course, found this approach to learning was connecting her to society:

The teacher divided us into groups of two or three students, asking us to establish a business from the scratch. We have to think of the whole thing: working out ideas about what business we are going to do, then finding supplier, running our business within the school campus, and selling our goods there. The teacher takes our businesses seriously, asking us to pay 10 per cent tax out of our sales, which goes to charity.

(Natalie, Year 11)

The third mode of mediation is the development of personal traits, such as team spirit and self-assertion, that this Australian school endeavours to inculcate in its students.

The school activities emphasize cooperation and we feel so much connected to be in the team and we all do our best to contribute to it.

(Natalie, Year 11)

Like back in China, if I know how to work out a certain math question, I just keep it to myself. I don't want to be labelled as 'showing off'. But here I will argue with my classmates to show that my approach is the best.

(Rose, Year 10)

The three nodes of mediation mentioned above are negotiated in the ethics of an educational self, informed by Chinese educational experiences. The students demonstrated ethical negation, endorsement and transgression in their transnational educational journey. They demonstrated varied degrees of blending regarding the ethics of being, informed by different geographies of ethics.

The Chinese students used the split of *jiaoyu* into teaching and nurturing to mediate their mixed attitudes to their Australian educational experiences. The dialectic relationship between 'teaching' and 'nurturing' captures the dynamics, the changing attitudes towards Australian education and their construction of quality education.

Meanwhile, these research results also feed back into the relationship between the two components of *jiaoyu*, namely, nurturing and teaching. First, it demonstrates how much teaching and how much cultivation and nurturing are always an open signifier when defining quality education, where the balance between teaching and nurturing is culturally contextualized but not culturally defined. Second, the boundaries between teaching and learning can be quite blurred: some styles of teaching are nurturing by nature.

With reference to the research conclusions, it is argued that the Chinese students' ethics of educational being is an ongoing cultural construct, which is culturally contextualized, but not culturally determined. These students constructed new meanings of an *educational self* by the process of both negation and blending from the similarities and differences between two categorical culture units.

### **Case 3: reinvestigating *guan* and *xiao* in Chinese–Australian parent–child relationships**

Chen's approach of Asia as method is to 'uncover alternative possibilities', 'to provide alternative horizons and perspectives' and 'to advance a different understanding' in response to the structural limitations of the 'Western-centralism' in knowledge production (2010). It is, at the same time, a self-transformative and self-reflexive movement. One of Chen's 'urgent tasks' in using Asia as method is to rediscover and reinvestigate what 'existed prior to the moment of colonial encounter and global conquest' and 'are still actively working in contemporary daily life', instead of always seeking 'Euro-American social thought' (Chen, 2010). Inspired by Chen's proposal, this case explores *guan* (管) and *xiao* (孝), a Chinese parent–child relationship and a cultural feature that originated in Confucian philosophy, in shaping a group of

Australian–Chinese students attending a community language school in Melbourne.

In the interviews with Year 10 and Year 11 teenage students at a weekend Chinese language school, ‘parents made [forced] me’ was the most frequently mentioned reason for their attending the school. Many students indicated that it was to fulfil their parents’ expectations and requirements. Even for those who enrolled recently, parents’ suggestions and encouragement also played an important role.

Parental expectations of and involvement in children’s education and the Chinese parent–child relationships of *guan* and *xiao* have been reported as important cultural features that benefit the educational attainment and achievements of the children of the Chinese diaspora (Chao, 1994, 1996; J. Li, 2004; G. Li, 2006). These cultural factors can be traced back to Confucian philosophy, a lot of which, in short, simple rhymes and phrases, has been translated into everyday language and acts as guidance for Chinese people’s common practices. Based on Confucianism, ‘It is the parents’ fault to feed but not teach’ (养不教，父之过). Chinese parents are expected to play the guiding role in children’s upbringing, especially children’s education. They are supposed to *guan* (care, govern, teach and discipline) their children. Otherwise, they are negligent in their parental duties. On the other hand, children are expected to *xiao* or be *xiao* (filial, obedient and respectful). From Confucian classics, children learn first to be filial to their parents and respectful to their elders (首孝悌). Such Chinese parent–child relationships, prescribed in the Confucian classics, may well be able to explain these students’ attendance at the weekend Chinese school.

However, guided by Chen’s notion of ‘translation’, which, he contends, ‘is not simply a linguistic exercise but a social linguistics, or an intersection of history, sociology, and politics’ (2010, p. 244), this discussion tries to ‘reinvestigate’ *guan* and *xiao* in Australia and to ‘seek to move beyond the sorts of competitive essentialism’ (Chen, 2010). Chen’s notion of translation emphasizes that, ‘the object to be translated has to be subjected to existing social forces and must negotiate with dense local histories if it is to take root in foreign soil’, and it is ‘a localized product of this blending process’ (Chen, 2010). Therefore, *guan* and *xiao*, as an ethnic parent–child relationship, is subjected to, and negotiated with, the local social forces within the Australian context.

In addition to Confucianism, education has also been highly valued by Chinese parents because of a long-existing examination system for choosing officials and civil servants in China (Wu and Singh, 2004). Today, the most important examination for school education, the college entrance examination, is still regarded as life changing for most high-school graduates in China, owing to the severe competition (Yang and Gale, 2004). Together with China’s one-child policy, it is no wonder that Chinese parents have high expectations of their children’s success in education.

Overseas Chinese parents tend to rely on Chinese schools to complement the mainstream schooling, to ensure their children maintain their Chinese language and culture while living in Western countries (Archer and Francis, 2006). In Australia, students from a Chinese background are sent to weekend Chinese schools or coaching schools from a young age. There are cultural reasons for their attendance; however, social structural factors in Australia are not to be ignored. In fact, Australian–Chinese parents focus more on the benefits of bilingual status in the job market than on Chinese-culture maintenance (Chiang and Yang, 2008). Wu and Singh (2004) also suggest that Australian multiculturalism allows Chinese parents to draw on ethnic culture and value in education for their children’s benefit in Australia.

In this case study, the decision for students to attend Chinese schools from as young as 5 or 6 years old was definitely made by parents. Parents encouraged and supported them to learn Chinese, without which some might have already dropped out of the Chinese school, owing to a lack of interest. Students who were fluent in Chinese and ‘didn’t think it necessary’ or who ‘really hated Chinese school’ attended the weekend school anyway. Now in their teens, many students began to realize the benefits of learning their heritage language in Australia, and so going to Chinese school became based on more than just being forced to by their parents. Major benefits of learning Chinese that these teenagers mentioned included getting a better score in the VCE exam (the Victorian Certificate of Education exam), more job opportunities in Australia and abroad and effective communication with Chinese people. Some even felt grateful for being ‘forced’ by their parents to learn Chinese when they were young. Apart from the instrumental benefits in relation to students’ educational and career pathways, Chinese language was also an important marker of their ethnic identity. Many students mentioned it would be ‘strange’, ‘weird’ or ‘embarrassing’ if a person looked Chinese but was unable to speak Chinese. Studies of Chinese–Australians have also found that racial features still prevent Chinese in Australia from claiming their Australianness and unconditional acceptance by the mainstream Australian society (Ang, 1994; Tan, 2006).

The Chinese parent–child relationship of *guan* and *xiao* ensured children learned their Chinese heritage language from a very young age. However, for the teenagers, it was more owing to instrumental benefits as well as their awareness of ethnic identity that they stayed at community language schools. When using Chinese cultural markers such as *guan* and *xiao* as method in the foreign soil of Australia, even though it is within the Chinese community, local social forces need to be taken into consideration. In Australia, where minority immigrant groups are subjected to the linguistic assimilation pressures of school, media, peers and society as a whole, ethnic language loss has been confirmed as inevitable in many families, by both census data analysis and research (Smolicz et al., 2001). Therefore, to what extent *guan* and *xiao* are valid and effective among Australian–Chinese parent–child relationships needs further research. To reiterate Chen’s advice, without the localized ‘translation’, such a cultural feature remains trapped in the essentialist’s perspective.

## Conclusion

It may initially seem that there is no connection between the key words ‘network governance’, ‘independent school’ and ‘community language schools’. If scholars talk about the terms separately, each of them is no doubt an independent research project. Asia as method ‘serves as an umbrella problematic, which links together work that grew out of different historical moments and requires analyses at different levels of abstraction’ (Chen, 2010). If we put them under the same academic discourse – Asia as method – the relations between them naturally show up. This paper has argued that, in order to get beyond the Euro-American centralism research paradigm in the field of social science, it is necessary, even desirable, for Chinese researchers to recover their traditional culture and local wisdom with regard to the issues of Chinese education. Drawing on Chen’s view of Asia as method, this chapter has provided three different research cases to explore how Asia as method works in educational research concerning Chinese educational issues.

Case 1 examined how the localized Western term of network governance, *Mohe* (磨合), works better in formulating and implementing Chinese education policy, and how the term *Mohe* potentially contributes to the Western theoretical framework of network governance in return. By discussing network governance theory in the West, this case argues that the notion of *Mohe*, which is derived from traditional Chinese culture, can offer flexibility to accommodate actors in the Chinese education policy arena, as ‘significant autonomy from the state’ is not implied in this term. Case 2 explores Chinese international students’ experience of schooling in an independent school in Australia. It offers a transnational interpretation of education that favours neither a nation- nor state-based perspective, but blends what the students identify as positive aspects of both educational systems. This case juxtaposed the culturally embedded notion of education to the transnational space where Western democracy and Confucian ethics meet. It is an attempt to complement Asia as method from a transnational perspective, by drawing attention to the transnational readings of Chinese education in the Australian context. Case 3 (re)investigates the long-standing cultural concepts of the Chinese parent–child relationship, *guan* and *xiao*, in explaining Australian–Chinese young people’s attendance at weekend Chinese heritage language schools. It provides a reflective application of how Asian (Chinese) concepts are used in other social, cultural and political contexts. In this case study, according to the most-mentioned reason of ‘my parents made me’, students’ attendance at the weekend school can be ascribed to the concepts of *guan* and *xiao*. However, further interview data and analyses show that instrumental benefits in relation to local and global educational, economic and sociopolitical factors, as well as the teenagers’ awareness of ethnic identity, play more important roles. This case study reiterates what Chen has suggested links the local forces, while applying Asia as method in foreign soil.

### Reflective section

We are different! We came from different parts of China, and have diverse career backgrounds. We conducted heterogeneous research topics in our PhD projects. We are the same! We have a homogeneous cultural identity – Chinese. We have the same study subject – Chinese people. We currently reside in the same place – Australia. More importantly, we have a similar struggle to use Western theories in the interpretation of Chinese data. Why did we work with Chen’s idea of Asia as method together in this collaborative chapter? How did this happen? What are the difficulties we experienced? What are the benefits we gained?

When our supervisors asked us to find research topics and methodology in the first year of our PhD projects, we almost unwittingly made the same choice: first, we preferred a topic relevant in Chinese contexts; second, we tended to use Western models, theory and methodology, which we were learning in Australia to conduct our research. We made these choices because we are familiar with the Chinese context and feel comfortable working with Chinese participants. In addition, contemporary international academic discourse remains dominated by Western scholarship. We assumed that this was a safe combination (Chinese topic plus Western scholarship). However, this combination left us with a trap in our PhD projects. The fact is, in the context of globalization, both time and space have changed. Western theories, originating from the Anglo-American tradition, cannot appropriately interpret the specific topics of China, with its unique cultural heritage and historical traditions. Meanwhile, the spectacular recent development of China has provided social researchers with golden opportunities to engage in a dialogue with Western theories.

With regard to the dominant role of Western scholarship in social science research, in the book *Asia as Method: Toward deimperialization*, Chen (2010) suggests that working with the ideas of Asia can provide a ‘defiant research imagination’ (Kenway and Fahey, 2006). Specifically, the diversity of Asian cultural heritage and ancient wisdom provides ‘alternative horizons and perspectives’ (Chen, 2010) in knowledge production. To Chen (2010), Asian cultural heritage and ancient wisdom, rather than Western theories, become a reference point for each other. As Asian PhD students doing Asian education studies in Australia, we were very excited at our first sight of Chen’s idea. In the beginning, we thought we had found a way to escape the trap. However, we quickly realized how difficult it would be if we followed Chen’s trajectory of thinking, in which we need to be familiar with the culture and tradition of other Asian countries. The big challenge is the obstacles of languages, as language is usually regarded as the carrier of culture. Although Asian scholars have published numerous academic papers in English in the international arena, this literature cannot provide enough material for us to use the idea of Asia as an ‘imaginary anchoring point’ (Chen, 2010).

We despaired, learning that Chen's (2010) idea of societies in Asia becoming each other's points of reference cannot be realized until we have comprehensive understanding of other Asian countries' cultural heritages and historical traditions. So, to find an alternative pathway, we decided to reread Chen's book *Asia as Method*. Doing so, we found that Chen's idea of Asia as method is so rich. At the beginning, when we decided to use his ideas to think through the problem of East and West in knowledge production, we had overlooked so many details of his expressions. Now, although we do not emotionally celebrate our superficial understanding of Asia as method, we have been inspired by Chen's ideas to try to construct a new research imagination in the thorny academic journey. We did not simply learn some key words from Chen's idea of Asia as method: more importantly, we found a new way to think through the relevant educational issues, beyond 'Western, imperial eyes' (Kenway and Fahey, 2006). Influenced by our learning experiences in the Chinese education system, we tend to learn passively from our teachers and books as humble students. However, in the process of doing our PhD research in an Australian university, we have realized the value of both 'Western' and 'Chinese' theories and philosophies in guiding and assisting us in our studies. Many times, we have to use Chinese literature, documents, concepts and terms to explore and explain our research data. In the transition from passive learners to active thinkers from Chinese backgrounds in Australia, Chen's *Asia as Method* has confirmed our ways of doing research by using our background culture and theory. More importantly, his ideas have inspired us to take responsibility for enriching academic research and knowledge by referencing Chinese or Asian literature. It has been of great benefit to us to work together to contribute this chapter, and we believe we will further benefit from this new research imagination in our future academic careers.

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### **3 The Japanese perception of silence in the Australian educational context**

*Dat Bao*

#### **Introduction to the study**

When Japanese students come to study in Australian universities, they realize that the behaviour that was appreciated in their Japanese classrooms is not considered normal here: they find themselves much less verbally involved than many of their Australian and international classmates. In conjunction, Australian lecturers often feel that some Japanese students are very quiet during classroom discussions. According to Knapp (2000), someone is considered 'silent' when the person tends to speak less than others or uses long pauses during communication. The concept 'silent', therefore, is employed in a relative sense and does not mean that someone is completely mute, but simply suggests that these students do not talk as much as the lecturer wants or expects them to. In many cases, the students do talk to the extent they assume they should, but that happens to mismatch the expectations of the lecturer.

As a great deal of research has already explained why silence happens in many educational settings, this discussion will attempt to take a slightly different focus, that is, how silence experiences some degree of challenge in the context where explicit talk is the norm. The chapter neither attempts to praise silence, nor does it try to criticize silence per se. Instead, it focuses on how silence among some students functions in situations where other students talk, based on empirical data from postgraduate Japanese students' experience with communication in English in the Australian educational context. This choice of context is based on the researcher's expertise and interest in working with Japanese students in an Australian university. Towards the end of the discussion, the chapter hopes to raise readers' awareness that silence does not have to be the opposite of talk, that silence and talk do not have to be mutually exclusive, and that it is not necessarily the lecturer's job to feel that students are more engaged when they talk. This line of argument also hopes to respond to the reality, rarely discussed in academic discourse, that the power hierarchy in the classroom can be reinforced through teachers' attitudes towards silence and talk, and that favouring talk over silence in classroom practice might make some students feel included in, or others excluded from, the learning process.

## **The researcher's positioning**

In line with the philosophy of the book, this chapter does not deal with its topic independently but is written to demonstrate shared ideology with other contributors, by providing intellectual responses to Chen's (2010) book *Asia as Method*. For this reason, I shall commence with an explanation of how my research topic can serve to respond to Chen. Not unlike other contributors, I am inspired by Chen's (2010) advocacy for the decolonialization of cultural studies, which may involve the exercise of 'self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery' in a desire to develop 'less coerced and more reflexive' research practices (p. 3). Taking the same stance, this chapter involves the rediscovery of a cultural issue, namely silence, with an attempt to move beyond a colonializing perspective, that is, to look at the issue less from a Western-dominant angle. A great deal about East Asian silence in educational settings has been explained in Western views, by Western scholars, based on Western resources, within Western contexts, initiated by Western institutes and published in Western journals. Such dominant forces of knowledge production have amounted to an act of colonization, suggesting that, without the intellectual support of the above agencies, East-Asian scholars might not be fully capable of researching their own issues.

Following Chen's appeal to move beyond Western frames of reference in academic research, this chapter employs a relevant discourse encompassing other than Western theories. Instead, most of the literature that interacts with the topic, in this discussion, comes from Japan and other non-Western backgrounds. As the project deals with an East Asian construct, the discourse related to it has been taken from the insights offered by scholars within the East Asian context. This decision does not intend to isolate Asia from the West, but, recognizing the fact that a tremendous amount of Western literature has already done so, considers it is neither an original nor desirable approach to echo this tendency.

## **Context and discourse on silence in Japan**

Over the past four decades in Japanese education, tension has existed between the desire to achieve a communicative mode of education and the emphasis on entrance examinations into universities. Many Japanese students view entrance examinations as more important than acquiring communication ability and, thus, remain less inclined to focus on verbal skills than accumulating knowledge transmitted by teachers and through textbooks (see, for example, Yu and Wang, 2009; Hosoki, 2011). For this reason, silence in the classroom is caused by both difficulty in verbally conveying meanings (Kurihara, 2006; Shimizu, 2006) and the inclination to perceive lecturers, not as facilitators or organizers of learning, but as sources of knowledge (Yue and Le, 2009).

As the spread of globalization has exerted influence over the nation's educational policy, recent educational reform in Japan has advocated a shift

to a more self-expressive mode of learning and communication (Lai, 1999; Kubota, 2002; Sasaki, 2008; Takeshita, 2010). The new curriculum simultaneously emphasizes the need to retain the Japanese cultural identity and the need to be open-minded towards other cultures. Although a new English curriculum was implemented in 2011, which advocated more verbal competence, some Japanese learning habits continue to pose a challenge to new educational practices: students' silent attentiveness and obedience are highly valued, whereas speaking out in class seems rude and somewhat arrogant (see, for example, Nozaki, 1993; Kato, 2010).

Founded largely upon research efforts over the past two decades by Japanese scholars, the meaning of Japanese silence falls into three main categories, including sociocultural, academic and pedagogical significances. First, silence as an expression of: modesty and politeness (Nakane, 2007), mutual expectations of roles (Kurihara, 2006), shared space for thought processing (Nakane, 2007; Kato, 2010), shared space for attentiveness (Nozaki, 1993) and shared space for participation (Harumi, 2010). Within the second category, the meanings of silence attend to learners' linguistic and behavioural difficulties: limited language competence (Lin and Yi, 1997; Nakane, 2007; Kato, 2010), foreign-language performance anxiety (Kurihara, 2006, p. 39; Shimizu, 2006, p. 38), peer pressure and fear of judgement (Kurihara, 2006; Kato, 2010), unfamiliarity with peers and teachers (Kurihara, 2006), low motivation (Chu and Nakamura, 2010, p. 34), learners' low confidence (Nakane, 2007, pp. 73, 74), poor preparedness for overseas study (Yue and Le, 2009) and reluctance to be the centre of attention (Nakane, 2007). The third categorizes silence as resulting from teacher abilities (Yue and Le, 2009, p. 9) such as poor classroom management (Kato, 2010), unsuitable methodology (Yue and Le, 2009), as well as uninteresting topics and learning content (Kurihara, 2006). Historically, Japanese students' silence in the second-language classroom, however, is not always related to linguistic competence in English, but rather to a social mode of communication and the degree to which nonverbal expression plays a role in people's behaviour.

Research efforts have been made to bring out the voices of Japanese students in overseas academic institutes who have gone through the experience of having to, occasionally, question the value of their own silent behaviour in a new academic environment, such as the United States or Australia. A case study by Nakane (2007) reveals a lack of proficiency, including difficulty understanding peers' and lecturers' speech, hindered students from participating in class. Japanese students' silence is also explained by a fear of failing to make themselves understood, unfamiliarity with turn-taking conversational rules in the Australian classroom and a lack of time for processing thoughts in preparation for verbal participation. Another study by Kato (2010) finds that some students find it hard to divide their efforts between the need to concentrate on listening to the teacher and the need to process ideas for participation.

It is commonly acknowledged that social expectations often influence the attitudes of individuals during classroom discussions (Kurihara, 2006). Seven per cent of the Japanese participants in Kato's study (2010) claim that being silent is a virtue, and that untimely participation during the lesson can be regarded as discourteous and irritating to others. The traditional view of an excellent Japanese student tends to be someone thoughtfully calm and attentive, not verbally aggressive (Nozaki, 1993). Owing to the social need for modesty, Japanese students consciously refrain from overt expressions of opinions and from becoming the centre of attention or disagreement. Indeed, critical comments and jokes are regarded as ill mannered in the classrooms in Japan (Nakane, 2007). Silence in Japanese social contexts not only serves as a communication tool but also represents persuasive behaviour in which action replaces the use of words. The act of talking may, in many cases, cause delay in, or interruption to, action and, thus, can easily break the trust of others in the conversation (Lebra, 1987).

### **Research focus and participants' profiles**

The project under discussion was designed to investigate Japanese students' perceptions, attitudes and experiences in relation to the use of silence in the classroom, whether as an academic learning mode or as an inherent social behaviour. Interviews were conducted in which Japanese students expressed their opinions regarding their mental and intellectual processes of developing knowledge and skills through silence and speech, their feeling and thinking towards peer interaction and the overall academic environment, factors influencing their choice to be quiet or verbal and their preferences for the best timing and conditions for talk or silence.

Eleven Japanese students in higher-educational institutes in Melbourne, Australia, participated in the project: six male and five female students, aged between 24 and 50 years old. Except for one participant who is an undergraduate, the rest are all pursuing their Master's degrees in various fields. The participants' experience in English learning ranges from 5 to 19 years, in both Japanese and Australian contexts, which suggests that they have gone through various learning styles and environments and, because of this, are able to reflect on their language learning and language use processes. Two of them are learning to become English teachers and, thus, are able to discuss the learning process in linguistic terms. Some of them reflected on their high school and university learning experiences in the 2–12 years they have spent studying in Australia. Most participants have university degrees. One participant is a schoolteacher and another is a sessional Japanese language tutor at Monash University; the rest are students. This means that their opportunities for verbal communication in English, inside and outside the classroom, are abundant. Most of them are capable of, and interested in, furthering their training and education.

The sampling method is both purposeful and incidental, because it is based on participants' background of being Japanese and studying in Australia, as well as their availability and the voluntary nature of the research project. There is no attempt to impose any generalization on the findings over a larger population.

### **Research methodology**

The project is a qualitative case study employing the semi-structured interview as the primary data-collection tool and interpretive discourse analysis to, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 4) 'make the world visible'. It is a case study because the investigator seeks to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003) and allows for an in-depth exploration of a few individuals (Creswell, 2008). The data-analysis method is inspired by phenomenologists in the sense that the participants' experiences are taken into account, based on their own view in relation to their own social context (see, for example, Moran, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000). The project embraces a deeply qualitative nature by seeking to understand meanings constructed by the participants themselves in relation to how they experience and make sense of the world around them, as suggested by Creswell (2008) and Merriam (2009).

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each individual participant, who expressed his/her beliefs on the use of silence in educational settings in relation to talk. The interview took place in either English or Japanese, or both – depending upon whichever language seemed most comfortable to participants at the time of the interview. The data were then interpreted, based on the participant's intuitive knowledge in combination with the researcher's expert knowledge of classroom communication.

### **Findings and implications of silence in education**

Two major findings from the empirical data will be reported and discussed in relation to relevant discourse, primarily among Japanese and other non-Western scholars. The reason for this choice of discourse type is to construct an alternative view that might be less common in the current, general literature on the topic.

#### ***Finding 1: silence can be negotiated to suit the changing context***

In the participants' view, there should be no hierarchy between talk and silence. Both of these dimensions can be either productive or destructive. If good talk keeps conversation progressing reciprocally, good silence leaves space for more conversation to be created by others. If excessive talk among a few class members dominates class time and hinders learning, excessive silence reduces beneficial feedback and contribution. Yusuke<sup>1</sup> expresses this

concern: 'One of my classmates just dominates class talk and does not allow others to express opinions. I don't understand why this student just wants to say everything all by herself.'

Efforts made by this study to compare the values of silence and talk show that students seek the appropriate balance between the time for silence and the time for talk in every learning scenario, as Daichi admits:

My attitude and behaviour can change, depending on how I perceive the circumstances. Back in Japanese schools, I used to be quiet to show cooperation; however, in my Australian classes, I've become more talkative as I'm aware that it is talking not silence that represents interest in this context.

The need to find a balance between talk and silence is important, as Maho suggests: 'Both talk and silence are important for learning to be complete. I don't think the class works well when some speak too much and others keep too quiet in the class.'

Unlike research data from some previous studies that indicate that students 'keep silent to maintain harmony' (Liu, 2001, p. 195), participants in this project demonstrate that classrooms resemble the broader society that requires sensitive integration between silence and talk so as to maintain community congruence. Hitomi comments: 'If I have already spoken a few times, I tend to shut up and leave space for my peers to speak.' Satoru also voices his concern:

When many of my peers have openly shared their thoughts, I would feel left out of the group if I did not try to make contribution. If I continue to keep quiet that would be considered disrespectful to the group.

These reflections, which are shared by other individuals in the study, debunk the myth about Japanese people that often perceives silence as invariably the symbol of respect: silence, in many cases, can also be considered rude in Japanese cultural behaviour.

The finding above suggests a strong direction in which research can continue, employing a multiplicity of theoretical frameworks and contextual factors to further explain human behaviour. My approach to analysing the above data was inspired by the works of Chen (2010), Margolis (1996) and Yoshikawa (1984). Chen's (2010) discussion on empowering scholars through challenging the East and West binarism and through discovering new ways of research using multiple frames of reference reminds me of Margolis's (1996) appeal to show sensitivity to context by being aware of the multiple factors in the surrounding world that support human observation and interpretability. In Margolis's view, to produce qualified specialists would not be as important as to prepare a generation of innovative scholars who are interested in constructing original pieces of knowledge, and, to do this effectively, scholars

must have the ability to work with diversity. Although there is no further elaboration on what diversity means, Margolis (2011) seems to indicate a wide range of resources, rather than a limited set of resources of a certain type.

Margolis's idea was inspired by Russian scholars such as A.N. Leontiev, D.B. El'konin and Vasily Davydov, who followed Vygotsky's legacy in their theoretical ideology. Founded upon this tradition, the methodological resource to be used for research in a certain context should actually come from that context. To begin the quest for ways to understand knowledge and solve problems, it is essential to keep in mind that, as such problems have originated from that context, its surrounding environment is in some way responsible for it. Such an environment inherently contains in it some resources related to that problem, and so understanding the nature of such resources and how they are related to the problem can play a role in dealing with it. In the current project, to understand Japanese educational silence, I find it useful to look into theoretical resources developed by Japanese scholars who are familiar with the context of their own silence. In this regard, Yoshikawa's (1987) double-swing theory helps me explain the negotiation between the silent behaviour brought from the Japanese society and the emphasis on verbal interaction in the Australian educational context.

The need to move beyond silence into talk or to refrain from talk represents a challenge of adaptation beyond one's own communication repertoire. Learning is social activity. The Japanese education system is a highly organized social construct in which talk and silence follow social rules developed and valued collectively. As formal learning is shifted to Australia, where verbal interaction is valued, the need for negotiation of silence and talk requires some degree of modification of classroom behaviour structure. Yoshikawa (1987) explains intercultural communication by conceptualizing how individuals, cultures and intercultural notions can meet in constructive ways and by managing the intersection of two cultures. In light of this theory, the ultimate aim of communication is not to eliminate differences but to use the dynamics that arise through the encounter, and the desired effect is achieved when the two participants both change during their communication. Such negotiation between the self and the other allows for a 'dynamic in-betweenness', in which the individual moves between different cultural behaviour to construct an integrated, multicultural sense of self. The participants in the present study admit making a conscious effort to adapt their previous classroom behaviour in order to be more accepted in the Australian academic setting. Reaching such a cross-cultural compromise is seen by Yue and Le (2009) as a heavy task, and by Yoshikawa (1987) as a necessity.

### ***Finding 2: talk might damage learning more than silence***

Several participants assume that talk can be more harmful than silence, because, in many cases, talk can cause conflict and disturb the thinking process, whereas silence brings comfort and a concordant social surrounding.

Most participants agree that one continues to make connection with the class even when staying silent. Silence allows individuals to concentrate on meaning, process information and raise questions. They are acutely aware that it is important to make talk more pleasant through the preceding use of silence, as Masako reflects:

When my ideas are not clear and I still need to gather or arrange them some more, being silent could help me clarify thoughts. Without such moments of silence, my thinking will be messy and my talk, of course, will be messy.

Yusuke agrees: 'It would be impossible to use language without preparing to do so.' Yurie also admits, 'I hate to share a thought which seems to be too common.' In fact, data show that every individual has a dual responsibility, not only towards his or her own learning, but also toward the learning of their community. As Daichi comments, 'I not only practise speaking quietly and processing my own thoughts but also to interact with others so that they too can benefit from the outcome of my silence.'

It seems clear that both talk and silence require a great deal of thoughtful consideration to be helpful. Yuna shares her experience of using silence to provide encouragement in communication: 'I usually talk very little when communicating to someone who is very silent so that person can have some space to open up. In addition, I do not strongly disagree with their idea but tend to agree more often.' As demonstrated, the verbal and silent modes of communication exist in everyone's repertoire, and which one is to be used more often is, in many cases, a matter of personal choice, rather than of a mere lack of ability.

The insight above seems to be uncommon in the findings of research about silence: not many scholars have actually investigated aspects of talk in the classroom that might cause more damage than silence. It came as a result of allowing research data to stray beyond Western discourse, which favours the value of talk. According to Davydov (1995), formal reasoning does not form the basis for thinking, but it is, rather, the empirical experience that shapes thinking processes. Chen (2010), Kao and Sinha (1997) and other postmodernist voices have attempted to replace the existing vertical hierarchy with a more horizontal level of communication among equal voices and to appreciate a more holistic approach to knowledge construction. Very much in the same ways that the media, which come from a small group, dictate the thinking among the public majority, academic debates have long been the forum, capital and commodity of a few paramount masters, from several nations, celebrating publications in English at the expense of diversity and all-inclusive world knowledge. As can be interpreted from participants' voices in this project, intelligent choices can be made collectively, and individuals' mode of thinking can be either a product of, or a reaction to, the belief of a community. In efforts to further understand social communication and theorize

modes of behaviour, Enriquez (1997), a Filipino theorist, articulates a number of interactional modes or levels of interaction that are often neglected among Western scholars. They include such concepts as mixing, conforming, adjusting and fusion, which can serve as the core foundation to explain many complex modes of communication in the Japanese context.

### **Linking the study with current discourse**

The need to look at the resources from both Japanese and Australian settings allows me to understand how the meanings of silence are contextualized, negotiated and constructed. This understanding of reality from more than one angle parallels Chen's (2010) proposal to approach the subject of research by moving away from the imperialistic perspective and by multiplying theoretical frames of reference for an in-depth understanding of issues under study. If these principles are applied to education, they also coincide, significantly, with the key concepts in the area of developmental instruction, an approach to education that argues against the imposition on learning of any single, superior mode and, thus, against falling into reductionism, and that promotes learning in a wide variety of ways to assist learners in reaching their full potential. Chen's appeal for the need to question the production of knowledge also corresponds with Chickering's development theory in education, which highlights the need to empower learners through changing their ways of knowing and reasoning (Chickering, 1969, 1993). Chen's book, *Asia as Method*, is meaningful in that it carries on the momentum of the oft-forgotten appeal by Kao and Sinha to move 'beyond the West' (1997, p. 7) in academic research, made over a decade ago. Kao and Sinha's edited book, *Asian Perspectives on Psychology*, served as a collective response to the fact that researchers in the Anglo-West, despite being a minority, had tended to neglect the enormous body of research and discourse knowledge produced in non-English-language publications. In their book, twenty-six scholars discussed their theoretical resources in response to one reality: what was not written in English and, therefore, is inaccessible to readers of English is often considered as non-existent in academic discourse and is left outside professional dialogues.

Chen has revived this response in an intellectually charming and balanced manner that does not lash out angrily at Western discourse but, modestly, takes various views into consideration. Inspiring as his view is, what Chen's argument could do more is to propose concrete strategies that would assist the process of selecting worthwhile and relevant theoretical resources. Furthermore, there is the need to offer a range of factors to be considered for making such intellectual choices and to provide an evaluation schema for weighing the value of such open-minded research.

I would like to suggest a number of factors that might be considered to assist the selection of relevant theoretical resources, to understand how the research topic is constructed and to reduce the hierarchy in scholars' perspectives due to, for example, favouritism of famous Western names.

There is a need to review the topic in relation to where knowledge comes from, how it was collected, and who processed it:

- Nature of knowledge: What are the essential issues in this topic? What are the key debates within and beyond that context?
- Source of knowledge that informs the field: Where does the debate come from? Who has such knowledge? Are they the only group who has this knowledge, or who else should have it?
- The authority of the discussants: Do the scholars who engage with the topic have sufficient experience and a strong track record related to that topic? For example, if a scholar who discusses how to teach and learn a second language is a monolingual person who is not fluent in any second language, his/her authority should be in question; likewise, a scholar who discussed Confucian cultures but has never set foot in East Asia or has never learned to speak an Asian language should not be trusted as the full authority to discuss this area, and so on. Such situations, which are not rare, might amount to academic colonialism, insofar as they show similarities to colonial times, when the colonists who consumed gold were not those who dug for gold and risked their lives in mines: they were people who exploited and abused others to become the elites.
- Other aspects include the question of voice (whose view is dominant, and whose voices have been left out?), as well as the implication and application of the research outcome (who needs the outcome of this project the most? In what context can that outcome apply?).

As an Asian scholar who lectures in an Australian university, I feel that it is my responsibility to serve as a sliding door that facilitates a dialogue between the East and the West to educate the world. Reading Chen's work, I realized that he, too, was concerned with the ethical question of how researchers' work is often slanted excessively towards the West. As I read Chen's work and support his open-minded view about the need to move beyond a Western perspective in viewing the world and engaging with research, my mind, at the same time, resists his thinking in relation to the Western and Asian sliding doors. I feel that such partition, or the break-down of it in Chen's philosophy, continues to divide the world into two parts, whether these parts are merged or separated. Although, geographically and historically, the East–West division is fairly clear and reasonable, attempts to perceive humans' intellectual development in relation to such union or disunion seem to continue to turn academia into a battlefield. I feel that, in his book, *Asia as Method*, Chen plays the role of a hero going to battle with the West, and I wonder if this should be the case. My interpretation of Chen's voice is that Western academia has been strong, while its Asian counterpart has been weak, and so one must do something so that Asians become stronger in research. This understanding, to a great extent, reflects today's reality, in which there still exists a hierarchy between Western and non-Western knowledge. In unwritten

institutional practices, Asian scholars educated in the West are often graded above their counterparts educated in Asia, and, according to Chun and Shamsul (2001), those with Western degrees who return to Asia are often treated as 'the vanguard of indigenous scholarship' (p. 168).

Despite this, I feel that the West is, in some way, not necessarily in a powerful position, but sometimes also needs help. I shall cite here an anecdote from my work experience to demonstrate why I say Western discourse sometimes requires support and, in doing so, I also make the connection with Chen's view. This anecdote has to do with why an international scholar, such as myself, often resorts to Western referencing in academic works. When I was a PhD student in England, more than 10 years ago, I was compelled to quote Western names in my assignment and research writing simply because my writing happened to be marked by scholars who were unfamiliar with discourse beyond the English-speaking world, and, in order to please my lecturers, I found it safer to quote names from publications in English. I consciously refrained from referencing names of philosophers in my home culture – partly because their works were not translated into English, plus doing so was not always an easy task, and, partly, because philosophers in my country did not interact with the common discourse known in English. Quoting Western names for me, therefore, represented an act of assisting lecturers in assessing my work within their range of expectation, knowledge and ability. In my stubborn thinking at the time, when submitting my work, I quietly resented my professor for not having knowledge beyond the predictable convention of the Anglo academic style and for not being broad-minded enough to accept more varieties of literature. Because of this, I was forced to abandon my resources, knowing that to do otherwise would cause misunderstanding, poor acceptance and low grades. Instead of performing at my optimum to learn, I was trying to fit my writing into a predetermined academic framework, so as to satisfy the examiner and to secure favourable assessment. Deep in my awareness, I knew that this act was not highly ethical, as it not only severely reduced the true meaning of learning but also denied the educational background and development that I had received for decades in my home country.

My further dialogue with Chen has to do with the question of agency to make change happen. Although highlighting the need to move beyond Western discourse, what Chen has not discussed, which I think would be very helpful, is who would be the agents responsible for conducting this task in educational research. In fact, stepping away from the Western imperial stance should not be the task of international scholars alone, but Western lecturers and professors should also re-educate themselves by moving beyond the comfortable academic ivory tower of English discourse and seeking beyond what has traditionally been learned. Lecturers and professors should not continue to sit there waiting for international students and scholars to offer them something different, because doing this would perpetuate inertia and oppression. Expanding and enriching Western academic theories should now be the task

of both scholar students and scholar lecturers alike. Insofar as academics begin to see this as a collective task, shared by everyone, richer academic interaction will be more likely to happen.

I do not perceive Chen as a scholar standing alone to appeal for a more liberal research stance. For decades, scholars such as myself have practised this endeavour in many research projects, while moving beyond the conventional institutional assessment. I see Chen in an imagined community together with other Eastern and Western scholars, including Chickering (1969), Creswell (2008), Davydov (1995), Enriquez (1997), Kao and Sinha (1997), Margolis (1996), Merriam (2009) and Yoshikawa (1984), among numerous others. What Chen did that captured my colleagues' attention was to focus systematically, in one book, on voicing the need for multiple perspectives on research, challenging the dominance of Western knowledge and raising questions regarding the academic struggle experienced by the co-authors of this project. This has prompted the need to create a collective dialogue.

A final, but not less worthwhile, concern, which should be considered to strengthen research capacity among non-Western academics, would be the important place of languages other than English in empirical enquiry. The English language, despite its globally convenient role, might not always be helpful, may be too restrictive, when obtaining empirical research data from the non-English-speaking world. For instance, the role of the Japanese language has proved to be essential for this study. The project would not have been able to achieve its depth of data or analysis if the interviews had been conducted completely in English: a certain expanse of information, sentiment and nuances would have vanished in the process. Arguably, many studies that formed the relevant discourse employed to support this project have attempted to expand beyond the English language. With only English employed for research, the bilingual and multilingual capabilities of the scholars (namely, the other authors who have contributed to this book) and the mother tongue of the participants in all these projects would have been suppressed, denied, marginalized, silenced and wasted, in what can be significant resources of academic knowledge. Language, as defined by Malinowsky (1923), is not just a tool for information or translation, which would be too simplistic, but imbues numerous pieces of behaviour with their own, unique meaning. For this reason, I would like to challenge the hegemony of monolingual academics and appeal to every Western scholar for advanced proficiency in at least one language other than English for research purposes. Such languages are valuable assets, with which one can stretch far beyond the ivory tower of current, limited scholarly resources, without succumbing to self-complacency.

### **Concluding remarks**

This study has made use of discourse beyond Western theories and has generated empirical data by using a language other than English. These two

features resonate with Chen's appeal to refrain from heavy reliance on Western frames of reference. As a result, the meaning of silence is perceived differently from the way it has often been discussed. Contrary to that part of Western discourse which interprets Asian students' silence as a result of negative reaction to undesirable circumstances (Foss and Reitzel, 1988; Phillips, 1991; Jaworski, 1993), respect for absolute authority (Martin, 2003), lack of ability to communicate (Tannen, 1985, p. 94), shyness, anxiety or a lack of knowledge (Buss, 1984; Foss and Reitzel, 1988; Jaworski, 1993; Hilleson, 1996; Phillips, 1999), data from this study have portrayed Japanese students in a more critical and independent light: Japanese students understand and can control the learning functions of silence.

The individuals in this study occasionally find themselves negating or resisting what the lecturer is trying to say. This phenomenon was also recognized, in research conducted by Yoneyama (2001), who found that students in Japanese high schools often feel the need to resist control by, and power of, authority, and tension can always exist between the instinct for conformity and the desire for resistance. When resistance happens, the participants in this project tend to remain quiet, although, inside their head, they can hear their own voice talking. Private speech can be seen as an expanded form of practice, through which students develop their knowledge in a non-threatening, stable environment provided by the type of teacher who is able to accept both inner talk and verbal contribution. Several participants internalize this dual responsibility towards themselves and towards others. They can remain quiet, listen to others and learn by themselves, but, at times, they need to reciprocate by sharing their thoughts out loud, so that others can learn from them. This process allows meaningful and enriching reciprocal classroom discourse.

Research investment into silence in education will continue to enrich and illuminate our understanding of culture-sensitive pedagogy. Further research can be conducted on teachers' policies towards working with learner silence in the classroom with regard to teachers' perceptions, pedagogical effort and management skills. Teachers' neglect of students' silence may amount to an oppressive act, first, because the students' mode of learning is not acknowledged or respected, and, second, because there is no pedagogical support from the teacher to make learning happen. In the classroom, where power dynamics about speaking and silence are unbalanced, and where the greater amount of space is claimed by talkative students who assert their voice excessively, the reinforcement and misunderstanding of silence ignorantly erase student agency.

## **Note**

- 1 All participants have been assigned pseudonyms, to maintain anonymity.

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## 4 ‘Asia as [a] method’ of complexity and dialogue

*Bin Wu*

My primary concern is with the social world, and I engage with academic discourse only when this kind of explanatory machinery is necessary to understand real conditions.

(Chen, 2010, p. xi)

In 2011, I taught a diploma programme in early childhood teacher education in New Zealand at a campus for international students only. All my students came from Asia, most from East Asia (mainly China and South Korea, a few from Japan) and others from South and South East Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Philippines). Apart from citing ‘love working with children’ as a reason to enter the programme, the students told me that a New Zealand qualification would provide them with better opportunities, whether they stayed in New Zealand or returned home: early childhood education in New Zealand is ‘better’.

Export education in New Zealand generates revenue and creates jobs. ‘International education contributes more than NZ\$2 billion annually to New Zealand’s gross domestic product, and supports around 32,000 jobs in 2011’ (Immigration New Zealand, 2012). However, there is a different side to this picture. The *New Zealand Herald* reported, ‘Quan, a 20-year-old student visa holder from Vietnam, works up to 50 hours a week in a retail shop and gets paid \$7 an hour’ (Tan, 2013a). Although the minimum wage is currently \$13.50 an hour in New Zealand, for some Asian immigrants, it is not uncommon to work at much lower rates – for some, as low as \$2 an hour. In an apparent reversal of the logical relations of employer and employee, some immigrants even *pay employers* a handsome amount – to forge paid employment status in order to apply for permanent residency in this country (Tan, 2013b). A recent study showed that migrants are exploited by people of their own ethnicities: ‘Chinese hiring Chinese, Indians hiring Indians’ (Anderson, cited in Tan, 2013a). This phenomenon cannot be fully explained without a critical understanding of the imperialist past and present and the part New Zealand played and plays in it. I will come back to the vignette shortly.

Imperialism, in a general sense, is 'the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling in a distant territory' (Said, 1994, p. 9). Unlike colonialism, which relies on physical and military occupation, imperialism exerts its political, economic, discursive and ideological control over distance. 'The new imperialism' has continued to expand after the end of the classical or settler colonialism era. Despite their sovereign independence, formerly colonized countries' economic and political dependence on the West intensifies in a globalized market (Tikly, 2004).

Inequalities deepen in the form of a new global hierarchical order: the West becomes the First World; others are subsequently incorporated into the Second, Third and Fourth Worlds.<sup>1</sup> Tikly (2004) describes:

To a more limited extent, some low-income countries have begun to find a niche with the global economy linked to an indigenously determined growth path through developing specialist areas of manufacturing or services. This has led to the 'success' of the so-called Asian Tigers along with more recently globalized parts of the world including some provinces in China and states in India.

(p. 176)

Likewise, Chen (2010) discusses the effects of colonialism and imperialism. Moreover, he elaborates the complexity and fluidity of the situation: 'subjectivity is the primary focus of my analysis. History has proven that the formation of empire is never merely a matter of political, economic, and military control' (p. 24).

Chen's concept of subjectivity is about 'culture and mind, desire and body' (2010, p. x). He terms the approach *geo-colonial historic materialism*, under which subjectivity is bounded in physical space, yet not limited by geographical borders. Chen uses the character Dou-sang from the movie *Dou-sang: Borrowed Life* to illustrate how the wider context is entangled, recreated, shared and embodied in daily life:

Indeed, Dou-sang relies on a hierarchical structure to make judgments, and comparisons, with the Japanese at the top, 'us' in the middle, and mainland Chinese at the bottom. The cultural imaginary that engendered such a hierarchy was not at all unique to Dou-sang, but was a widely shared structure of sentiment for his generation . . . There are hierarchies within the imaginary Japan, Taiwan, China, and America, and different social classes have different imaginations and consensuses. In the colonial period, for the Japanese and Taiwanese elites, Europe, France, and Paris were the pinnacles of civilization. This traditional view is still held among the intellectual elite of the postwar era. . . Dou-sang's embodiment of the colonial aspiration for modernity, for things that are better, more advanced, more modern, and more civilized.

(2010, p. 133)

Adopting Chen's approach, I now return to the vignette. For many Asian students, the UK is regarded as one of the pinnacles of civilization in the cultural imaginary. New Zealand, a British settlement in the South, is at the middle, and 'the Rest' are at the bottom. Certainly, learning languages and cultures other than one's own is illuminating and beneficial. However, the one-way export of education from 'the West to the Rest' is problematic. In Chen's terms, this one-way traffic represents 'the structural flow of desire' towards the empire (2010, p. 225).

Because of this consensus among many Asian countries, New Zealand is able to attract international students (with the vast majority from Asia) for a 'better' education. The word 'better' echoes Chen's analysis cited earlier: 'for things that are better, more advanced, more modern, and more civilized' (2010, p. 133). Hence, education as an export brings in revenue to New Zealand, even though the physical empire has long gone. The fact that some migrants are willing to work for minimal or no pay reinforces Chen's argument that imperialism is not only the material, but is also the 'culture and mind, desire and body'.

Chen contends that the 'West has become the sole point of reference and the rest of the world is the "Other"'. Asia as method aims to shift the centre of power through inter-referencing within Asia. Through the formation of new intellectual alliances within Asia and the Third World, the West would lose its dominance as the sole referent; alternative perspectives would be developed, and subjectivity transformed.

Centred on Chen's concepts, this chapter comprises two parts. Part I: Asia as method of complexity discusses the complexity and fluidity of subjectivity in view of Chen's geo-colonial materialism. This provides a wider context and theoretical background for Part II: Asia as method of dialogue. Part II explores Chen's concepts of critical syncretism and inter-referencing and, subsequently, their applications in education. I interpret these concepts as intra- and multi-dialogue in the context of education.

### **Part I: Asia as method of complexity**

Chen's *geo-colonial historic materialism* is to place 'historical materialism in geographical space' (2010, p. 106). It draws attention to the localized historical context and the dynamic and intricate interlocking of the local and global, past and present. For instance, New Zealand is located within the Asia-Pacific region. Historically, New Zealand, as a British colony, has had strong links to Great Britain, despite being more than 10,000 miles away. Asia, halfway between New Zealand and Great Britain, has been bypassed and mentally excluded. After the UK joined the European Union, New Zealand began to acknowledge its proximity to Asia,<sup>2</sup> at a time that, unsurprisingly, coincided with the economic and political rise of Asia. I begin Part I with a discussion of New Zealand in terms of Chen's geo-colonial historical materialism. My

aim is to portray the complexities and dynamics of the local and global, the personal and sociopolitical, situated in New Zealand and beyond.

### **'100 per cent pure New Zealand'**

New Zealand is a former British colony. Unlike North America and Australia, New Zealand was not only meant to be White, it was meant to be White British, a 'better Britain' in the south (Belich, 2001). As in North America and Australia, up until the Second World War, Asians were largely excluded from the New Zealand dream; discriminatory laws singled out Chinese, in response to the popular fear of the Yellow Peril (Ip, 2003).

Such 'Othering' serves to define what New Zealand is *not*. Lin (2012) discusses this issue in response to Chen's Asia as method: 'The "superior cultural self" is defined in relation to the "inferior cultural other"' (p. 169). Extending Hall's notion of identity, Ang (2012) argues, 'what we might become is more important than "who we are"' (p. 150). Identities, personal or national, are neither mere wishful thinking nor duplicates of the material world. They are products of subjectivity within its historical and sociopolitical milieu.

New Zealand and Great Britain developed a close colonial bond from 1840<sup>3</sup> well into the 1960s. As the 'better Britain', New Zealand was seen as part of the great empire, without all the social ills of class divisions. It was presented as a laid-back, racially harmonious paradise Down Under. New Zealand soldiers fought overseas in British wars and played British sports (cricket and rugby). The colonial tie was also cemented in material terms.<sup>4</sup> Britain remained the single biggest export market for New Zealand until the 1960s (Belich, 2001): in 1955, 65.3 per cent of New Zealand's exports went to Britain. In the 1970s, after Britain joined the EU, New Zealand's exports to the UK steadily declined and, by the year 2000, comprised only 6.2 per cent (Statistics New Zealand, 2000). In 2012, Australia was the biggest export market (22 per cent), with China the second (13 per cent) (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). While I was writing the final draft of this chapter, the news that 'China overtakes Australia as NZ's biggest export market' (*The National Business Review*, 2013) was reported in the *National Business Review*.

The imaginary New Zealand encompasses different aspects: the cultural, economic and political; the past, present and future; the geographic location; the natural and social environment; dreams, fears and desires. Before the 1970s, these elements were seamlessly woven into the better Britain dream, albeit with many twists and self-justifications.<sup>5</sup> This dream was shattered when the country had to face the global change, and yet the old sentiment lingered (Greif, 1995). It was not until early 1987 that the New Zealand government officially changed its immigration law to admit migrants based on their education and skills, rather than race.<sup>6</sup> This move aimed to make New Zealand more engaged with Asia, in an attempt to boost New Zealand's stagnating economy (Preston,

1997). Soon after, Asian immigrants started to arrive. Among them, the majority were Chinese.

### ***China and greater China***

When China embarked on its economic reforms and opened its door to the world in 1978, it was obvious that the Western way was better and more advanced. The West had washing machines, telephones, televisions, cars and all the modern comforts that ordinary people in China did not have. The desire was not just about material advances though. The West symbolized liberty and intellectual freedom. Eager to catch up with the more advanced, the 1990s saw a ‘going-abroad fever’ pandemic, particularly among educated youth in China. I had my first-hand experience of this pandemic as a university student in China. In Chen’s terms, it was a ‘structural flow of desire’.

These socio-economic changes and associated changes in subjectivity in mainland China bear many similarities to similar processes in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chen, 2010; Lin, 2012). Lin (2012) argues that, in Taiwan and Hong Kong:

[Those who] have grown up in the 1960s and 1970s, however, have the additional benefit of witnessing firsthand, and the opportunity of critically reflecting on the dramatic transition of a poverty-stricken post-war society in the 1950s and 1960s to an economic booming city in the 1970s and 1980s.

(p. 156)

This situation is comparable to mainland China, even though China’s occurred 20–30 years later, after Deng’s economic reforms.

These parallels can be analysed from the notion of globalization: all states are to be integrated into the ‘global disorder’ sooner or later (see Amin, 1997). The chronological gap of a mere 20–30 years has placed mainland China at the bottom of the hierarchical ranking, below Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the case of East Asia, the situation is further complicated with the after-effects of the cold war. States and places with Western allies are deemed superior to those from the ex-Communist camp, because the former are associated with the more advanced and more modern West (Chen, 2010; Lin, 2012).

Like the imaginary New Zealand, the imaginary China or greater China encompasses many different facets. The cultural, political, commercial China interlocks, overlaps, differs and contradicts (Wang, 1993).<sup>7</sup> Despite political socio-economic disparities within greater China, the meanings of China and greater China are interpreted and manipulated in different ways for different agendas. For instance, shared cultural experiences were utilized to set up business in mainland China, along with social networks for trade and profit, in the name of patriotism (Wang, 1993).

***Liberty and freedom . . . outside or inside the box?***

I came to live in New Zealand with a permanent resident's visa. The settlement experience for skilled Chinese/Asian immigrants in laid-back New Zealand is similar to that in other English-speaking countries (see, Lee et al., 2002; Salaff and Greve, 2003; Ho, 2004; Statistics New Zealand, 2004). In 2000, to integrate myself into mainstream society, like many other new Asian immigrants (Statistics New Zealand, 2004), I went to university in Auckland to gain a local qualification and, a decade later, a doctorate.

'Critical thinking' and 'thinking outside the box' are supposed to be the key principles required in New Zealand universities, as part of modern Western academia. Being raised in another culture, I am already outside the box. Even a foreign-sounding name can hamper a paid employment opportunity (Wilson et al., 2005). However, I had to learn how to think inside the box. Those who think outside the box remain outside the social and cultural mainstream and its related benefits (Wu, 2011): liberty and freedom are neither neutral nor unconditional. Nevertheless, this realization or disillusion did not dampen my desire to integrate.

***Cultural responsiveness: what does it mean?***

When I started my doctoral study, cultural responsiveness was commonly advocated as a code of academic conduct when dealing with students of ethnic minorities. I was reminded that Western theories might not be relevant to the study of Chinese migrants, a focus of my research. As part of emancipating my thinking from Western theories, indeed to deconstruct the existing Western knowledge base, I needed a replacement. Confucianism was a convenient candidate.

During the periods of Spring and Autumn (770–476 BC) and Warring States (475–221 BC), in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, long before Confucianism came to dominance, there was an abundance of schools of thought in China. Confucius's thoughts were largely ignored by the rulers in his lifetime. Indeed, after unifying China, Qin promoted Legalism as the state ideology, and Confucian scholars were prosecuted and their books were burned as a measure to eliminate dissent.

It was not until 141 BC, under the Han Dynasty and more than 300 years after Confucius's death, that Confucianism was established as the orthodox ideology, used to strengthen the feudal centralization of China (Fung, 1976). During the Han Dynasty, China's territory expanded massively. As a result, Confucianism's influence reached the other parts of East Asia that Chinese imperial power touched. In this sense, then, Confucianism was associated with the glory of the Empire. When the Chinese Empire finally collapsed in the 1900s, many intellectuals started to challenge the orthodox status of Confucianism. In Mao's China, Confucianism, together with other 'Old' thoughts, was eradicated, so that China could modernize (Wu, 2011).

Confucianism, like all knowledge and cultural resources, is not neutral. The value of Confucianism in research depends on the context and how it is used or manipulated. Cultural responsiveness does not always take into account the complexity of the culture in question and its contexts. This is because the minority learn about the dominant culture, but the reverse does not occur. Without an equitable and reciprocal relationship between the two, ‘responsiveness’ can remain mere rhetoric.

In a discussion with my supervisor, Nesta Devine, on this issue, she agreed: ‘this is a re-inception of imperialism, forcing you to a pre-conception of the “Other” held by European academics’ (personal communication). This kind of Othering is, nonetheless, different from old-fashioned Yellow Peril bigotry. I believe that cultural-responsiveness Othering fulfils people’s ideal and longing for a liberal and equitable society and justifies the desire for the ‘better’ and ‘more advanced’.

Othering is not always forced upon minority groups for the purpose of exclusion. It, too, has its complexity: who owns what, for what, in what way, and who decides it? For example, claiming ownership of Confucianism as Asian culture as opposed to Western culture can be used to resist the Western epistemology of knowledge (e.g. Li and Yan, 2006). The myth of Asian academic success in the West has been attributed to Confucianism. This self-imposed Othering declares ownership of Confucianism as a positive cultural attribute, aiming to build a more favourable image to resist the inferior status of Other (Wu, 2011). Meanwhile, such resistance serves to justify the longing to be more advanced, without resentment, by claiming autonomy, freedom and esteem. Oppositions and contradictions coexist in a complex world.

### ***The West, the Rest***

Consistent with its paradise image, New Zealand has been portrayed as having a cordial racial relationship between the European settlers and Māori, the indigenous people (Ip, 2003). Presenting evidence from the history of the New Zealand Native Land Court, Roa (2012) disputes this portrayal as myth. She states that the myth started with the book *The Long White Cloud: Ao Tea Roa*, published in 1898 by Pember Reeves, in which the injustice of robbing Māori of their land and other resources was omitted and silenced. This omission and silencing justified the colonization process and served the ‘deceptive “colonial image of self”’ (p. 7). To maintain a coherent national narrative of a better Britain in the South, when Māori could not be physically eliminated, there was a need to abort this strategy and dissolve them into the colonial consciousness. One way of achieving this was to rank Māori second to the European but above other Coloured races. This colonial categorization facilitated the validation of differences between the treatment of indigenous people in New Zealand and in Australia (Roa, 2012). There was even a ‘White’ Māori legacy, the theory that Māori were actually genetically Aryan, in the New Zealand narrative, to sustain the White New Zealand dream

(Belich, 2001). Māori and Pākehā encounters ranged from violent confrontations in the Māori Land Wars, constant protests and the Māori separatist movement, to peaceful coexistence and active assimilations<sup>8</sup> (Belich, 2001). The sociopolitical reality is more ambiguous and contradictory than coherent.

### *The Rest*

In the White New Zealand dream, both Māori and Chinese were marginalized. Yet, dominant attitudes towards these minority groups were different. Māori would be assimilated, whereas Chinese should be eliminated (Ip, 2008). Encounters between the two minorities, the indigenous people and the country's earliest and biggest non-European immigrants, have seldom been documented or systematically researched in the past 150 years. It was not until recently that the relationship between these two minorities was explored (see Ip, 2008, 2009).

Significant Māori–Chinese encounters date back to the early 1900s, when Chinese market gardeners leased Māori land, where Māori and Chinese worked together. Some of these interactions led to de facto or casual sexual relationships and marriages, mostly between Chinese men and Māori women. These relationships were either ignored in the grand history or sternly condemned in public (Ip, 2008). Comparative studies among other minority groups in modern New Zealand are almost non-existent, apart from some New Zealand government initiatives that group Pacific and Māori together as needing special support for academic achievement.<sup>9</sup> These endeavours deny the diversity among the Rest, who are, thus, rendered invisible in the better Britain.

Interactions among the Rest are richly complex. Māori and Chinese generally collaborated peacefully in rural areas in the past. However, the 1990s saw a backlash against the influx of new Asian immigrants, and Māori leaders were particularly vocal (Ip, 2009). The highly respected veteran Māori academic and activist Ranginui Walker warned that the new Asian immigrants could take over New Zealand, much as the European colonists did to the Māori, and this situation would 'impinge on both Māori and Pākehā' (1995, p. 28). In this case, Pākehā and Māori are more allies than antagonists. He considered that the new Asian immigrants, mostly from the middle class, would have negative impacts on both the Māori and Pacific people, who are mostly working class. Walker's analysis points to the entanglement of ethnicity and social class. His discussion highlights that alliances and alienations between the Rest and the West, or among the Rest, are not static, but change according to contexts and various sociopolitical agendas. The complex relationships among the Rest indicate that the West versus the Rest serves to ensure the West remain on top. As long as the hierarchical order exists, regardless of our obsession or indifference towards the West, the Rest may be left to fight for whatever positions remain in the hierarchy, creating complicated webs beyond a binary classification system.

***Asia as method of complexity***

The crux of colonialism and imperialism is not simply the West versus the Rest. It is a systematic and sophisticated matrix where we, by which I mean *all* of us, reside and participate. It is a deep-rooted and well-connected matrix where people fulfil their various needs and desires – cultural and material needs, desires and ideals, sense of security and stability, self-esteem, and so on. So, what are these needs and desires?

‘Craving for something beyond the present actual world is one of the inner desires of mankind’ (Fung, 1976, p. 4). There might be an inner longing for more advanced or better. The more advanced or better might change, but the longing has been present throughout human history and could be longing for a divine power, ideals, collective imagination or imperial power. Imperialism, and the desire for it, existed long before the so-called West came into prominence. There is nothing fundamentally sinister about such longing: the problem is what and who are embodied in the better, and how the power of desire is manipulated. This embodiment is a complex process, with numerous intricate entanglements that are difficult to break apart. However, when one does tease them apart, what constitutes more advanced might vary, but the matrix remains.

**Part II: Asia as method of dialogues**

The West and Rest relationship is not one of mutual exclusion and hatred. It encompasses a full spectrum of emotions. The West versus the Rest divide is a recurrent storyline used to sustain Western dominance. Inter-referencing with multiple referents disrupts imperial logic and coherence, rather than targets the dichotomy per se. In Part II, I adopt Chen’s approach of *critical syncretism* and his concept of *inter-reference* to explore their implications and applications in education against the complexity of sociopolitical, economical and cultural entanglements.

***Critical syncretism: out of the box or out of the matrix?***

According to Chen, a key to moving from the imperial and colonial way of thinking is to change the point of reference. He proposes *critical syncretism*:

The direction of identification put forward by a critical syncretism is outward; the intent is to become others, to actively interiorize elements of others into the subjectivity of the self so as to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations. . . . Becoming others is to become female, aboriginal, homosexual, transsexual, working class, and poor.

(p. 99)

Supporting Chen's proposition, Lin (2012) discusses its implications for education:

Critical discourse analysis will need to go hand in hand with creative curriculum design that also seeks to provide the opportunity for students to emotionally take up the subject positions of 'the weak' as defined by current structure of dominance.

(p. 172)

The question is how to realize those intentions in practice. As noted earlier, those Asian immigrants in New Zealand who work for nothing, or much less than the minimum wage, are mostly hired by people of the same ethnicity. Ethnic minority employers are marginalized too and possibly only survive through discounted prices, low margins and cheap labour. Their shared experience of being 'the weak' does not guarantee empathy and critical consciousness. Instead, the oppressed exploit the more vulnerable further down the pecking order.

Human perceptions are intricately linked to social reality. In education, subjectivity and practice are also implicated in this wider context. For instance, the Western notion of play has been adopted as the mainstream medium of teaching in Hong Kong early childhood education. However, this adoption is not without local tensions and adaptations. Hong Kong is a former British colony, with more than 90 per cent of its population being ethnic Chinese. Li (2004) observes that, although teacher training is heavily influenced by Western theories of play, its application is constrained and modified by a range of factors:

The cultural context, external structure, and personal cognitive capability appear to be the driving forces limiting the development of teachers. Though it is not clear which force is stronger, it is clear that we cannot create teacher change by tackling only one of them at a time.

(p. 344)

By 'limiting the development of teachers', Li refers to barriers to implementing the Western notion of play in child-centre practices, despite its acceptance in theory. Li's findings demonstrate the complexities involved in changing subjectivities, which requires dealing with a cluster of factors simultaneously. In addition, Li's observation implies the resistance inherent in human subjectivity. All 'foreign' ideas are implemented with a twist, as a result of local constraints, and become hybrid in praxis. Bhabha (1994) describes the nature of such hybridity and contends that its ambiguity opens up space for change and creativity. Nevertheless, such discrepancy or resistance in action does not diminish the longing for the more advanced and more modern. Hallinger (2005) notes that, in the field of education, 'the *policy du jour* adopted in London or Sydney is quickly taken up in Malaysia, Hong Kong and South

Africa' (p. xi), despite complications in application. This issue warrants further investigation to understand the forming and changing of subjectivity.

Even large-scale events that aim to bring social and political changes do not always alter human subjectivity. The 'sent-down' movement, which started in the 1950s and reached its peak during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, is an example. The rural–urban divide is one of the most prominent inequalities in Chinese society and originated from a combination of many deep-rooted historical, economic, political and institutional factors (Brown, 2012). To eliminate the disparity, a Communist ideal – the 'up to the mountain, down to the village' (上山下乡), or 'sent-down', movement – was implemented, by which urban-educated youth were sent to the countryside for re-education. Urban young people were called to live under one roof with rural peasants, eating and working together (同吃, 同住, 同劳动). The aim was that, by their identifying with the peasants, urban youths' subjectivity would change, thus erasing the inequality.

Evaluations of the movement three decades later ranged from total rejection through positive criticism to nostalgia (e.g. Cao, 2003). Although full discussion is not possible here, it is clear that rural–urban inequality was not erased, and urban youth did not put down roots in the countryside, as intended. Many explanations are possible, including the broad notion that people's subjectivities are intricately related to their sociopolitical and economic reality. Fundamental changes require concerted efforts and actions in all sociopolitical, economic and cultural arenas. Next, I discuss Chen's inter-referencing as a method for such changes and its implications in practice.

### *Inter-reference as inter-dialogue in education studies*

Chen (2010) proposes de-binary thinking as a method for decolonization and deimperialism:

The purpose of the inter-referencing mode of analysis is to avoid judging any country, region or culture as superior or inferior to any other, and to tease out historical transformations within the base-entity, so that the differences can be properly explained.

(p. 250)

Chen's statement bears many resemblances to the initiative of intercultural dialogues in education (see Besley and Peters, 2012a). Besley and Peters (2012b) explain that, 'interculturalism is also a political ideology that places a priori all cultures on the same level of intrinsic value and makes an assumption about the value of cultural diversity that should be protected and maintained' (pp. 5–6).

Huntington (1993) predicts the centre of power will eventually shift from the West. He emphasizes that civilization and modernity are not equivalent to Westernization. Consequently, categorization of the world should be based on different civilizations. Huntington further elaborates this concept in his

book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1994/2002). From Huntington's analysis, it can be inferred that, "the West" is a contested and historical dynamic concept, open to revision in terms of both its past and its future' (Besley and Peters, 2012b, p. 9).

I have discussed the dynamic nature of geographic space such as China or greater China and New Zealand. Similarly, the West embodies the cultural and political West, the colonial and imperial Western power, Western civilization and the economic and financial West, all of which overlap and intertwine. It is pivotal to disentangle these different threads, while still recognizing their interrelatedness. The issue is not about Western culture itself, as a whole, but about how different aspects of the culture are utilized and manipulated to exploit and oppress. Whereas Huntington stresses increasing clashes among civilizations, Besley and Peters (2012b) argue that evidence also points to opportunities for intercultural dialogues that are 'not only based simply on awareness of differences but on finding commonalities' (p. 6).

Likewise, Chen (2010) calls for a shift in the centre of power from the West to Asia and inter-Asia referencing, to understand differences and seek commonalities in shared experiences within Asia. Chen's approach is to treat the West 'as one cultural resource' (2010, p. 233). I conclude that this means, not a rejection of Western civilization, but a renunciation of Western imperial power through an epistemological shift. Moreover, he maintains that the issue goes beyond understandings and similarities:

Asian inter-referencing is a process of relativization. Its task is not only to understand different parts of Asia but also to enable a renewed understanding of the self. More importantly, the agenda of the transformed self is to transcend existing understandings of Asia and thereby change the world.

(Chen, 2010, p. 254)

Therefore, in a broad sense, Chen's Asia as method in education can be viewed as a way to cultivate new perspectives and understandings about education. In practice, this would involve diversification through the breaking down of hierarchical restrictions on curriculum subjects, professions, knowledge and skills, educational providers, learning styles,<sup>10</sup> and so on.

Emmeshing it with interculturalism initiatives in education (Besley and Peters, 2012a), I construe Chen's inter-referencing as dialogue when applied to education. In this section, I discuss such dialogues against the background of complexities discussed in part I, as well as the complexities of dialogues in practice. Questions and issues are raised for further discussion and research.

### *Multifaceted education*

I have discussed complexity as dynamic and multifaceted, and this also applies to education. Besley (2012) identifies tensions between economic gain and intercultural aspirations and in the internationalization and globalization of

education. In New Zealand, the export education market creates considerable revenue for a small country. The new market-driven approach to education, however, treats Asian students as economic commodities, rather than as cultural resources that would benefit both domestic and international students (Bishop and Glynn, 1999, p. 15). Is education a public good, personal good, customer service or economic manoeuvre? Ideally, each should fit with the others. But, what if they do not? Is export education an opportunity to deconstruct the imperial order, or does it reinforce its power? In a dialogue, when different groups are allocated inequitable sociopolitical positions within the stratification, their utterances are not valued equally. Certain conditions are required to create genuine dialogues.

### *Context for dialogues*

Kazepides (2012) defines dialogue as one of the ‘complex and refined human achievements’ (p. 78) that is embedded in its cultural, political and economic contexts. Some basic principles of dialogue include being ‘open, free and informed’ (p. 84). Kazepides explains: ‘if my general attitude to others is one of distrust, exploitation, competition or personal gain, dialogue with others will be seriously undermined’ (p. 81).

Asia as method promotes dialogue, especially within Asia, and among the Rest and the Third World. This kind of dialogue would enhance awareness of minority (or Third World) cultural knowledge and resources, the complexity and richness of which would gather momentum and create currency to achieve genuine cultural responsiveness. This can only happen if the dialogue is open, free and informed. Asia as method would also involve dialogue with the West. Without any suspicions as to how cultural resources would be deployed for political, economic and personal gain, the West, with its own cultural and historical richness, has much to contribute to the dialogue.

In this dialogical environment, Asian students in the West will not be questioned about their loyalties, nor should they be forced to make an either/or choice between the West and ‘us’. Indeed, everyone may move freely without restrictions. Hybridity, in this way, would truly open new space for creativity. This is the ideal. But what next?

### **What next?**

I have discussed, in light of Chen’s approach, the complex, dynamic nature of the social world of colonization and imperialism and, subsequently, decolonization and deimperialism. Then, I discussed their implications in education studies and the dilemmas and ambiguities inherent in applying such ideas. To dismantle imperial power and imperial ways of thinking requires concerted effort in all sociopolitical and economic arenas.

Given the complexity of this issue, I do not believe in any quick, cure-all solution. I am, actually, confused after studying all the contradictions and

ironies of human life. To my complaint, Nesta Devine replied: 'Why should you be exempt from the contradictions and inadequacies that plague us all? We just have to learn to work with them . . . they are also the source of our ideas' (April 2013, personal communication). Chen has constantly mentioned anxieties in his book: 'A common practice of intellectual work is to use personal anxieties as a type of energy to drive research forward' (2010, p. xvi). As no one is exempt, I have raised more questions and issues to invite everyone into the 'source of our ideas', to continue the dialogue.

## Notes

- 1 The 'Fourth World' points to the inequalities within and between nations. Amin (1997) describes continuing unequal development through different forms of capitalism, which contributes to current polarization into a 'global disorder' (p. 2).
- 2 For example, please see the New Zealand Government White Paper *Our Future with Asia* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2007).
- 3 The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 between the British Crown and various Māori chiefs from the North Island of New Zealand. The country became a British colony.
- 4 New Zealand's colonial links with the Great Britain were strengthened by the frozen meat trade in the 1880s (see Belich, 2001).
- 5 See my discussion later.
- 6 Similar immigration law change was implemented in the USA in 1965 and Australia in 1972.
- 7 Chen also mentions similar issues in his book *Asia as Method*.
- 8 For example, participating in the White man's game (rugby) and the White man's war (the First World War) (see Belich, 2001).
- 9 For example, the Ministry of Education (2013, p. 4) states, 'All school Boards of Trustees have a role in helping to raise the achievement of the three priority groups – learners with special education needs; Māori learners; and Pasifika learners' (Ministry of Education's *Statement of Intent, 2012–2017*).
- 10 For instance, numeracy and literacy skills are more valued than other skills in formal learning. Certain learning styles are also more favoured. Qualifications from the Ivy League circle are deemed more prestigious. It is through the control of complicated and comprehensive hierarchical orders that imperial/subimperial power prevails.

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# 5 Vietnam, the West and the generalized Self in transnational education

*Thi Nhai Nguyen and Peodair Leihy*

## Introduction

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from  
the ends of the earth.

The Anglo-Indian writer Rudyard Kipling's 'The ballad of East and West' begins and ends with these lines. Ironically, the first line is sometimes used to uphold the inscrutability of East to West and vice versa – when the poem goes on to attest that, when 'men' of the East and West meet, there is no such gulf (women, meanwhile, are entitled to feel left out).

This chapter is essentially about engaging Asian ideas of the Self and exposing the binary falsity of East and West in the process, all in the context of higher education. From the outset, we should disabuse ourselves: there is no Asia, and not just because there is no West either. Whether by deliberate intention or otherwise, the existence of an Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society is instructive. *Inter-*, not *Intra-*, *between* not *within*; there are many Asias. We should bear this in mind as we unpick the various forms of Asian deference that Chen Kuan-Hsing identifies in *Asia as Method* (2010), a term that, true to its cross-pollinating ideals, borrows from the Japanese theorist and critic Takeuchi Yoshimi (1960).

The term transnational education, moving beyond its (possible) original intent to distinguish itself from international education, with its attendant ills and limitations, can also be taken seriously semiotically.<sup>1</sup> Rather than *between* nations, the transnational is *across* them. Here, individuals frame themselves across national orientations, not simply as representatives of one drawing from or supplying another: the individual is a self, informed but not bounded by nationality. Transnational education may well supersede international education if it can reflect this complexity.

Conceptions of the Self vary and pulsate; here, we seek to draw on Asian notions of Self to supplement, rather than collide with, any Western ones. We

draw chiefly, but not exclusively, on Vietnamese examples and elements of Chinese Confucian heritage. To do this, we follow the specific case of Vietnamese students studying in Australian offshore degree programmes offered in Vietnam and investigate their confrontation with a commercialized notion of education, apparently predicated on their 'Otherness' vis à vis the West – a pathology they may not actually accept from the onset. The chapter draws on extensive interview data collected by Thi Nhai Nguyen, yet chiefly concerns situating theories of Self and Other on the shifting sands of Asia.

### **Conceptualizing the Self**

Notions of Self revolve around subjectivity as individuals' ways of making sense of themselves and of the social world (Woodward, 1997; Kettle, 2005). Michel Foucault (1988) argues that the constitution of the subject is grounded in the Self. The subject seeks greater accessibility to self-control or self-discipline in order to build a robust Self, an act that Foucault (1998) terms 'an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being' (p. 2). Bhikhu Parekh augments Foucault with the coming together of individuals with different ethnic, religious, cultural, occupational, national and other groups and formal and informal expressions of identity and multiplicity (Parekh, 2009).

In contrast, Confucian thought takes the human Self as a point of departure, with self-understanding the quest (not alien to the Hellenistic imperative to 'know oneself'). Knowledge of the Self in the spirit of Confucianism implies a 'realization of human possibility of intellectual intuition' (Tu, 1985, p. 20). Tu Wei-Ming terms this 'inner sageliness' and argues that this nature is not simplified as the state of 'being known' (Ibid.). Confucian self-knowledge is 'either mutually contradictory or mutually complementary' to (other) empirical knowledge. The concrete experience of Self is situated within 'the finite, historical, and culturally specific to the exclusion of the infinite, trans-historical, and universal' (Tu, 1985, p. 10). Therefore, 'learning to be human' essentially engages a true understanding of 'the creative tension between our earthly embeddedness and our great potential for self-transcendence' (Ibid.; see also Tu, 1999, where he stresses the task of embodying humanity).

The English writer A.S. Byatt sees that, apart from Self being attached to self-understanding, the Self is configured as an 'imagining self', allowing 'consistent, rational, ordered thought' as the 'conscious life opposed to the unconscious life' (Byatt, 1987, p. 25), at the centre of all human relationships and environments. Byatt sees, in this Self, a metaphoric knot that ties things together, the genetic code, the language we speak, national history, the food we eat, the constraints upon us and the people around us. If we have no sense of Self, this knot is seen as vulnerable (Ibid., p. 26). Confucianism, although placing the Self in the centre of self-cultivation, also stresses human relations by expanding the inner circle of Self to an 'open system' receptive to the larger social relations of family, community, country and the world: 'Confucian

perspectives, they are also realms of selfhood that symbolize the authentic human possibility for ethicoreligious growth' (Tu, 1985, p. 58).

This contrasts to a Western Self shaped by a:

historical set of conditions for acting that include, among others, who is defined as the agent to 'act' and who is not capable of such action; rules and standards for participation, and the relation of the actor's agency to the collective belonging of 'society' and/or 'local' principles of reflection and participation.

(Popkewitz, 2005, pp. 4–5)

It is wrong to underestimate personal dignity, self-independence and autonomy within Confucian thought, warns Tu (1985, p. 12), as the Confucian Self, in recognizing itself as a social being, tends to balance an array of social interactions. He observes:

The prevalent view that Confucianism is a form of social ethics which particularly emphasizes human-relatedness is basically correct, but it fails to account for the centrality of self-cultivation as an *independent, autonomous and inner-directed process* in the Confucian tradition. Confucians do maintain that one becomes fully human through continuous interaction with other human beings, that one's dignity as a person depends as much on communal participation as on one's own sense of self-respect. . . . In fact, the ability of the Confucian tradition to undergo *profound transformation without losing its spiritual identity* lies in its commitment to the inner resources of humanity.

(Tu, 1985, p. 55; emphasis added)

We can see the emergence of the *centring Self* in Confucianism, with a strong sense of agency lying in its commitment to the inner resources of humanity (self-knowledge and self-cultivation). Rather than denying that there is a centre or core – the postmodern dodge – the Confucian sensibility seeks to find one through ongoing engagement.

The Othering of the East by the Western Self, long established as more powerful, is often presented as a discursive construction (Palfreyman, 2005, p. 213) involving social distances and subsequent negative judgements grounded in stereotyped opinions melding a vast and diverse grouping. Inherent in colonialist discourse is the representation of an Other in stark contrast to the Self as the 'ideal norm' (Kubota, 2001, p. 9). Juxtaposing the sociological concepts of ideal and norm, although inherently tautological, often occurs in practice to privilege a state of being, such as Western cultural hegemony.

Focusing largely on the Middle East, but applicable a fortiori further east, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques how the 'Oriental' is produced in the Western imagination as irrational, depraved and fallen, childlike, different (p. 40) and backward (p. 7), whereas a person in the West is rational,

virtuous, mature and normal (p. 40) and represents superiority (p. 7). However, the Oriental is made, not born, and so controls her or his life but is implicated in the colonizing project of the West. These beliefs are inculcated as 'built-in characteristics' from birth (Phan, 2008, p. 34). The East is treated derogatorily and homogeneously, and, consistently, Easterners' subjectivities are objectified. Especially in higher education, Asian institutions are frequently interpreted and presented as emulating Western models, for example, as the MITs and West Points of the East (Leihy, 2011).

Globalization appears as likely to perpetuate iniquities as address them. Globalization regularly conceals and legitimates a continued colonialism (Kellner, 2000) on behalf of entrenched interests. The intricate web of power relations between Western and Eastern countries and between Western institutions and their Asian international students is part of this. The USA proudly claims to be an educator of world leaders and to educate international students beyond its borders. North America, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand treat Asian students as an export market, often a homogeneous one. For example, an investigation of a set of seventy-eight items (fifty-five articles and twenty-three opinion pieces) published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* between 1996 and 1999 reveals that 77 per cent of these items contain texts with imperialist characterizations towards international students in the US. These characteristics either represent inferior cultural qualities or behaviours. For example, the diligence of White students is attributed to their work ethic, whereas this quality in Asian international students is seen to derive from the fear of losing a visa or the vulnerability of being a foreign national in the US (Rhee and Sagaria, 2004).

The West crafts Eastern identities in various ways. Through *objectification*, the West reduces the Easterner's status to a receiver of knowledge rather than a full human of equal status. Another pattern is 'characterizations of colonized people in negative terms of subordination by what is absent rather than by what is present in their cultures' (Rhee and Sagaria, 2004, p. 81). Representation through *generalization*, with the manipulative treatment of the East as a homogeneous/undifferentiated mass or as comprised of a single stereotype, has also suppressed Eastern self-identity. Thus, the West exploits 'positional superiority which puts the Westerner in a whole series of relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand' (Said, 1978, p. 7).

Chen points to the binary of Self and Other as a dominant frame of academic discourse. Researchers may fall prey to the 'unconscious system of representation' that infiltrates the cultural imaginary of both the colonized and colonizer. To Chen, the cultural imaginary, however, refers to 'an operating space within social formation, in which the imaginary perception of the Other and self-understanding are articulated. In this domain, the structure of sentiment is the link and mediator between the colonizer and the colonized' (Chen, 2010, p. 111) – from each side, Chen sees a frisson of resentment and desire.

Chen's concept of 'geo-colonial historical materialism' is crucial. He argues that, 'every mode of production produces its own socially organized space'

(Chen, 2010, p. 105) and asks, ‘within the imminent historical geographical formation, how does a geographical space historically generate its own mode of production?’ (Chen, 2010, p. 106).

With geo-colonial historical materialism, we are able to advance the Chenian call of ‘multiplying references’ – especially through enlisting Asia’s abundant multiplicity. Western universities sell dreams, but it is crucial to their credibility that their dreamlike elements are grounded in some realizable reality. The West has historically mesmerized prospective Asian students through illusions of a presumed set of identities based on superior, Western-made credentials. International education becomes imagined industrially as a sphere of production, consumption, exploitation of efficiencies, and other ‘dispersed forces that actually drive the production process’ (Appadurai, 1996, p. 42).

It would be sentimental to yearn for outright rejection of (in part) consumer-oriented education. Indeed, there is a certain romance and connectivity in consumption. Zygmunt Bauman (1998, 2007) has suggested that it is now possible to credit a consumer vocation:

In a society of consumers, *everyone* needs to be, ought to be, must be a consumer-by-vocation (that is, view and treat consumption as a vocation); in that society, consumption-seen-and-treated-as-vocation is one universal human right *and* universal human duty that knows no exception.

(Bauman, 2007, p. 55)

Consumption can be dignified at the same time it is being forced. A difference between the treatment of Asian and domestic students is that local students, although necessarily customers insofar as higher education is planned and managed, are ‘not (just) customers’ (Sharrock, 2000). International students, however, report being treated as if they *are* just customers, whether to subsidize classmates or university operations in Western countries. ‘Cash cow’ is a term that crops up so often in discourse, not least in allusions to cultural differences in what constitutes exploitation.<sup>2</sup> The problem is not so much treating students as customers as clearly profiling them as sales targets and, so, stressing the consumer relationship.

### **Generalizing the self?**

In G.H. Mead’s theory of the *generalized other*, a child progresses from less interactive role-play to game playing with others:

In a game where a number of individuals are involved, then the child taking one role must be ready to take the role of everyone else. If he gets in a ball nine [plays in a baseball team] he must have the responses of each position involved in his own position. He must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out his own play. He has to take all of these roles.

(Mead, 1934/1962, p. 151)

One way of looking at this is that the community, one's own community or team, rather than the opposition, is taken for granted, and that one's Self must be located in contrast to the generalized Other. To Mead, the self imports the social process. Confucian teachings, the lynchpin of East Asian intellectual tradition, allow another interpretation, that the embodied self is exported or projected into the social.

Asian conceptions of society also regulate notions of *us* and *them*, through, for example, differential pricing for locals and tourists, differential treatment for family and non-family, favours in circulation among former classmates, and so on. The Japanese idea of 'outsider' (*gaijin*) so often means foreigner but can, similarly, be applied in this relative way. A benefit of such stabilizing mechanisms is that, for insiders, something closely approximating shared selfhood is available and pervasive.

On the one hand, this is discrimination in action, comparable to the differential treatment of domestic and international students in so many countries (including Asian countries). On the Other, in these Asian contexts, equivalents of Mead's ball nine are imagined as extensions of the Self, not merely associated Others. To unreservedly join, rather than conditionally sign and play with, a team is an 'Asian' method, with immediate applicability for understanding Asian expectations of any educational establishment. Such an understanding may allow more, far-reaching benefits of globalizing education to flourish.

Hahm Chaibong (2001) convincingly establishes Foucault's theory of care for the self as, also, a way of caring for others. This, although traced by Foucault to Greek thought, parallels Confucian traditions of self-discipline, too. Rather than an individual enjoying a space upon which others do not impinge, the Confucian and Foucaultian self must achieve self-care through engagement and 'rituals of the self' – the Chinese concept *li*.<sup>3</sup> Another way to put this is that selfhood, in these cases, dwells in social interaction: the Self is 'generalized' into mutually beneficial relations with Others, rather than particularized among them. It follows, therefore, that Confucian (and, so, East Asian) expectations of a community (such as those that comprise Western higher-education institutions) might be of a *generalized Self* rather than Other. Its intent is to provide, not a comprehensibly consistent Other, but an opportunity for a more thorough identification.

Hahm's view of the limitations, in comparison with Confucian and Foucaultian self-care, of the negative freedom accorded by the Western, 'liberal' appreciation of what the self is not prevented from doing receives support from the experience of illiberal atrocities such as the Holocaust. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's work on totalitarianism (e.g. 1951), Giorgio Agamben has argued that the horrors of the Second World War showed that civil rights must precede human rights: 'a human requires protection through continuously cultivated political status' (1998, p. 126). Hahm cites the Confucian insistence that the self (*li*) contrasts with the Western idea that, although the self may reside in a body, it needs protection through ties to

others.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the idiom ‘warm bodies’ refers to nondescript and interchangeable people: a warm body may well have a self, but, in its warm body capacity, it is generalizable. Where the Western Self depends on the Other, the Confucian self-as-body exists in a more amalgamated relationship with other selves-as-bodies.

### **West metes West?**

When Western universities establish offshore programmes in Asia, they operate on the theory that a sufficient number of students will assume that, with all of Kipling’s certainty, the West has indeed come East. And, indeed, these programmes are welcomed as bearers of the intangible benefits of the West, much more than technical competencies, which can always be copied – notably, a reversal of the (unsuccessful) late Qing dynasty maxim *zhōngtǐ xīyòng*, ‘Western utility, Chinese essence’.

Interviews were conducted with forty international offshore Vietnamese students (that is, students undertaking courses from a foreign university in Vietnam) to explore their experiences (Nguyen, 2011). The research sought to find out in what ways these Vietnamese students perceived the values and impacts of Western education on the formation of their identity, and in what ways they positioned themselves as learners and consumers in the international education market.

The findings highlight certain prominent attributes of international student identity: self-directedness (with a strong sense of subjectivity) and self-determination (with strong agency). Students’ identity is shaped, to some extent, by their suspending their home culture (Vietnamese) while submerging themselves in an Australian ‘host’ culture that, in the case of this study, was effectively bivouacing in their country in an offshore campus. Students become sojourners as they either totally or partially assimilate into Western academic mores and institutional regulations. They disrupt their native identity to construct and reconstruct their subject dispositions as international students and as customers in the international education market, the context for their self-reinvention (Kenway and Bullen, 2003; Nguyen, 2011). In this process, the virtues of critical thinking, self-reliance and, for some students, creative nourishment are associated with Western education.

Chen’s *Asia as Method* approaches post-colonial challenges from three major perspectives – deimperialization, decolonialization and de-cold war – which refer to ways historical domination has been framed and continued in modern Asian nation-states.<sup>5</sup> The very notion of transnational education is permeated with the ailments to which Chen would have us apply Chenian ‘multiplying references’, and with the need to bring to account the geo-colonial historical materialism of the research context. A striking feature uncovered in the research is that, notwithstanding the popularity of hands-on-sounding subjects such as business and its subdisciplines, Western courses are judged, often unfavourably, against what may be seen in the West as

the regressive, elitist notion that self-formation is more important than instrumentality: 'I want to develop myself as a person' (Female, 19, Business Administration).

Although such lofty ideals are associated with elite higher-education subcultures in the West and, therefore, afforded a disproportionate focus and romanticization, it was only for a brief period in the 1960s, in the US, that a mass form of liberal education was ever attempted (see Duffy and Goldberg, 1998, p. 22). It may be that Western universities are too jaded from celebrating such rhetoric to take it seriously – everyone can talk about self-formation, but, historically, it has only been for the few.

The higher-order demands of a strong, self-forming agent are what Paolo Freire has called an 'ontological vocation' (1972) – the sacred task of existence: 'The rediscovery of the sacred within the self is important democratically, for it returns agency to humanity, along with responsibility for social justice and for advancing a vision of a better world' (Carlson, 1998, p. 197). This task is easier said than done, as engaging the self in institutional curriculum, practice and policy-making will inevitably affect commercial acuity.

Drawing on interviews with 200 international students in Australia, Simon Marginson and Erlenawati Sawir argue that international education should be seen in terms of 'self-formation': that is, 'agency centred, complex, reflexive, open, historically grounded, and subject to relations of power' (2011, p. 147). The Vietnamese study further suggests that international education is also an act of varying self-imagination and global imagination.

Education as self-formation can be spontaneous or meticulously planned. The task of forming the self is innate to individuals. The guiding of the child begins at birth. In Vietnam, mothers lull their babies to sleep with *loi ru* – lullabies that often take the form of incantations of morality. *Loi ru* are designed, at least in verbal and tonal content, to lure the baby into the world of morality and self-cultivation before that of sleep. From such a perspective, and in contrast to Mead's ball nine, an adult grows to swim in the sea of his/her collectivities, including, in Vietnam, Confucian traditions, whose primary and final aims are the cultivation of self, with a rich lexicon of abstract values. As previously reported (Nguyen, 2011), prominent among these is the prestige of *quan tu* – a high-status and high-responsibility conception of the teacher's role. *Quan tu* is directly derived from the Chinese *jūnzǐ*<sup>6</sup> – literally, 'the superior one'. We might compare this with Matthew Arnold's cultured 'best self' as opposed to the anarchic 'ordinary' one (1869).

Albeit embedded for aeons, this is a fine example of Chen's notion of Asia as method, as, in its nativization into Vietnamese, it both draws on a Chinese heritage and co-opts it in particular ways that depart from its Chinese equivalent. The Vietnamese variation might best be described as a teacher's 'personal civilization'. In Vietnam's north, especially, this element of Confucianism is said to have developed more intensely than even in China (Marr, 1981, p. 103). Kang Zhao and Gert Biesta explain *jūnzǐ* as similar in connotation to 'gentleman', in that it refers to a (male) person of 'high

character', operating in the practical world but fascinated by wisdom (2011, p. 11). David Marr offers a deliberate observation of this Confucian imprint in the body and the soul of Vietnamese people, as follows:

'Self-cultivation' (*tu than*) encompasses a wide variety of techniques for achieving personal enlightenment and virtue. In Vietnam, as in many other cultures, alternatives range from the most elaborate, extended study of canonical texts to direct, sudden awareness of ultimate truths. In practice, most Vietnamese assimilate hundreds of cultural prescriptions in childhood, perhaps prioritize them to some degree in adolescence or early adulthood, but are not inclined to weed out contradictions or commit themselves internally to single principles. Like most of us, they proceed through life with a mixed bag of intellectual, emotional and behavioral preferences, only being forced to lean to one direction or another by the necessity to take concrete action.

(Marr, 2000, p. 773)

Confucianism, therefore, projects its central scholarship on to the self and self-development, towards the cultivation of both morality and intellectual scholarship. The individual is regarded as an architect of her or his own destiny and life project. Confucianism frequently places a high degree of emphasis on the power of self and self-cultivation. Consider the teaching of Confucius taken from the Confucian *Great Learning*, as follows:

From the supreme ruler down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything else. When the root is neglected, what springs from it cannot not be well ordered. What is of great importance cannot be slightly cared for, nor can what is of slight importance be greatly cared for.

Let us elaborate this point further. The ultimate purpose of the Confucian project of learning is, as Tu (1985, p. 10) remarks, 'learning for the sake of the self' (Chinese: *wéi chī*). The Confucian teaching says, 'Now the man of perfect humaneness, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others' (from the *Analects*, on 'humanness' (Chinese: *rén*), VI. 28). Confucian self-cultivation is a communal act (Tu, 1985; Pham, 2010, 2011).

In Confucian thought, individual adults are regarded as architects of their own destinies and life projects, and yet selfhood is not seen as something opposed to community. If anything, self-forming is more explicit and conceptually active within Asian cultures than in Western ones, in which Others are components of an environment that negatively bounds selfhood. It is, then, especially pernicious that superficial assumptions are made about international students as embodiments of only neo-liberal drives. Moreover, it is

hard to say whether the flippancies of global marketing are debasing or augmenting healthy understandings of Self with obtuse disjunctions.<sup>7</sup>

The Vietnamese students come to their transnational experience anticipating that it will not only meet their programmatic needs (i.e. skills acquisition) but perhaps also shape their wants anew. One participant soberly voices:

I can't see any changes in my personal development. Studying here only helps me develop my technical skills for a future job; for example, I can make a balance sheet, an income statement or a cash flow or analyse a simple financial report. These skills don't enhance my personal development. What I've been expecting to gain from this program is the social knowledge and skills apart from professional skills, particularly the desire for life goals and ideals.

(Male, 21, Bachelor of Commerce programme)

Management gurus have long toyed with the notion that social and generic skills and, even, aspirations are intrinsic subsets of professional skills. The reductionist approach, where the disciplinary core is the course content, with other 'stabilizing' skills perhaps being learned along the way, does not seem satisfactory when one considers the students' expectations. '*I want to improve myself as a person*', the commerce student says, and feels his experience fits poorly into his bigger picture.

Typically, studying in a Western degree programme involves abandoning an elite Vietnamese university whose social, cultural, academic and other capitals are denominated in 'local' currency – an opportunity cost. Overseas qualifications have variable standing, and it is always risky to forecast future returns. The impetus for gaining international qualifications is only partially explained in terms of acquiring competitive advantage: students are attracted to an international experience that they can process as part of themselves. For international providers, selling accrued credentials (in competition with other international education brands), with formative experiences a mere side effect, is not the most astute approach.

Finding that they are treated as consumers rather than learners, it is understandable that existing students and, if word gets around, prospective students, in international programmes scrutinize their own consumerism. One interviewee joked about his study experience: 'I ordered a Coke but they served me a Pepsi' (Male, 19, Bachelor of Accounting degree programme).

Although this 'Coke good, Pepsi less good' mindset may show sign-value-over-substance pettiness, institutions lead students to expect their experience to live up to the prestige-ridden hype. A Pepsi instead of a Coke is a wonderfully rich image, because, in perhaps conceding naivety in even wanting a Coke in the first place, it hits the institution where it hurts, that is, by exposing that not only is the course delivering a simulacrum of what it claims, what it claims may be unsustainably appalling. Western offshore education providers rely on such Confucian virtues as persistence, infused with strong 'filial duty'

that draws on a selfhood couched in terms of family and connections (the Chinese *guānxì* is increasingly becoming a business-English buzzword), to drive student throughput. The customer–vendor relationship may suit clean, swift transactions of property, but longer associations might be better achieved through mutual growth. Elaborate, quasi-feudal Eastern customs of socialization surrounding business development can provide ‘cultural’ heft to international business education in the West.

### **Beyond agency: empathy and cosmopolitanism**

A new Australian government employs more ambiguous rhetoric than the 2011 White Paper ‘Australia in the Asian century’. Nonetheless, Australia-qua-nation seeks to continue to gain from transnational education.

Calling Western institutions out on the ultimate folly of underestimating the non-Western student is, unfortunately, a necessity. To cite an example:

International students are not simply units of revenue, or sites of deficits in the English language or academic practices, or ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled with Western wisdoms. They are media of global or local connectedness. They are self-creators. They are remaking themselves in international education, and in the process of creating a more divergent and complex world.

(Marginson & Sawir, 2011, p. 12)

Universities cannot afford to alienate ‘export’ markets in the short term or to alienate importable talent flows in the long run. Eastern students’ agency needs to be cultivated, if ever they and their institutions are to achieve the co-production of things better than credentials with shaky credibility. Universities need success stories, research outcomes and in-house talent development throughout their student bodies.

At present, Western institutions routinely exploit what Arjun Appadurai calls imagination (1996). Imagination is the organized field of social practice, the form of work, the form of negotiation between sites of *agency* (individuals) and *globally defined fields of possibilities*. Individual identity no longer confines itself to traditions of the local and the national, but extends to the global space: identity is discursively constructed and reconstructed in the space of self-imagination and is given to the imagined community of global cosmopolitans (Anderson, 1983). Proactive and alert universities, operating transnationally, might do well to encourage and accommodate this in their students, rather than to assume they are, and will be, grateful recipients of Western catechism. The multiple real worlds of Asia are heavily informed by messages and values that derive from places other than Asia, as well as elsewhere in Asia. A compelling future world is certainly not, with any sustainability, what Western institutions often seem to serve up. It is a reality of the enterprise of education that we make rough, changeable generalizations

about those involved, but we might do well to realize the importance and inexorability of generalizing Selves, as well as the Other.

### **Chapter reflection**

I came to Australia, having lost my sense of self. And I got lost in research imagination. Now I felt much restored. This is not because I was incapable of doing research, but because social realities were sliced into various, complex and subtle angles. And because there were such fundamental ways for novice researchers of seizing realities of the world, which I had never experienced before.

(Thi Nhai Nguyen, 27 January 2012)

Now, sitting in front of the desk and thinking about what to put in this reflection section, what comes first to our minds is the struggle to problematize our research. Especially, this research manifests our personal 'hauntology' of the postmodernist paradigm. It has witnessed incessant internal dialogues. To unbundle these complexities and work towards Asia as a method is not easy. After all, it is the journey of reshaping our research subjectivity, epistemology and research imagination.

In seeking to understand how international offshore Vietnamese students shape their identity through their pursuit of an Australian offshore degree programme, more and more we draw in the multiplicities of Asia. In looking, in depth, at how the blend of Western education and local culture and traditions influences the ways Vietnamese students position themselves and perceive Western values, we scrutinize how Australian offshore programs position themselves and their value in outside markets. Our research, then, provides some comparative analysis that detects mismatches.

It was not until the stage of data analysis and discussion that we came fully to understand the complexity of our research sites. Even though modernist and postmodernist research approaches allow a wide reach, we still felt such approaches were superficial and deficient in insights into the interpretation of student identity. The Western theoretical framework of deploying a Western notion of self, identity and agency only reveals how precarious, or even cartoonish, such factors are presumed to be in Asia. Without adequate commitment to conceptualizing the notion of self by constantly comparing and contrasting Western notions and Confucian perspectives, with their variations throughout East Asia, the task of understanding the formation of Vietnamese students' selves would be impossible.

Gradually, our conceptual tools were calibrated to fit. The binary and/or dichotomy of Self and Other challenged us to move beyond this Western boundary towards a more open, critical space, where we are able to subvert the binary within the spatiality, temporality and production of self (Grossberg, 1996). And, because of such boundaries of the research, 'dead rigours' – all of the knowledge we had pulled out from extensive reading – blocked possible

interpretations and threatened to trap our research methodology in dependency on a Western imagining framework, without sufficient attention devoted to the complex global forces and the internal contradictions of Self influencing the consumption of transnational education. This rigidity would, if allowed, prevent us from looking beyond the boundaries of power and knowledge.

We recall these experiences of researching in the postcolonial context, not out of narcissism. By demonstrating our experience, our purpose is to alert researchers to the danger of being locked into a compliant Western research imagination, where researchers deploy a secondary imagination: a purely ‘reproductive, imitative, or combination imagination’ (Kenway and Fahey, 2008, p. 9). By means such as these, we aim to ‘*think beyond our means*’, to identify our own relationship with knowledge and to overcome conventional practices of thought.

## Notes

- 1 Transnational education is usually used, with varying strictness, for institutions based in one country delivering education in another (McBurnie and Ziguras, 2007).
- 2 Interestingly, this term was applied by Anglo-Indians when they saw sacred cows being used to garner donations. This is an instance of syncretism between traditional Asian practices and a disjunctive Western scepticism. Asia as method rather depends on a similar readiness to critique practices between Asian cultures that has been inhibited by the misconception that Western methods should intervene.
- 3 Ritual being or self; the sort of thing rationalism might curb in the name of efficiency, before its cohesive function is fully appreciated.
- 4 In view of Chen’s take on Asia as method, this Confucian conception of Self is to be compared with other prominent schools of Asian thought.
- 5 Today’s Asian nation-states follow reasonably cogent ‘national’ lines, more plausibly than many African countries, which often inherited arbitrary boundaries from the age of European empires. Nevertheless, it is important to be mindful that the nation-state, as it is commonly understood, is a Western, pluralist technology – many Asian countries, in some fundamental respects, operate on more intensely national assumptions and handle pluralism quite differently.
- 6 A hangover from pre-Pinyin transliteration conventions, in some ongoing English-language discussions, *jun zi* can still be found spelt *chun tzu* – different enough to cause confusion.
- 7 For example, ‘Make Yourself’, reads a recent Nike slogan, toying with the reflexivity of self-formation. (Is that ‘self-construct’ or the more idiomatic ‘self-override’? Bauman’s post-Weberian ‘work aesthetic’ (1998, p. 34) meets the ascetic, as it were.) The Chinese tennis player Li Na famously wore a yellow T-shirt with ‘Make yourself’ written in Chinese (*shìxiàn zìjǐ* – more literally, ‘Achieve oneself’), following her breakthrough French Open win in 2011. Just as ‘Make yourself’ plays on idiomatic English, the self (*zìjǐ*) is here rather disjunctive in Chinese. Speaking in English at a press conference, Li’s malapropistic translation ‘Believe Yourself’ only added to the depth of its appeal. It backs the idea of a generalized self in Asia that a limited run of thirty official copies of the ‘Achieve oneself’ shirt then went on sale in China; the Chinese seem able to bypass vicariousness in genuinely sharing in the achievements of those they identify with on a national level. No doubt the thirty T-shirts immediately became blue-chip investment items for the mega rich. This episode arguably highlights that, although there is a Chinese attraction to novel conceptions of ‘Self’, its expressions are often understood as part of the collective fabric, rather than deviations from it.

In any case, if we sustain Hahm's insistence (above) that, in Confucian thought, the self is a body (and definitely not an abstracted 'soul'), perhaps Nike and Li's use of *zìjǐ* turns Confucian consideration closer to that element of the bodily potential where true identity waits to be unlocked (cf. Sigmund Freud's psychic element *das Ich*, customarily rendered in English translation as the essentially pejorative Latin *ego* (in Latin, *ego* is a rare word, as it is possible to indicate that the first person singular is a sentence's subject through the verb ending. *Ego*, therefore, stresses investedness on behalf of the 'me')).

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## 6 Towards deimperialization of instructional strategies

### Cases of task-based learning and reflective practice implementation in the Indonesian context

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#### **Introduction**

Education is generally acknowledged as a powerful tool for empowerment, playing a significant role in the process of nation building and national development. However, its terrain has also made it a contested site of interest that is subject to various ideological discourses. To a large extent, in the context of Indonesia, the education arena has been driven and shaped by the state ideology, as reflected in various education policies and practices (see, for example, Halstead, 1995; Matanin and Collier, 2003). At the same time, Indonesia's education has also been marked by adoption and adaptation of Western concepts, which, more often than not, create tensions and conflicts (Harper, 2009), as will be elaborated throughout this chapter. However, Indonesia's adoption of Western educational practices is thought to be inevitable. Tracing the history of formal schooling in contemporary Indonesia, Rosidi (2006), in his article '*Meninjau kembali kurikulum sekolah*' ('Revisiting the school curriculum'), delineates how the current education system is, in fact, a 'continuation' of that of the colonial Dutch government established in the mid nineteenth century, where students were educated to fulfil the need for cheap labour. Even Ki Hajar Dewantara (1889–1957), one of the greatest figures in Indonesia's history of education, borrowed educational concepts from Europe and the United States, generating a 'creative amalgam' (Harper, 2009, p. 3) of Western ideas and 'local wisdom' rooted in local traditions, philosophies and cultural practices. As Harper (2009) argues, Ki Hajar Dewantara's notion of the *Taman Siswa* ('Garden of students') provided the impetus for 'one of the most remarkable indigenous educational movements anywhere in the colonial world' (p. 3). The establishment of the *Taman Siswa* can be said to be a form of resistance against Dutch imperial authorities: it was part of the political struggle for independence, awakening a sense of patriotism.

Similar to the struggle of Ki Hajar Dewantara in adapting Western educational practices to local needs, in Chen's (2010) discussion of 'the

West', he explains how nationalist thoughts and discourses within the context of Asia have been used as a mode of response to counter invasions of Western forces, in the forms of both colonialism and imperialism. Although different historical contexts may point to different positioning within these discourses (e.g. modernist, nativist or neo-traditionalist), Chen indicates that the major purpose behind the construction of these narratives is to evoke patriotic sentiments. In the context of Indonesia's histories, hegemonic national ideologies are reflected in, among others, the 1928 Youth Pledge, proclaiming, 'one motherland, one nation and one language' (Massardi, 2011), which was, initially, intended to spark a feeling of unity across all ethnic groups in the then-colonized Indonesia, and the idea was, eventually, taken up in the Constitution.

Although it has been more than six decades since Indonesia gained its independence, a 'structural flow of desire' towards the West lingers on, manifesting itself in different forms of mimicry, among other manifestations. Although Indonesia's contemporary education system is believed to reflect colonial legacies, discourses of Westernization, often spelled out as 'globalization'<sup>1</sup> and 'internationalization', appear to intensify the nation's dependence on Western education knowledge structures. In line with this, frameworks of nation building and national development often require teachers to pursue further study abroad (Fang, 1996), with many receiving training in English-speaking countries through overseas aid programmes. Once these scholars return to their home country, it is expected that they will implement the newly gained expertise and disseminate the ideas that, needless to say, often translate into a reproduction of a Western body of knowledge. Such adoption of knowledge, however, is not unproblematic.

Exemplifying the (problematic) adoption of Western educational practices in her study on the implementation of a school-based curriculum in Indonesia, Heyward (2009) confirms that culture plays a critical role in determining the direction of reform.<sup>2</sup> Her analysis highlighted the fact that educational changes were significantly constrained by cultural obstacles, mainly because values embedded in the reform were not congruent with those of the societal culture. As mentioned earlier, ideas of educational reforms are commonly borrowed from developed nations, whereas the contexts in which these reforms occurred were generally dissimilar to those where the ideas originated. In the milieu of Heyward's study, the idea of autonomy contained in the school-based curriculum was inhibited by deeply embedded cultural attitudes that place high value on total obedience – particularly to an elder or a superior – social harmony and conflict avoidance. In light of the research findings, Heyward infers that the notion of reform, in this context, is only superficially understood, ascertaining that a deeper-level change has not been achieved.

The above case is but one example of how reliant Indonesia is on Western knowledge. In the spirit of constructing Asia as method and breaking away from the East–West binary structure, Chen (2010) urges academia to explore more local knowledge and encourages the act of inter-referencing among Asian

scholars so as to enable shifts in points of reference in knowledge production. Asian countries, as Chen observes, may have suffered from a lack of confidence in using their own voices as a result of colonization, with or without their consent, by Western theories, an effect that has further been intensified by economic globalization. Chen maintains that globalization can also be an opportunity to deimperialize theories, because ‘globalization without deimperialization is simply a disguised reproduction of imperialist conquest’ (2010, p. 2). Nevertheless, this chapter is not premised on ‘anti-West’ propaganda. Rather, this study seeks dialogic meaning-making, in which Western theories are mediated within Indonesian social, cultural and political discourses, with the intention of raising awareness to construct knowledge that is, locally, more compatible and applicable.

In the context of foreign-language pedagogy, the reliance on Western pedagogical practices is evident in the case of, for instance, task-based learning (TBL) and reflective practice (RP). Driven by the spirit of internationalization, the concept of TBL, which historically was generated and developed in the West (i.e. Britain and the US), gained tremendous popularity across the globe. Until recent decades, Western educational concepts, such as those constituted in TBL and RP, have often been adopted uncritically by stakeholders in Indonesia, with the assumption that they offer ‘better’ instructional strategies. Generally, their principles are perceived to be applicable and beneficial for language learning and for teacher education, regardless of students’ backgrounds, for example, or other contextual factors.

To understand discourses of internationalization within the English language education domain, Phillipson’s (1992) cautionary note on linguistic imperialism is not to be completely dismissed, despite the criticism it received as being irrelevant in today’s contexts of world Englishes (e.g., Douglass and Shaikh, 2004; Tulung, 2004). One would be hard-pressed to deny the existence of ‘structural and cultural inequalities’, borrowing Phillipson’s words (p. 47), between English and other languages. Highlighting English language teaching (ELT)-related aid given by English-speaking countries to promote activities such as teacher training and curriculum development, Phillipson describes how such assistance can be a way of establishing and maintaining a hegemonic relation, where dominated societies are made to rely on the Western world for knowledge and information. In line with this idea, Chen (2010) warns that, ‘the universalist assertion of theory is premature, for theory too must be deimperialized’ (p. 3). Integral to Chen’s ideas is his recommendation to be extra careful of claiming the ‘universal truth’ of knowledge, as it is restricted by various factors.

For some time now, there has been a social and political awakening among some Indonesian scholars (e.g., Rosidi, 2006; Sumardjo, 2010), who are calling for the need to anchor practices of thought to local philosophies and traditions and to revive these philosophies and traditions. Despite these scholars’ good will, the issues surrounding locality and particularity can never be tackled in a simplistic manner, given that Indonesia’s histories have been

coloured by a blend of outside influences, such as Islam from the Middle East, Hinduism from India and Taoism and Confucianism from China, while also being deeply entangled within narratives of colonialism. On one level, these local scholars' call to return to one's 'base-entity' (Chen, 2010, p. 251) can be interpreted to signal a nativist positioning and a drive towards such a movement. On a deeper level, however, these nativist discourses also indicate the complexity of Indonesia's constant obsession with the West. As Chen observes, drawing particularly on the works of Hall (1992), 'in the third world, the West has become the object of both desire and resentment' (Chen, 2010, p. 217), where the West is imagined both as a source of mimicry and a source of resentment.

### **Deconstructing Indonesia's dominant cultural imaginaries: a sociohistorical approach**

The study of colonialism and imperialism is not simply a return to history in order to deconstruct the colonial cultural imaginary and colonial identification, but . . . it is an active intervention against the triumphalist sentiment of the imperialist desire. . . . Decolonization operates on different levels of the social formation and has different meanings. If decolonization, at this historical conjuncture, no longer simply means the struggle for national independence but a struggle against any form of colonization, then we have to recognize both that neocolonialism, neo-imperialism and globalization are structural continuations and extensions of colonialism.

(Chen, 2010, p. 112)

In this section, we attempt to trace Indonesia's dominant cultural imaginaries using a sociohistorical approach as an analytical tool. In so doing, we base our work on Chen's notion of cultural imaginaries, which we see as a way of understanding and deconstructing the operation of colonialist/imperialist structures. Although Chen argues that the act of returning to history is not sufficient to 'deconstruct the colonial cultural imaginary', we believe that it is a necessary step towards realizing a 'decolonized frame of mind'.

Our analyses in this chapter are twofold. First, as the construction of cultural imaginaries is often intertwined with particular historicity, our line of enquiry, inevitably, also needs to incorporate a discussion of Indonesia's (post-colonial) political system of the *New Order*. This sociopolitical construction has served to exert particular cultural imaginaries (e.g., notions of multiculturalism and collectivism that reinforce *living in harmony*) to maintain the status quo during the Soeharto years. Next, to highlight how these cultural imaginaries operate, we then investigate two cases of TBL and RP, by examining the structures of local cultures in two geographical sites in Indonesia (East Java and Yogyakarta).

According to Chen (2010), cultural imaginary is a social configuration of feeling or sentiment in which 'the imaginary perception of the Other and self-

understanding are articulated' (p. 111). The perception of cultural imaginary is historically manifested and incorporates the process of convergence of colonialism and local cultural practices – for example, the categories of *personal* versus *collectivist*. Chen implies that the cultural imaginary should be critically investigated if decolonization is to occur, as it can lead to another form of hegemony that, in turn, opens the way for further colonization. For example, in Indonesia, the value of living in harmony within a multicultural society has consistently been upheld. This construction, however, can also be seen as a cultural imaginary that serves as a political strategy to win the hearts of the people. Similarly, in Australia, the adoption of multiculturalism by the governing body can be regarded as a strategy to control the behaviour of individuals, so that they can tolerate whatever may be imposed, in order to manifest the image of a 'peaceful co-existence' (Chen, 2010, p. 98).

If adopting Western categories of identification is considered to be a practice of being colonized, the grand narrative of multiculturalism is, perhaps, another form of colonial construct. Looking into the discursive forms of colonization, Indonesian history has recorded that the oft-noted failures of the Indonesian people's struggle for independence come from a lack of unity, as a result of diverse cultures, hence the Dutch colonial maxim *divide et impera* (divide the concentration of people's power and conquer them). This may be why the early founding fathers strongly voiced the slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which means 'diverse in unity' (Nababan, 1991, p. 117). This slogan allows people to maintain their cultures and traditions, while prioritizing the common interests of the peoples (cf. Chen, 2010).

As Chen argues, multiculturalism resembles zoological taxonomy, that is, 'the language of multiculturalism classifies others and constructs hierarchical orders. Minorities are displayed like rare animals in a zoo' (Chen, 2010, p. 97). In saying that, Chen underpins the construct of multiculturalism as a driving force for all people, from diverse ethnicities, to create 'peaceful co-existence' for the sake of the larger group's interests, implying the dominant culture becomes the 'winner'. Such multiculturalist discourses were particularly evident during the *New Order* governmental regime from 1965 to 1998, which interwove political and cultural structures. These discourses, for instance, manifested themselves in the form of jargons such as *musyawarah untuk mufakat*,<sup>3</sup> arguably functioning to control the thoughts and acts of the Indonesian people and, hence, reinforcing and maintaining the constructed dominant imaginaries. This seems to have been a tactful strategy during the revolution era to win the battle against the colonizers. However, such a slogan is not without its problems, particularly if it becomes national policy to control the behaviour of the people, as is highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Although it is hardly feasible to isolate one single, comprehensive concept of Indonesian dominant culture and its people's attitudes, owing to their complex diversity within the large archipelago, it is somewhat more plausible to trace the governing culture from the political side (Heyward, 2009). It was not until 1998 that Indonesia gained a more democratic governmental system,

following Soeharto's 32 years of presidential ruling. However, after being colonized by the Dutch for 350 years, the uncritical absorption of cultural values could be perceived as having led Indonesia, as a nation, to experience a new form of colonialization, that is, neocolonization. On this note, Chen (2010) warns:

Decolonization must transform nationalist energy into a liberating consciousness of socio-political needs; otherwise, once the common enemy (colonizer) disappears, the most resourceful among the national bourgeoisie will occupy the dominant positions in the apparatuses of nation building and state making and will collaborate with the former colonizer, thus turning the colony into a neocolony.

(p. 23)

This study is congruent with Chen's idea in that, regardless of Indonesia's independence from the colonialists occurring more than 60 years ago, the culture of the colonizer may still be evident, particularly because it appears that the colonial culture morphed into a form of neocolonialism during Soeharto's regime (1966–98). However, Soeharto did not necessarily collaborate with the Dutch as the past colonizer, partly owing to the patriotic sentiment of the revolution history. Soeharto was one of the prominent military leaders fighting the Dutch colonists and so, psychologically and emotionally, he did not wish to collaborate with them. Nevertheless, it is Soeharto's regime that imposed what Chen calls 'subimperialism' within the nation: the hegemony of the dominant culture (ethnicity) was used to 'tame' other cultures. This could help explain why Soeharto so 'successfully' ruled the country for such a long period. Soeharto, of Javanese heritage, politically exerted Javanese cultural philosophy to perpetuate his power (Sarsito, 2006).<sup>4</sup> The Javanese culture, through political practices, became dominant in Indonesia, but, sadly, its virtues were exploited to justify Soeharto's political actions. One fundamental justification he used was that of 'social harmony', spelled out through the famous Javanese adage *rukun agawe santosa* (harmony makes us strong), which Soeharto abused by punishing people who were deemed to potentially endanger social harmony (Sarsito, 2006). Minimizing personal and social conflicts is one of the ways to achieve social harmony, and it constitutes the highest virtue for Javanese, as Geertz (1989, p. 147) argues:

The determination to maintain the performance of social harmony to minimize the overt expression of any kind of social and personal conflict is based on the Javanese view that the emotional equilibrium, emotional stasis, is of highest worth, and on the corresponding moral imperative to control one's own impulses, to keep them out of awareness or at least unexpressed, so as not to set up reverberating emotional in others.

The pervasion of social harmony, as characterized by existing social values and the exploitation of these values by Soeharto, is evident in educational

practices and discourses and manifests in the two virtues of collectivist-oriented learning and conflict avoidance (Sarsito, 2006; Heyward, 2009). At this point, it is important to emphasize that our reference to terms such as ‘collectivist’ and ‘individualist’ is *not*, by any means, used to romanticize cultures, but, rather, we refer to these terms as devices by which to talk about cultural differences, as is commonly found in the literature.

The above discussion, then, brings us to the question: How do these cultural imaginaries mediate and shape Indonesia’s current educational landscape? Before proceeding further, it is worth bearing in mind that Indonesia, with more than 17,000 islands and more than 1,100 different races, is extremely diverse, and differences in the customs of each ethnicity are markedly obvious. Interestingly, the centralized system of education and the close intervention of the central government in educational practices have been able to successfully reinforce and maintain the above-mentioned, constructed cultural imaginaries. Curriculum and subject matters related to citizenship and history were strictly controlled by the governing regime and dictated the values (from the dominant culture and ethnicity) that were believed to be significant for national building. The role of Soeharto’s regime in maintaining this ‘imaginary’ was evident from the practice of the uniformity of voices: differences were considered as threats to national unity. Hence, military intervention in many aspects of state life ensured that law enforcement almost became the norm at that time.

It is in light of this cultural and political hegemony that the two Western educational theories, TBL and RP, are discussed. In this discussion, we are also aware that any positive support or any problems from its implementation could emanate from cultural and instructional factors, as they are often entwined. However, for the purpose of this narrative, we limit the scope of discussion to the cultural factors that mediate the implementation of those instructional pedagogies.

### **Cultural imaginaries and their influences in Indonesia’s educational practices**

This section highlights how cultural imaginaries facilitate the enactment of Indonesia’s educational practices, by foregrounding two Western educational concepts, TBL and RP. Although adapting some Western education practices seems to be inevitable, we argue that this adaptation needs to occur with critical awareness of its compatibility with the prevailing sociocultural structures, that is, a ‘collectivist’ society. In our analysis, the Indonesian education sector seems to receive the impact of colonization from two major forces, namely internal and external. By ‘internal’, we refer to the cultural imaginaries constructed by the *New Order* regime through its sociopolitical agenda, whereas ‘external’ refers to the forces of globalization. Chen’s notion of globalization helps us understand the impact of the powerful influence of the English language, which can, already, be felt to permeate almost all dimensions

of life. The effects are reflected in various reform agendas, such as changes in the curriculum and the adoption of imported teaching approaches and methods. This chapter, however, is not written to seek solutions to problematic cultural imaginaries. Rather, it aims to critically reflect that there are cultural constraints when Western educational practices are adopted into local institutions. We wish to communicate that, sometimes, the cultural imaginary plays an inconsistent role in society. It is both in conflict with, and supportive of, the process of translating Western concepts: empowering at one time, but disempowering at other times. These impacts are evident in the two cases that follow.

Our case studies of the adaptation of TBL and RP in two different institutions find a general tendency to practise collectivist-oriented learning among all participants. This learning style is congruent with the findings of Hofstede et al. (2010) that, in a country with a low individualism index, this collectivist profile also appears to be one of Indonesian students' ways of learning: for example, Indonesian students prefer pair work or group work to studying alone. However, our studies discover differing results of learning styles mediated within this collectivist culture.

First, for TBL, learning in a collectivist-oriented atmosphere is more comfortable and easier and provides more assistance for students. As mentioned by one of the participants, doing assignments was easier 'because most of the assignments are done in groups' (Nanang). Furthermore, favouring collectivist-oriented learning for reasons of comfort and getting assistance was reported. Students found working with friends stimulated a relaxed learning situation in which they felt comfortable. Receiving assistance from friends was another way to make the learning process easier (cf. French et al., 2001): 'I ask when in the classroom and at home (at a friend's home). Because I think it's clearer and more understandable to me. I think the problems were solved because I trust my friends' (Bidadari).

Allowing students to be collectivist-oriented in their learning is one of the ways to accommodate students' individual differences. Furthermore, with the Indonesian students' embedded cultural attitudes, which reinforce the habit of being unwilling to admit any fault (Dardjowidjojo, 2001), assigning students to work in pairs or in groups appears to offer a solution. Accomplishing tasks with trusted fellows builds a secure feeling. Consequently, students would not be hindered by embarrassment over errors or shortcomings. For example, to respond to a question of why she preferred working in pairs or groups, Ika said, 'because I'm not ashamed if I ask my friend'.

Implementing TBL within the Indonesian context in this study illustrates how 'translation' occurred. As Chen (2010) claims, for translation to occur, 'the object to be translated has to be subjected to existing social forces and must negotiate with dense local histories if it is to take root in foreign soil' (p. 244). Within TBL, autonomous learning is one core element in which students are expected to be independent, in the sense that they are to seek their own strategies to solve problems on their own, without asking for assistance

from others. In such a situation, students are expected to be able to draw on available resources, such as textbooks or dictionaries, in building up their language skills. This will enable them to learn to live independently. However, when this learning principle is implemented in Indonesia, it has to negotiate with Indonesia's 'dense local histories' (Chen, 2010, p. 244), which strongly identify with collectivism. This may be recognized as Indonesians' 'cultural imaginary' that has long been rooted in the lives of most Indonesians and that, 'links to the concrete experiences of everyday life' (Chen, 2010, p. 111). As, in real life, Indonesian people cannot separate themselves from being collectivist, which includes consulting others, such a characteristic tends to colour their learning situations, including learning strategies. Despite being less autonomous in learning, utilizing such a cultural imaginary in students' preferred strategies was found to be efficient and could promote the progress of their learning of English.

Allowing students to use collectivist-oriented learning during the implementation of TBL is a practice of merging what has been applied as the West's with the local cultural imaginary, a practice of synchronizing the West with the East. Advantageous and applicable principles of TBL are implemented, and yet some parts that are not preferred, namely total autonomous learning, are left out, owing to the embedded cultural imaginary, that is, collectivist-oriented learning.

In contrast to successful TBL implementation within a collectivist culture, the RP adaptation appears to be challenged by this aspect of cultural attitude. There are several implications emanating from collectivism. Collectivism may prevent pre-service teachers (PSTs) from writing genuine reflections, because reflection, by nature, means the journey into one's self that PSTs may regard as invading their privacy. Also, PSTs may find it difficult to voice their thoughts and feelings based on their individualism, simply because they are not used to expressing opinions. Minnis (1999) elaborates on this observation, stating that some shared values within South East Asian countries are characterized by 'equilibrium [and] communitarians' (p. 177), which are viewed as taking priority over an individual. Therefore, the people prefer consultation and, even, indecision to conflict, debate or legal action. This last measure is to be avoided as far as possible, because the value of 'harmony' is higher than the value of facing conflict. Therefore, keeping other people happy and contented is pivotal, and this often leads to superficiality and formality in social practice. 'Superficial and formal' here means being insincere, not acting truly, with the heart. This is a part of *bapakisme*<sup>5</sup> (Golafshani, 2003), that is, doing things only to make others happy. Extended to the RP educational context, this could mean PSTs doing their reflection cursorily, viewing it as an assignment to complete and undertake only because other PSTs also think they should do so. The major problem associated with conflict avoidance is lack of honesty. As told to one lecturer, by Fiona, PSTs could not be as honest as expected in their observations of their peers' teaching performances in class: 'Being an observer is so difficult Miss . . . I don't dare

to provide honest feedback, as a matter of pity. I am not honest to give the score particularly if my observation feedback is contributing to their evaluation’.

This suggests that PSTs may not be willing to pass their critical self-reflection to other people if this could potentially hurt another’s feelings. The evidence of such dishonest feedback is frequently reflected in their comments on their peers’ teaching practice, with mechanical compliments recorded, such as: ‘good’, ‘excellent’, ‘well done’, etc. What results is actually a meaningless evaluation in the context of providing constructive feedback.

Such phenomena are common in micro teaching classes as evidence of *ewuh pekewuh*, cultural attitude, as explained in the previous section. This attitude is corroborated by the other Javanese cultural tradition, *mikul dhuwur mendhem jero*, which means to carry the others’ good deeds high and to bury the others’ bad deeds deeply (Sarsito, 2006, p. 451). Groomed in such a culture, PSTs are accustomed to speaking out about good things in others, and they may refuse to say otherwise. Minnis (1999) calls this phenomenon the ‘unwillingness to confront issues openly’ (p. 180). One example of conflict avoidance is from one PST, Shandy, who reported feeling depressed for almost a week after being given feedback on her teaching performance via an open ‘social reflection’ (reflection done by all peers together). Although social reflection was a normal procedure in the micro teaching class, it could be counterproductive, because it could position a PST to ‘suffer’ from public scrutiny that, obviously, could pose a risk to one’s self-esteem. RP, then, needs to be carried out with extra care to prevent such a problem from occurring.

Although RP is an educational paradigm borrowed from the West in which the tension of ‘being colonized’ may be inherent, it has been claimed by many studies (e.g., Baker and Shahid, 2003; Husu et al., 2008) that RP has potential for the development of PSTs’ learning. However, we have presented examples of PSTs’ educational experiences wherein cultural imaginaries, such as conflict avoidance and the culture of obedience, can, on the one hand, promote the state of peaceful co-existence promoted in their culture while, on the other hand, compromising their freedom to reflect critically and, potentially, compromising the entire praxis of teaching. As previously pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, we do not attempt to investigate the solutions to this problem. Rather, this chapter aims to present some cultural imaginaries that can become the site of investigation for further study, through which, hopefully, the process of decolonizing cultural imaginaries can be examined and understood. The process of decolonization may be hard and painful, but Chen (2010) offers a more optimistic lens for seeing the West, as follows:

Rather than being constantly anxious about the question of the West, we can actively acknowledge it as a part of the formation of our subjectivity. In the form of fragmented pieces, the West has entered our history and become part of it, but never in a totalizing manner.

(p. 223)

In doing so, the West is not seen as a solid structure of knowledge, hard for any culture to argue against. Instead, it indicates a shift towards seeing the West as equally as important as other points of reference. Chen's idea on inter-referencing is sympathetic to life philosophies (e.g., co-existence), in that it implies people ought to respect any culture, any race, any religions, any beliefs, ought even to show equal respect to the past colonialists and the colonized, in an ongoing attempt to understand why they are the way they are. Reading Chen, we are invited to ponder that knowledge should be discussed (Bakhtin, 1981), not only so that we are open-minded to others', different views, but, also, so that we are more reflective. In short, a non-racist mindset is a priority for self-decolonization.

The discourses on TBL and RP constitute only a small part of the dominant narratives within Indonesia's education system, yet it is hoped that these two cases may provide pictures of how 'foreign' concepts can be double edged. On the one hand, foreign concepts result in skilful translation that allows some space for cultural imaginaries, whereas, on the other, they create tensions and conflicts, thus receiving challenges from within because they do not fit with the conditions, philosophies and cultural values of the society at large. Whereas the former has been exemplified through a case study of TBL implementation, the latter is evident in the study by one of the authors of the application of RP in a university setting.

It is interesting to note that, although both studies took place in Java, the differing nature of these foreign concepts, in relation to their compatibility with Indonesia's localities and cultural imaginaries, can be seen to result in contrasting treatments of the two instructional strategies. At a more fundamental level, this chapter has also illustrated the nation's conflicting sentiments towards the West, which is, simultaneously, perceived as both a source of desire and a source of resentment.

In short, this chapter has shed light into how inside forces (i.e., Soeharto's neocolonialism) and outside forces (i.e., globalization) are negotiated and appropriated (as illustrated in the case of the implementation of TBL) or resisted in Indonesia's educational settings (as in the case of RP implementation). The chapter suggests that the adaptation of TBL and RP in Indonesian classrooms should allow some space for cultural realities, which may have become an unchallenged ideology structured by colonialization and local historical and cultural resources. However, in allowing some space for cultural realities to take shape in local educational practices, as noted previously, it is far from our intention to reinforce cultural essentialization as if this were the only way of investigating the problems of Indonesian education reforms. Rather, this study suggests the importance of studying and deconstructing cultural imaginaries and various forms of 'forced' cultural hegemony in order to generate critical awareness in adopting and adapting educational reforms from other developed countries, such as those from Western educational practices.

### **Reflective section**

As scholars who have been, and are being, trained in an English-speaking country, the journey of writing this chapter has been an exhilaratingly challenging one, as we ourselves were constantly faced with the realizations of how our own subjectivities have been deeply entangled with Western knowledge structures. Indeed, the writing of this chapter proved the extreme difficulty of breaking away from the West as a point of reference. For example, being conscious of the value of reflecting on a cultural imaginary as an attempt at self-decolonization, we are also aware that bringing those cultural imaginaries to the forefront, at the same time, can mean approaching the additional danger of being trapped into the reproduction of the colonialists' categories of identification.

In spite of this, as we argued throughout, it is imperative that Western ideas and pedagogical models be critically considered and evaluated, at least, in the hope that such a critical stance and better awareness of self can help us make a step forward towards deimperialization in education.

Admittedly, however, understanding and working with Chen's theoretical concepts is not an easy endeavour, as engaging with Chen's ideas was challenging at many different levels. At the conceptual level, while realizing the potential of Chen's line of enquiry to provoke and unsettle our habitual practices of thought, we feel his arguments themselves are difficult to grasp and pin down. In our attempt to understand Chen's ideas, we constantly asked ourselves whether we had interpreted them 'the right way'. At the practical level, we found many of his concepts rather too abstract and technical. For us, as education practitioners who unfailingly seek 'pedagogical implications' in almost every line of enquiry, Chen's concepts sometimes do not appear grounded and workable enough and are, thus, difficult to translate at the classroom level.

We were, undoubtedly, fascinated by the ideas and principles that Chen put forward in the book: they were intellectually stimulating and thought provoking, as they unsettle and problematize the taken-for-granted sources and conditions of knowledge production. Through his key notions of 'deimperialization', 'decolonization' and 'de-cold war', Chen highlights the urgency of 'breaking free' from the hegemonic imagination, providing his readers with a sense of empowerment. Yet, as the journey continued, we became increasingly aware of the complexity that we were striving for. It was not simply a matter of drawing a line between 'East' and 'West' or 'Self' and 'Other'. Suddenly, what once marked our sense of 'pride' as we rediscovered the wealth of our own 'local wisdoms' became the very object of our scrutiny and made us alarmed, for we might be seen as provoking a sentiment of 'nativism'. We became critical of ourselves. Moreover, as we delved deeper into Chen's theoretical constructs, the tensions and dilemmas of working with his ideas became more apparent. While fully acknowledging the powerful analytical device that Chen offers, we also realize that his ideas and notion of

'Asia' do not always speak to the Indonesian context. As an example, we could hardly relate to his 'de-cold war' concept, as, historically, Indonesia was not directly involved in this. Thus, we feel disconnected. Additionally, the book project's requirement to intensively and extensively work with Chen's ideas sometimes placed us under constraint, as it tends to treat Chen as the sole point of reference.

Needless to say, the benefits of joining in this book project far outweigh the difficulties. Engaging with Chen's line of thought *does* provide us with a sense of empowerment and opens up our horizons. It also proves to be a powerful device with which to analyse our data, giving a different dimension to our interpretations. Inarguably, writing this chapter was a fruitful scholarly engagement and a worthwhile endeavour.

## Notes

- 1 Chen (2010) believes that globalization is capital driven and can 'seek to penetrate and colonize all spaces on the earth with unchecked freedom eroding national frontiers, integrating previously unintegrated zones' (p. 4).
- 2 Heyward uses the term 'culture' to refer to 'societal culture which underlies distinctive values of Indonesian society' (2009, p. 7).
- 3 *Musyawaharah untuk mufakat* literally means the act of negotiating to achieve a consensus. This is often considered to be a democratic manifestation to achieve conflict resolution. However, it can also represent 'submissive acceptance of the wants and wishes of people of higher status, to force cooperation and passive avoidance' (Noel, 2008, p. 12).
- 4 Soeharto's political practice followed the monarchy concept, in that the state was ruled as a great, imaginary Javanese kingdom. He patronized loyal people and punished those who were considered too critical, as they could endanger social harmony (cf. Sarsito, 2006).
- 5 Etymologically, *bapakisme* comes from the word *bapak*, which means father. Originally it was a political practice to make the father (Soeharto, a former Indonesian president) pleased. Later on, it came to be translated as anything that makes a superior contented.

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## **7 Problematizing the ‘East–West dichotomy’ through the language practices and values of young English-language teacher trainees in Vietnam**

*Hai Ha Vu and Thuy Linh Le*

Teaching is the noblest profession of all.

(Pham Van Dong, ex-prime minister of Vietnam)

In a country with traditional proverbs such as ‘One who teaches you a word is your teacher, one who teaches you half a word is also your teacher’, teaching has always been associated with concepts of ‘admirable’, ‘noble’ and ‘respectable’. It is particularly true for teachers of the English language in today’s Vietnam. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the end of the cold war and the recent trends of globalization, English has gradually replaced Russian as the most popular foreign language in this country, with a series of official documents and decrees to officially acknowledge its role and status (Phan, 2008, p. 83). As English gradually becomes the language of educational opportunities and employment prospects, on a larger scale and at an official level (see Vo, 1994; Le, 1999, 2012; Phan, 2008, for instance), it offers teachers of English in Vietnam a wealth of opportunities and plenty of socio-economic advantages over their counterparts and many other professions today.

On the other hand, much has been written about neo-imperialism, which embraces the skilful deployment of economic, cultural and political powers to exert its indirect but growing influence over other countries (Pennycook, 1994; Tsui and Tollefson, 2007; Chen, 2010). In this new discourse, language has been put at the forefront, particularly the confrontation between the ‘national language’ and the rise of English, the latter aligned with inevitable globalization (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 2003; Tsui and Tollefson, 2007; Phan, 2009). Moreover, as no language is neutral, learning and teaching English not only promote a foreign language per se, but also open the floodgates to a wealth of ‘alien’ values, which might have considerable impact on the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of its learners (Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 2003; Finegan, 2004, p. 559; Phan, 2008). Grave concerns have, indeed, been raised about the ‘Westernization’

(Hitchcock, 1994, p. 6; Pennycook, 1994, p. 247; Turner and Khondker, 2010, p. 19; Tong and Cheung, 2011, p. 56) of, not only the language, but also the values of young Vietnamese people, as will be specifically addressed in the subsequent discussion.

This new discourse, along with the social sentiments it embraces, has presented Vietnamese teachers of English with the dilemmas caused by the distinctions between the Vietnamese and English languages and traditional and modern values, all of which are embedded in the prevalent 'East' and 'West' dichotomy. As it seems impossible to avoid, or remain neutral in the face of, such binaries, resolving these dilemmas becomes critical for any English language teacher trainee in Vietnam, who has learned Vietnamese since his or her birth but is now trained to employ and extend the English language and, thereby, the Western values it embodies, in their engagements with future generations. Chen's concept of *Asia as method* (2010) provides a possible resolution to these dilemmas. This chapter offers further arguments and explains how his ideas have been deployed to address the East–West dichotomy in two projects, with different emphases on the tensions of (English–Vietnamese) languages and (East–West) values.

### **The concept of *Asia as method***

Although many educational and cultural studies have referred to the West as the 'cradle of world knowledge' (see Connell, 2007; Holiday, 2011), Chen's (2010) book, *Asia as Method*, highlights inter-referencing among Asian and Third World countries to de-centre ourselves from an obsession with the West and Western knowledge, cultures, theories and epistemologies (p. 223). In dealing with this tenacious problem, Chen suggests, 'a move toward Asia as a possible way of shifting points of reference and breaking away from the East–West binary structure' (p. 212). *Asia as Method* is not deconstructing or eradicating West as method, but refers to West as offering an enriching body of knowledge, while also drawing on other points of reference to transform our subjectivities and worldview (p. 223). According to Chen, we should acknowledge the influential power of the West on Asian countries and explore the ways in which the West has been imagined and reimagined in local society (p. 217). In light of this conceptualization, the two case studies in this chapter illuminate how *Asia as method* has been articulated in the field of English-language education. Apart from the problematization of the East–West dichotomy, this paper also employs and explores some of the central concepts that have already been discussed in the Introduction chapter, particularly deimperialization, geo-colonial historical materialism, subjectivity, translation, base-entity and cultural imaginary.

### **Illustrative case study 1: empowerment or deculturalization? Young TESOL trainees and their code-switching practices**

The young generation born in the 1990s in Vietnam are coming of age among a growing apprehension in society and the media about their code-switching (see Myers-Scotton, 1993; Muysken, 1997; Auer, 1998; Bullock and Toribio, 2009) between English and Vietnamese languages at different linguistic levels. These practices are often perceived as the linguistic ‘invasion’ of English, with ‘distorted’ (Vũ, 2008), ‘puzzling’ (Cao, 2010; *Nguoi Lao Dong Online Newspaper*, 2010) and ‘perilous’ (Cao, 2010) impacts on their mother tongue. To pioneer a critical examination of the issue, this case study foregrounds the English-language teacher trainees born during this period, on the grounds that their immediate, as well as long-term, perceptions and actions towards this English-language interference could carry significant implications for English language education and language policies in Vietnam across time, space and identities. The project commenced with a questionnaire survey of 489 English-language teacher trainees of this generation, randomly selected from the biggest institution of English-language teacher training in Northern Vietnam. Based on their responses, fifteen ‘deviant/negative’ or ‘typical’ cases (Caracelli and Greene, 1993, cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 520) were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups that enquired into their perceptions regarding the code-switching practices of their generation. Within the limited space of this chapter, only qualitative data will be elaborated on, to demonstrate how code-switching could, in contrast to public perception, be seen as empowerment (i.e., as opposed to deculturalization), in light of Chen’s concept of Asia as method.

#### ***Code-switching as empowerment***

Most of the arguments against code-switching have been anchored with the West as a point of reference, whereby code-switching is treated as the ‘Westernization’ of the mother tongue. This view underlines the discourse of nationalism (see Bosworth, 2007, p. 64), which is particularly powerful in Vietnam owing to its sociohistorical relations with the West (Tran and Reid, 2006, p. 4). Language has been widely believed, historically, to trigger and accelerate the rise of a nationalist consciousness (Reid, 2003, p. 12; Anderson, 2006, pp. 37, 39; Simpson, 2007, p. 4); hence, it is unsurprising that switching between Vietnamese and English was categorically deplored as linguistic deculturalization and to be banished at all costs.

Asia as method, however, offers an alternative perspective on this linguistic trend by aligning itself with many other scholars’ problematization of a nationalistic consciousness (see Anderson, 2006; Bosworth, 2007, for instance). It goes further by pointing out the failure of nationalism in deimperialization, as well as unmasking its contribution to ‘internal colonialism’ in many Asian countries today (Chen, 2010, p. 84). In light of this argument, it

is necessary to look beyond the national walls erected by fervid nationalism and expand one's worldview to include heterogeneous horizons, through trans-border, regional and even intercontinental dialogues (p. 255), to see that linguistic interference is neither necessarily detrimental nor always resistible in today's world. Specifically, languages such as English, when integrated into Asian countries, have become 'Asianized' in different ways (Bianco, 2003, p. 35). In neighbouring and adjacent countries such as Singapore and China, the popularity of English-based Creoles such as Singlish and Chinglish (Simpson, 2007; Tsui and Tollefson, 2007; Kramer-Dahl, 2009; Tong and Cheung, 2011) attests to the remarkable endurance and significant values of these Creoles in the lived culture of the speakers, despite the negative social images with which they are often associated. In this dialogue, the 'base-entity' (Chen, 2010, p. 250) of Vietnam should be foregrounded: whereas British colonialism left significant imprints on the English-language practices in Singapore and parts of China, English as a foreign language did not permeate Vietnam through the door of colonization (Gayle, 1994, p. 286). It is, thus, necessary to highlight the recent discourse of globalization in relation to the code-switching practices in question, as well as the nationalism discourse problematized above.

Accordingly, the project (particularly its qualitative data) revealed four major thematic purposes of code-switching:

- 1 to empower a voice;
- 2 to serve as a pragmatic and cognitive convenience in recording and exchanging information;
- 3 to authenticate English-language acquisition among the disadvantaged; and
- 4 to construct, negotiate and struggle among multiple identities.

We first consider the use of code-switching as the empowerment of voice. Code-switching was believed to empower certain trainees to articulate what they might not dare or be able to say comfortably in a standard, single language, whether it was perceived personally or culturally, in English or Vietnamese. Linh and Mai, among other interviewees, attributed their language practices to this empowerment:

Up to now I'm still using English in my blog entries, because maybe English distinguishes between *I* and *you* only, which makes it easier to express our emotions and conceal something.

(Mai)

If I say that something is *đáng yêu* [i.e., *cute* in Vietnamese], I'll feel like difficult or something like that. If I say *ku-te* [i.e., *cute*, transliterated], I'll feel very comfortable, and if the hearer communes with us, it'll be fantastic. If they even find it humorous, it'll be even better.

(Linh)

From a nationalistic perspective, Linh might be quickly charged with attaching farcical humiliation to the mother tongue. However, when it was clarified in her interview that she, indeed, remained very critical of code-switching, even attempted to abort it, I ventured another explanation for her behaviour. Linh appeared to me to be a mature, experienced and rather steely person, or a 'tough survivor' (in her own words, after the interview), through her experience of many hardships and difficulties. Therefore, *đáng yêu*, a complimentary phrase with certain emotional and personal attachments, might be difficult for her to say comfortably in Vietnamese. This impression was confirmed by Linh in her second interview, as she revealed that she did not find it easy to open up to those with whom she was not familiar. Code-switching the phrase into a foreign language such as English seemed to offer her some distance from these connotations and lend her a more neutralized means to convey the compliment, and transliteration would act to downplay these possible sentiments by investing the phrase with humour. In a similar vein, when first- and second-person pronouns in Vietnamese abound and are, invariably, commensurate with the interlocutors' emotions, social roles and status (Trần, 1996, pp. 314–15), their simplicity and neutrality in English seemed to lend Mai a resolution to address a wider, often unknown, audience on the increasingly popular virtual space with ease and convenience. Together with other participants' responses, as these trainees switched between the languages, they also switched between the cultures these languages typically represent, to compensate for cultural gaps in each. In such a way, they could enrich their linguistic and cultural repertoires to the extent that their voices, an embodiment of the self, could be accommodated among multiple, emergent and changing discourses today.

### ***Nationalism and globalization as co-existent and complementary***

Underlying the linguistic debate above is an epistemological or worldview conflict, in which constructs of East and West are represented by forces of nationalism and globalization. As posited by the arguments above, the notion of linguistic fixity and the preservation of a 'pure' Vietnamese language are harboured by nationalism, whereas the rise of English could be said to be fuelled by globalization (Tsui and Tollefson, 2007, p. 1). English and Vietnamese, and globalization and nationalism, will be conceived as contradictory to, and precluding, each other in the discourse of 'West as method', provided that the notions of East and West are placed as polar opposites. It is here that the break from the easy East–West binary, as recommended by Chen in his concept of Asia as method, offers an alternative approach in which West and East are fused into each other, 'in a systematic, but never totalizing, way' (Chen, 2010, p. 223). Accordingly, it could be inferred from his claim that globalization and nationalism are not necessarily contradictory, but co-existent and, even, complementary at times.

Both the literature and findings of this case study seem to head in the same direction. From the literature, the integration of foreign linguistic elements

has been advocated from both a structural stance (Nguyễn et al., 2002, pp. 50–1, 128, 130; Le and O’Harrow, 2007, p. 434) and a sociocultural standpoint (Reid, 2003, p. 23; Le and O’Harrow, 2007, p. 428; Simpson, 2007, p. 17; Trần, 2007, pp. 224–6). This integration is to be seen, not as a threat, but as an empowerment of Vietnamese language at critical moments in history. In this case study, interviewees’ responses appeared polarized and, thus, mesh well with the East–West binaries notion. However, a ‘third space’ was also presented that did not align itself with either East or West in opposition. The project explored three major possibilities of how such a space could be constructed by the participants:

- 1 the reconceptualization of English as an empowerment of Vietnamese language (and vice versa);
- 2 the localization and personalization of English; and
- 3 the conception of English as not a threat to love and development of the Vietnamese language.

In the construction of their professional identity, these future English teachers would also work towards a construction of a similar third space in their English-language classroom, where code-switching is accommodated but should be circumscribed, as this participant suggested:

I am a teacher-to-be so to speak. I must act somehow to set an example to others, and only when I am not ashamed of myself, not embarrassed about myself can I teach others . . . I think we should create a space for my students to enjoy (code-switching). However, through the printed media and TV, books and the teachers’ lecturers, I believe that we could minimize its [code-switching’s] damages.

(Kim Anh)

It is here that the identity of being a language *teacher*, largely characterized by professional identity and institutional discourse, could become more salient and override that of a language *user* when they become an English-language teacher – again, not to eradicate but to create necessary ‘pull forces’ to counterbalance the hegemony of English and globalization. Together, they point to a prevalent third space that would have never been accommodated or justified within the framework of ‘West as method’.

As illustrated above, Chen’s Asia as method had been particularly useful for the study in offering an alternative approach to code-switching, as not a threat but as an empowerment for the rising group of bilinguals in Vietnam today. It also problematizes the commonly perceived East versus West, English versus Vietnamese, globalization versus nationalism dichotomies, rendering them misleading and simplistic when drawing on binary oppositions. It puts forward a possible third space to accommodate these ‘Englishized’ language practices, inside and outside the language classroom.

## **Illustrative case study 2: 'teachers as moral guides' in the perceptions of Vietnamese TESOL teacher trainers and trainees**

As far as English-language education is concerned, in her analysis of Chen's *Asia as Method*, Lin (2012) reconfirms that, 'most countries are still suffering from the aftermath of colonialization at the cultural and subjective level' and 'what is most problematic about this colonized state is that these deep rooted desires, attitudes and beliefs and cultural imaginaries are often unconscious' (p. 158). Vietnam is not an exception. Chen (2010) sees English as 'the language of the colonial in the non-English speaking part of Asia', and, thus, 'those countries who have adopted it are viewed by others as much too colonized' (p. 213). In support of this, Lin (2012) agrees that, 'the myths about the superiority of the colonizer's language and the beauty of English-native-speaker speech are still with us even in post-colonial days' (Luk, 2001, and Luk and Lin, 2006, cited in Lin, 2012, p. 158). As Vietnam is a post-colonial nation, this case study about Vietnamese teachers of English heeds this discourse.

In addition, the common theme running through the recent discussions of English as an international language (EIL) has indicated its influential power on language learners and teachers in many ways (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Kubota, 1998; Canagarajah, 1999; McKay, 2002; Phan, 2008, 2009). More specifically, EIL has a powerful role in making critical changes in the sociocultural and educational aspect of any society. This is especially prevalent among students and teachers, considering the contribution of EIL to the construction of its users' identities (McKay, 2002; Phan, 2008; Tran and Walter, 2010). Thus, the threat of EIL's language and values, in tandem with globalization (Tsui and Tollefson, 2007, p.1), to national identities and traditional/cultural values, particularly for those on the periphery, should be analysed. With reference to Chen's *Asia as method*, it is, possibly, a part of the decolonization and deimperialization project to reinvestigate and reconstruct the cultural imaginary about the 'imaginary West' by using an alternative perspective to see the imaginary West as a cultural resource, rather than an opposing entity (Chen, 2010, p. 223). Within the field of English-language education, Lin points out that using *Asia as method* means: 'regaining the agency and confidence to developing indigenous theories and knowledge suitable for our own context, not necessarily relying on applying imported Western theories, though we might be actively modifying and adapting them' (Lin, 2012, p. 175).

On this ground, the previous case study problematizes an East–West dichotomy through language practices with regard to the Englishization of Vietnamese TESOL trainees. The second case study illustrates the translation of 'teachers as moral guides' through the negotiation of values associated with the informants' English-language teaching and learning. This was part of a larger, longitudinal, qualitative case study conducted with twelve Vietnamese

TESOL trainee teachers and five teacher educators in Vietnam, about their perceptions of teachers as moral guides and the national/cultural identity of Vietnamese teachers (Phan, 2008). It focused on examining the reconstructed meaning of this professional/national identity in relation to EIL, in conjunction with globalization. The data collection process involved a three-stage sequence – guided journal writing/semi-structured individual interview (before practicum); 4–6-weekly diaries collected through email correspondence (during practicum); and individual, in-depth interviews (after practicum). Individual, in-depth interviews were done with both teacher educators and student teachers at the final stage. Pseudonyms and abbreviations of ST (student teacher/teacher trainee) and TE (teacher educator/teacher trainer) were provided. This case study first presents inter-referencing in the theoretical section to illustrate the break away from the ‘binarization’ of East and West (Chen, 2010). Then, it focuses on the tension of EIL learning and teaching (ELLT) for the identities and values of the informants by referring to Asia as method as an analytical tool.

### ***Theoretical perspective: a shift in point of reference***

Investigating the reconstructed identity of Vietnamese teachers as moral guides and its meaning in the practice of EIL teaching and learning, this project has gone beyond the framework in which the West is located as the point of reference or the point of opposition (Chen, 2010, p.222). The theoretical framework of this case study has been built up by cross-referencing knowledge from the West and non-West and invokes a multiplicity of theories about identity and identity formation to, consequently, reference the relationship between teacher identity and teacher morality in connection with ELLT.

### ***Identity and identity formation***

Among the varied multitude of literature on identity emanating from the West, there is one shared meaning: identity is not a fixed and coherent attribute of an individual, but is constant, changing, conflicting, multiple, relational in nature and negotiated through language and other forms of social interaction (see, for example, Hall and Du Gay, 1996; Jenkins, 2004; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Reeves, 2009). Informed by Chen’s *Asia as Method*, we turned our points of reference to Asian contexts and authors, among which a harmonized combination of Western and Vietnamese scholarship on identity by Phan (2008), a post-colonial scholar, was found. In her work, identity is described as multiple, dynamic, unstable and hybrid, not just changing and fragmented. It is continuous, fluid and connected, with a sense of belonging that, together with it, creates dynamic change within a wholeness (p. 193). Associating ‘the being’ with national and cultural identity, she suggests it is the ‘core’ identity, existing in the multiple and contradictory identities and upon which other identities will be constructed, that constitutes ‘the becoming’. In this study,

Phan has offered a critical and comprehensive dimension of looking at TESOL teacher identities from a multiple approach, using different theoretical resources. Phan's approach has contributed significantly to a harmonious understanding of teacher identities between essentialists and non-essentialists in the current debates around the discourse of identity.

### *Teacher identity and morality*

The relationship between morality and teacher identity has been examined in conversations between Asian and Western authors. Recent studies from the West about the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching have emphasized the role of teachers as pedagogical experts (Beijaard et al., 2000), as moral agents/exemplars (Festermatcher, 1990; Strike and Ternasky, 1993; Beyer, 1997; Campbell, 1997; Maslovaty, 2000; Johnston, 2003; Whitney, 2003) and/or as role models/moral guides (Festermatcher, 1990). Thus, the role of teachers in developing the students' morality is implanted in language teachers. The moral influence of teachers' personality and conduct on students' development (Carr, 2000, Campbell, 2008a, 2008b) is also reinforced. However, these studies were all about Western teachers.

Taking this point forward to Asia and Third World countries, insight into morality and its role in the formation of teacher identity is found in the work of Phan and colleagues (Phan and Phan, 2006; Phan, 2008; Phan et al., 2011) and other scholars (such as Campbell, 1996; Carr, 2000; Goodwyn, 2005). 'Morality' is acknowledged 'as an essential element in the construction of teacher identity and the teaching profession in Vietnam' (Phan, 2008, p. 5). As teachers, no matter what subjects they teach or what level they work at, they are expected to demonstrate their morality in all settings. 'Teacher as moral guide' has become a professional identity of Vietnamese teachers, and, more remarkably, it has been theoretically and empirically proven to be the 'core' identity embedded in the multiple and even contradictory identities of Vietnamese teachers (see Phan and Phan, 2006; Nguyen, 2008; Phan, 2008; Phan et al., 2011). Meanwhile, many other studies from and about Western teachers show limited recognition of the moral influence of teachers' personality and conduct on students' development (see Carr, 2000).

### *Teachers as moral guides – a negotiation of values*

Data from the larger study have confirmed previous studies' results (see Phan et al., 2011) showing that teacher morality is an essential element in shaping Vietnamese teachers' identity. The 'teacher as a moral guide' is perceived as the one who practises and educates about morality through the model of their own behaviour. However, the data show that this traditional role and 'core identity' are being translated to a different level through the participants' confrontation with exotic values from the imaginary West and through their

negotiation between modern and traditional values, and between Western and national values, in relation to ELLT.

For instance, discussing the morality and moral-guidance roles of teachers, the participants referred to the hegemonic values of the ‘imaginary West’ as an influence on their ways of thinking in general and their views about the moral issue in particular. In most of their accounts, the Western values and cultures embedded in ELLT seem to be idealized. One informant held an illusion about a ‘free and open-minded Western society’ and referred to the West as a system of reference or as an object to learn from. This example reflects Chen’s argument for the West as subject of nationalist discourse. Similarly, some of the other informants alluded to the values of the ‘imaginary West’ as empowering in their self-formation and transformation. Their imagination of the West has, to some extent, transformed their subjectivities, which may lead to the transformation of values in the base entity as a result: ‘When learning English, we talk about very open topics . . . it is so interesting. . . . Our opinions about such issues as cohabitation or unwed mothers . . . are less stringent and more open’ (Hoa, ST).

In their perceptions, the ‘West’ and Western cultures were considered objects to learn from.

The informants’ perceptions of the significant role of EIL in the construction of their identities present the risk and the problem of neo-liberal imperialism, as suggested by Chen (2010, p. 82). EIL, an embodiment of globalization, is likely to lead to changes in tradition or be seen as a threat to local values and identities. This is reflected in the participants’ opinions about the scenario of a teacher who was a single mother, as follows:

I think, a single mum teacher in the modern society is not very much criticized as it was in the past . . . uh . . . previously, such kind of teacher was denounced and condemned by the community. But the people today are more open-minded and tolerant, they do not judge teachers in that strict way . . . I won’t judge too much.

(Quyen, ST)

However, the informants tried to distance themselves from societal concerns when constructing their identity position.

We are living in Eastern country and we should follow the Eastern culture. Sometimes we face the dilemma in the modern time we need to choose what to follow. For example, if a teacher has a baby without marriage, I think it was not acceptable from the very old day, it is not good for any girls, so the teacher should be the model for the student to follow.

(Chi, ST)

This account shows an attempt to create a space for negotiating modern and traditional values and exotic values and local values. It is in this space that

East and West values are connected, with due note of other referencing (Hall, 1992a, cited in Chen, 2010, p. 99).

Another informant, an experienced teacher of English who was aware of the West hegemony, demonstrated his dissatisfaction with this by offering a solution through the development of 'critical thinking'. To him, critical thinking might be a means of reconstructing the imaginary West as an advantage, to enrich one's knowledge and values, without losing one's identity. As suggested, this 'advantage' depends on the attitudes of the receivers or consumers. This sentiment echoes Chen's emphasis on the utilization of multiple references to transform our subjectivity and to move away from the easy, binary East–West proposition: 'We need to learn not only from Western countries but also from other non-Western countries if we find something, which is appropriate, which is necessary for our own culture' (Khanh, TE).

In a similar vein, another informant believed that Vietnamese teacher identity and morality should be constructed with proper reference to Western values, but with local/national values remaining dominant:

With regards to morality, I think that teachers must be a model, an exemplar in their behaviors, their conducts in their workplace. They can have modern style but must behave in the way teachers are supposed to. Although they can be Westernized, I mean, dynamic, mobile and modern . . . they must hold up the standards for Vietnamese teachers. They should not lose the core identity of the Vietnamese teachers.

(Bach, TE)

The sense of belonging can also be seen in relation to emotional aspects, as presented in the following account by a teacher trainer:

You know I think when I speak English just simply because my interlocutor does not know Vietnamese, and I don't know their mother tongue, so English in this case becomes instrumental. It is just a medium of communication . . . a medium. But when I speak Vietnamese, I speak with my soul; I speak Vietnamese, my mother tongue with my soul, my heart. For English, this never happens. I cannot speak English, another language with my soul and with my heart.

(Khanh, TE)

Thus, no matter how beneficial and influential EIL is on the construction of their multiple and contradictory identities, the 'being' exemplifying the core identity of a Vietnamese person is, essentially, associated with Vietnam's national language and moral values. This denotes the clear sense of belonging or local attachment among the informants, as discussed in Hall (1997) and Phan (2008). It is here that the teachers' identities are shaped through the negotiation of the informants' own values, imported values and traditional values. Through their opposition and their references to others' and Western

values, the construction of Vietnamese TESOL teachers' identities is driven by their ELLT and their imagination of the West. However, it is here that the West is regarded as an inclusive element in the construction of the identity of 'teachers as moral guides', but does not fully constitute it.

### *The translation in meaning of 'teachers as moral guides'*

'Translation' is one central tenet in Chen's Asia as method and it invites us to explore 'the ways in which aspects of modernity are articulated to the existing social formation' (p. 244). In general, the informants in this case study seemed to both identify with and distance themselves from the conventional role of teacher as moral guide. They identified this role as a significant one, but found it a challenge, and even a tension, to wear this 'hat' in all settings. For them, 'teachers as moral guides', as the core identity of Vietnamese teachers, was reconstructed at the intersection of base-entity values and exotic/Western values. In globalization, teachers have more challenges and pressures – for example, the stresses of low pay and the prominence of exotic values.

Sometimes I feel very disappointed especially, in economically developing countries, teachers' salaries are not enough to survive, and sometimes this distract my intention, my energy from teaching. Like it or not I have to think about my life, my own life and my family life . . . because I have children to support, so like it or not I have to spend some of my time doing moonlighting on second job for additional income.

(Khanh, TE)

It appears that the identity of Vietnamese teachers as moral guides is recreated and transformed in line with social changes. Currently, apart from being able to deal with socio-economic changes, teachers should be capable of adapting their morality to the development of the modern society, but still keeping core values. The reconstructed meaning of 'teachers as moral guides' is now associated more with the roles of EIL teachers in teaching moral and cultural values to produce 'world citizens' (Birch, 2010; Chen, 2010).

The fundamentals of morality are perceived as unchanged, referring to certain fixed attributes inside a teacher; the most important attributes in a teacher are being 'inspiring, passionate, caring, fair and respectful to their students'.

Modernity has introduced changes to the 'moral guiding roles' of Vietnamese teachers. There is more concern about teachers' knowledge, manners and behaviours in the classroom rather than outside, and in their own social lives. Teachers, themselves, expect certain space for freedom in their personal lives as individuals.

Negotiation of values is, currently, considered one of the moral roles of English-teaching professionals. The meaning of 'teachers as moral guides', accordingly, is transformed into 'critical moral guides'. The teacher as a

'critical moral guide' must be prepared and able to balance the traditional and the modern, the local and the global values in such a way that it can enrich their own cultures, and yet maintain identities. Additionally, they should be conscious of cultural imaginaries and cultural differences and decolonize themselves from the East–West binary by being able to multiply their frames of reference in their teaching and in performing their roles. This also informs curriculum and language policymakers when developing English teaching materials and defining the moral roles of EIL teachers in the current milieu.

Asia as method has not only helped to eliminate anxiety about not referring to 'Western' knowledge and cultural imaginaries as the focal point of reference, but has also provided a substantial analytical tool to explore the translation of values and subjectivities and to raise awareness of using Western values to enrich cultural values of the base-entity. This case study has partly illuminated how the local meaning of 'teachers as moral guides' has been translated in relation to ELLT and the globalization process in contemporary Vietnam, through the perceptions of TESOL Vietnamese teacher trainers and trainees. Throughout the material, the colonized state or neo-imperialism (Chen, 2010) is found to still exist and be influential on the identity development of the informants. However, it is shown that the combination of the informants' local values and their ideas about the imaginary West has reconstructed their epistemology and transformed their subjectivities, leading to the translation of values and indigenous meaning of 'teachers as moral guides'.

## **Conclusion**

The two case studies covered in this chapter revolve around dissimilar social concerns and draw on different concepts that Chen embraces in his concept of Asia as method; notwithstanding, they could be subsumed under the same discussion for three main reasons. First, they both foreground English-language teacher trainees as a critical group for their direct exposure and continuous navigation, both as students and teachers, between the languages and values of Vietnam and those of the West. Second, although language and values constitute the focus of each case study, respectively, they are indeed intertwined, owing to the cultural politics of English-language learning and teaching, as well as the forces of nationalism and globalization these languages represent. Most importantly, both cases fasten on multiple notions in Chen's work that elaborate on Asia as method as neither a total reliance on the West as a primary point of reference nor a joyous celebration of Asian wisdom. Either of these would result in being boxed within the East–West dichotomy, which Chen forcefully cautions against. Rather, whether it is the language of the young generation or the changing perceptions of morality among the teachers-to-be, Asia as method constitutes attempts to translate and employ multiple points of reference to enquire into local situations, to see that the discourse of Asia in general, and Vietnam in particular, has never been

detached from issues of colonization, imperialism and the cold war. Such attempts to address and resolve these issues, as this single chapter and the whole book indicate, are never straightforward, nor complete. They are not straightforward: the common fallacies of clinging to the West as superior or returning to 'the root', with excessive nationalism, have been refuted throughout the chapter. They are, also, incomplete: any conclusion drawn from the two case studies so far is, and should be, subject to changes, debates and contestations across time and space, as Chen's notion of geo-colonial historical materialism and critical syncretism underlines. Asia as method is not, and should not be, taken as a purely Western or Asia-centric concept or as a universal truth, but as a culturally specific, negotiated concept that empowers Asia and Asian nations and brings them into an ongoing, open and critical conversation with themselves and with the world.

### **Reflective section**

Before reading Chen's book and participating in the Asia as method project, our backgrounds as English-language teacher trainers and novice researchers had been largely shaped by the East–West dichotomy, deeply entrenched in our educational experiences as well as lived cultures. As researchers, we often found ourselves examining local phenomena through the eyes of Westerners and ended up either criticizing or indulging ourselves with impractical solutions, which might be totally socioculturally incompatible with the local base-entities. As such, we were deeply caught in the dilemma of East and West ourselves, whereas contemporary linguistic, cultural and professional issues (such as those addressed in our chapter) have coerced us to confront it as active and critical participants in the world.

This is where Chen's discussion came in handy for our thorny dilemma, though not necessarily in a straightforward manner. In our early readings and premature conceptions of Asia as method, we falsely conceived of Chen's ideas as resistance to the West by an absolute return to the East. Therefore, we committed the intellectual misjudgement of relying on the nationalism, nativism and civilizationism Chen warns against so compellingly.

Our (re)conceptualization of Chen's work did not witness radical transformations until we re-engaged with his work, as well as attended further workshops and seminars concerning the project, in earnest. It dawned on us that East and West should be unpacked as social, cultural and political constructs (underlying Chen's approach of geo-colonial historical materialism), not to be rejected, but to be continuously and critically challenged. The East needs to turn to itself and attend to all the diversities, complexities, particularities and interrelations very much overlooked by its frequent obsession with the West. Hence, we take seriously Chen's endorsement of comparative studies about the ways in which the West has been imagined and reimagined in the local society, not to emphasize difference from the West, but to assess how aspects of the West have become internal to Asia's

base-entities. This understanding provided a substantial analytical tool for our studies, in which we strived for multiple and more diverse frames of reference. Though our discussion will attract further criticisms and debates, it should not be denied that such multiplicity, inspired by Chen's work, would do justice to postmodern research enquiries by breaking new ground for further discussions on complex linguistic, social and cultural changes in Asia and Vietnam today.

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## **8 Doing educational research in Bangladesh**

### **Challenges in applying Western research methodology**

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#### **Introduction**

Research methods are closely linked to specific cultures (Kee, 2004). Recognition of cultural values in the knowledge generation process is important if researchers are to produce culturally diverse interpretations of reality that facilitate meaningful progression. Asian scholars often depend on Western theories for understanding issues and creating knowledge in their own contexts (Papoutsaki, 2006). Many scholars relate this influence of the West on the non-West to neocolonization (Nguyen et al., 2009), neo-imperialism (Balogh, 1962) and globalization (Rizvi, 2004; Campbell, 2012). Scholars also see this influence as a unidirectional cultural flow, from ‘the West’ to ‘the Rest’ (Rizvi, 2004, p. 159). Such Western influences on knowledge-generating practices often pose challenges for researchers from non-Western, particularly Asian, contexts when they employ Western methodologies in their own contexts.

These challenges are embedded in differences in cultural values, beliefs and norms, as well as differences in orientation to research, because each society is unique in character and has specific knowledge needs that are culturally appropriate. Societal and local knowledge is, essentially, a contributory factor if research is to be locally appropriate and globally acceptable (Ma Rhea, 2004). Therefore, research in a particular locality needs to reflect local societal or contextual knowledge (Papoutsaki, 2006). In this chapter, we present our reflections on some challenges that we encountered in conducting educational research using Western methodology in the Asian context of Bangladesh. There is a paucity of context-specific information regarding such challenges, but Chen’s (2010) call for Asia as method, discussed in the following section, provides important insights into our reflections. The experiences shared in this chapter might be used as a point of reference for future research to be conducted using Western methodology in an Asian context.

This chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of Chen's (2010) book, *Asia as Method*. It then describes the educational research context in Bangladesh, which is followed by a discussion of the specific challenges that we faced in the research field.

### **Asia as method**

Asia as method, as proposed by Chen (2010), is an attempt to move forward on the trilateral challenges of decolonization, deimperialization and de-cold war.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the complex, related structures of imperialization, colonization and the cold war have shaped and conditioned intellectual knowledge production all over the world, in what could be called the hegemony of the West over world knowledge. We acknowledge that aspects of our lives in Asia, including education, have, indeed, been influenced by colonization, globalization (Thaman, 2007; Tsui and Tollefson, 2007 ) and the cold war as part of the current world economy and politics. As Chen (2010) asserts, our national and regional psyches, as well as knowledge production, have been shaped by these influences. In the process, the West has presented itself to other parts of the world as the sole authority or standard in knowledge generation. In Asia, as Chen states:

The West has performed different functions in nationalist discourses. It has been an opposing entity, a system of reference, an object from which to learn, a point of measurement, a goal to catch up with, an intimate enemy, and sometimes an alibi for serious discussion and action.

(Chen, 2010, p. 216)

Chen explained that the 'West as method' has become dominant over the past few centuries, resulting in certain response strategies by Asian scholars. As Chen notes, Asia as method is:

a critical proposition to transform the existing knowledge structure and at the same time to transform ourselves. The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history.

(Chen, 2010, p. 212)

Chen asserts that Asia as method, by using Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, offers potential for societies in Asia to become each other's point of reference and to understand each party's problems better. This seems a very

good proposition; however, as Chen admits, Asia is not geographically or politically well defined. For instance, school textbooks in Bangladesh present the Middle East as a part of Asia, whereas Australia is not. However, in the current political context, Middle Eastern people do not consider themselves as Asian, whereas Australia wants to be considered part of Asia. Considering the historical political context of each part of Asia can be problematic too: Bangladesh or India has a very different historical–political background compared with Japan or China. In this situation, which part of Asia can be considered an anchoring point?

Chen asks for more dialogue among Asian scholars in Asia. Although pointing out the difficulties in doing this, he offers no practical solutions. One obvious difficulty arises because of imbalances in power, development and size among nation-states. For example, it is challenging to use Japan as a point of reference in educational research for Bangladesh. To us, Japan is as different from Bangladesh as, for example, the UK or US, because of its economic and historical standpoint. We are more drawn to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka or Nepal as points of reference, because of our similar historical past and educational practices, as well as similarities in research approaches that are influenced by both Western knowledge and the local culture. There is, therefore, a need for negotiation between Western methodology and local sociocultural phenomena when conducting educational research in a local context.

We have indicated that we encountered research challenges in conducting educational research in a non-West context and met them by integrating local sociocultural practices with Western research approaches. This practice of integration can be considered a point of reference for similar contexts. It may also provide insights into Western-led research practice in non-West contexts.

## **Education and the educational research context in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh, a developing country, belongs to the South Asian region. Along with other parts of South Asia, Bangladesh (formerly part of the Indian subcontinent) was a British colony from 1757 to 1947. During this ruling period, a British education model was introduced in the Indian subcontinent by the colonizers, based on Wood's Despatch (1854; see Ghosh, 1975), which recommended an improved education system for the entire subcontinent. In independent Bangladesh (after 1971), education reform has been largely informed by the British-dominated education system. Since colonization, authorities have inspected schools in Bangladesh using methods that create a climate of suspicion and control. In our recent research experience in Bangladesh, we observed inspectors making unexpected school visits during which they observed teachers' classroom performance and sought to assess students' learning by asking some questions. These inspectors have the ultimate power over decisions on teachers' promotion, suspension or transfer and on school funding. Consequently, when we asked for information regarding the

school or teachers' teaching practices for our research purposes, respondents were sceptical about the intent behind the query and considered the research to be a type of inspection.

Educational research to produce local wisdom or locally suitable innovations has not been promoted in Bangladesh. Of the little research conducted in academic institutions, most is traditional in character and includes questionnaire surveys, short visits to schools and quantitative data and interpretation (Begum et al., 2002). Most education reform initiatives in the country have been supported by foreign aid agencies in association with the government. Our experiences suggest that the country relies heavily on organizations such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other UN organizations for most of its financial support and, therefore, is obliged to follow their recommended strategies for research, which might be designed simply to accomplish their agendas. These international organizations tend to set their own agendas, which are derived from Western expertise, knowledge and approaches. From working with many donor-funded research projects, we see that, in the implementation of educational innovation in Bangladesh, Western consultants tend to play the leading roles, with little or no knowledge about the cultural context of the country. Often, only superficial, small-scale studies are conducted prior to the implementation of imported innovations. Modifications that are made to consider the issue of 'cultural fit' lack sufficiency. As a consequence, the education system of Bangladesh enjoys few benefits from the reform or innovation endeavours. Instead, cultural imperialism continues to take place, in different forms, when international consultants with limited cross-cultural experiences of the locality become involved (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1996).

Vulliamy (1990) reported that evaluative studies conducted by the World Bank in non-Western countries are heavily influenced by traditional input-output research designs, which have been proved to be, nearly always, inefficient or misleading. That is, aid-assisted, de-contextualized education reform has not been performing well with regard to effecting real change in Bangladesh. Although quantitative techniques can bring some benefits to the developing countries by providing general information, they are not sufficient for developing in-depth knowledge, and yet major attainment in the education of Bangladesh is limited to quantitative expansion. For instance, there is a significant increase in student enrolment and in numbers of classrooms, schools and teachers. However, the quality is still far from achieving satisfactory levels (Ahmed et al., 2005; Malek et al., 2007).

In these circumstances, it is suggested that context-focused research, using a qualitative/constructivist approach, can be more efficient for generating contextual knowledge (Vulliamy et al., 1990) in a developing Asian country such as Bangladesh. Moreover, reliance on dialogue between researchers and consultants from both Western and non-Western contexts and emphasis on respect for cultural factors can contribute to real change (Crossley and Vulliamy, 1996) in the education sector in Bangladesh.

## **Challenges of using Western research methodology in the Bangladesh context**

This section presents some of the challenges we faced in conducting educational research in Bangladesh. We have reported our research experiences that focus on two major issues: What challenges did we encounter in collecting research data using Western methods? And, how did we address the challenges?

### ***Getting permission for collecting data***

'Ethics' are codes of professional conduct for researchers (Creswell, 2009). As a part of addressing the ethical issues in the research planning and implementation processes (Mertens, 1998), researchers may seek permission from the respective authorities who work as gatekeepers to the information. Consistent with this, we sought a general permission letter from the appropriate authorities in Bangladesh for our academic studies. The permission letter was to accompany an invitation to the target participants to voluntarily join each researcher's study. However, we faced challenges in obtaining this permission letter, as presented in the following cases, each of which pertains to different researchers' experiences.

#### *Case 1: slow bureaucratic process and doubt about information trafficking*

One of the challenges I faced in getting permission to collect data was the slow, bureaucratic process maintained in the administrative offices in Bangladesh. For example, to follow the required procedure, I prepared an application letter to the head of the office, a gatekeeper with the power to say 'yes' or 'no' to me. The application needed to be authorized by a director before proceeding to the head; however, despite being sent to many of the large number of directors in the administrative office, I had difficulty finding the appropriate director for the authorization. After several days, I located the appropriate director, but he had no time to listen to my request. Fortunately, after convincing his personal secretary, I was able to talk to him. After listening to my explanations about my intended research, the director expressed his doubts about 'information trafficking', as the research was being conducted with a foreign university. I explained that I was conducting this research for my academic purposes, and no foreign funding was associated with my research. Although the purpose and associated funding of my research were clearly described in my application for the permission letter, this did not seem to be sufficient. I felt that my verbal communication with the officer helped me considerably in obtaining his authorization and receiving the permission letter.

*Case 2: unwillingness to issue a permission letter*

I sent all the documents, including an explanatory statement of my intended research, to the person who was the key to providing access to study participants at the research sites. This person said that he was too busy to read the explanatory statement and issue a permission letter. I politely tried to convince him, by e-mails and later in person. Without reading any of my documents or listening to me, this person in authority made the decision not to issue the permission letter, which put me in trouble. Finally, I was able to obtain the necessary permission by convincing one of the friends of the key person, who, in turn, requested him to issue the permission letter.

According to Western research methodologies, although ethical issues are an important part of research, and gaining a permission letter from gatekeepers is one of the important ethical procedures (Mertens, 1998, 2005; Creswell, 2009), the above two cases demonstrate how this sort of procedure is far from straightforward in a non-Western context, where the concept of research is still in a very early stage. As can be seen, it is a challenge for academic researchers to obtain this sort of permission from the relevant authorities in Bangladesh. If a researcher relies on Western processes for obtaining permission from the relevant authority, they may face considerable difficulties: the researcher needs to understand local cultural practices and needs to apply local knowledge and culturally appropriate wisdom.

These two cases also exemplify how the slow bureaucratic process common in Bangladesh necessitates a huge amount of time and labour if one is to gain permission from gatekeepers. Case 1 further illustrates how a researcher from a foreign university might encounter additional challenges in getting access to research information. In Bangladesh, as in many developing nations, research in education or other social science arenas is often conducted using funds from different foreign agencies. In these circumstances, gatekeepers can be concerned about disclosing data that they believe might dissatisfy the fund providers, which might, in turn, impede foreign funding. Our practical experience suggests that they remain watchful about providing information that might be linked to their performance evaluation.

***Minimizing power relations***

Doing educational research involving human subjects (e.g., teachers, learners, etc.) is not a clearly defined process and can be full of complexity and obstacles. Consequently, researchers often need to be flexible in their research approach. Power relations are a part of this complexity that the researchers have to navigate. It is well documented in the literature (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005) that a researcher needs to negotiate power relations at different stages of a research process, from gaining access to setting the method, through data collection to report writing or publishing.

In this particular study, we consider two cases, as presented below, to describe how we dealt with power relations at different phases of our data collection.

*Case 3: recruiting and interviewing participants*

I found it testing to minimize power relations while collecting data. Coming from a well-known university, it was easy for me to recruit teachers to participate in my research. When I invited them to participate in my study, all of them agreed instantly, as a university teacher is seen as a higher authority. The problem was that some of them agreed to participate in the study because they did not want to disappoint me, although they were not really committed. To manage this aspect, I recruited more participants than I needed and then continued with those who were actually committed.

I had to build a rapport with teachers and students before conducting interviews. I was seen as a stranger to them at first (especially in the rural areas), because of my position in society. Even teachers were nervous about talking about the 'right' things, particularly when I talked about the values they promoted in the classroom. I used two simple strategies: first, I shared the facts that I was born and brought up in a remote and rural area, and that my father was a teacher too. Second, I started discussing very simple, everyday matters with teachers and students, before going deeper in the discussions.

*Case 4: gaining access to the research setting*

At the district level, the district education officer (DEO) was the first gatekeeper with authority to control my access to the research site I had chosen. Before gaining access, I had to discuss my role with the DEO based on a prior negotiation – first, as a university academic and an ex-national consultant, and then as a PhD researcher (being enrolled in a foreign university). On the first day of our meeting, the gatekeeper welcomed me formally owing to my previous roles, according to prevailing social and cultural norms. On the next morning, after completing the official procedure, the officer offered me a lift to the very first school. I accepted the offer happily, as I was entirely new and not familiar with travelling options. We were three persons in the car, including the person driving. On the way to the school, one sentence from our conversation caught my attention, which was, 'We will take you to a school which is not far from the guest house and also a good school; you can see some teachers are doing well after training' (translated from Bangla into English). Instantly, I realized the two 'noble' purposes of the authority. One was to save me from the discomfort of travelling in a rural area, a gesture of respect to my position and, perhaps, to the fact I am a woman. Another was to demonstrate to me how the particular school was a 'good' school, or particular teachers were 'good' teachers, because I was considered a

representative of a specific project relating to my previous position. They would have imagined that the school would receive the blessings of a good report by me. Having realized their intention, I became anxious about the possibility of receiving subjective or partial data. I started to work on my rapport with the gatekeeper, starting from a very informal level, to renegotiate my role in order to gain better access to valid data. My focus was to make them clear about the purpose of my presence and whether my work would have any impact (negative or positive) upon them and on the intended participants in the study. In this process, I tried to minimize my previous roles and establish a researcher's role that was entirely harmless to them. It took the first two or three days to build up a trusting relationship. By the end of the first-round visit, the gatekeeper welcomed me (perhaps) as a researcher.

As reflected in the above cases, the role of the researchers, as immediately perceived by the gatekeepers and participants, did shape their role or function, as was signalled in their responses or interactions with the researchers. This illustrates a long cultural tradition in which power relations or a bureaucratic hierarchy matter. This kind of bureaucracy, dominated by the state, symbolizes the continuation of a colonial legacy in non-Western societies (Haque, 1997) and generates an accountability mechanism for satisfying the 'authority'. As a result, the likelihood of unveiling the sought reality remains dubious, with seeds of uncertainty about receiving prejudiced research data clearly implanted in the researchers' minds. Therefore, the minimization of power-dependent relations was crucial for us to generate justifiable knowledge. The researcher had to play down her/his role for the purpose of getting reliable data. In turn, the gatekeepers renegotiated their role by giving up their 'hidden' objectives. Simply, dependence on explanatory statements and maintaining an objective role (by the researcher) to avoid possible bias was not successful in this context. Therefore, the researchers developed sensitivity to the enquiry process, instead of only employing a formally approved, 'correct' design. They valued the local context and adopted viable strategies by developing relationships with the research site and the gatekeepers.

### ***Recruiting intended participants***

Most of us have encountered challenges in recruiting intended participants, especially with purposive sampling. Here, we present one of our experiences related to this challenge.

#### *Case 5: a tendency to show the desirable picture*

I intended to capture different understandings/constructs of science values from teachers and students of various backgrounds, such as experienced/less-experienced teachers, male and female teachers, urban/rural teachers and students, classrooms from high-achieving/low-achieving schools, etc. One suitable method to get these varieties of participants is the maximum variation

sampling technique, in which a variety of cases are intentionally selected (Patton, 1990; Wellington, 2000; Flick, 2002). To recruit participants from various backgrounds, I first chose schools from rural and urban areas, high- and low-performing schools; I then wanted to select teachers and students with varied backgrounds and experiences. When I attempted to select an experienced teacher from an urban school, the head teacher insisted that I choose someone who he thought to be a good teacher. He was so assertive that I had to select a less-experienced teacher nominated by him. I experienced the same issue in the second school. To overcome this situation, I decided to contact and talk to the teachers first and then received permission from the head teachers. In this way, I was able to overcome the problem – I was able to recruit participants with varied backgrounds and experiences.

I faced similar challenges when recruiting the students for focus group discussions. The class teacher wanted high-performing students to participate, whereas I wanted to recruit students of different abilities and performance. So, I compromised with my plan; I recruited half of the required students nominated by the class teachers and then selected half of the required students according to my initial plan, to collect richer data. The same challenge was also experienced by another researcher, who implemented the same strategy.

From the above experiences, it is apparent that the gatekeepers at the schools (i.e., head teachers and teachers) wanted to nominate participants for research. The only explanation for their behaviour is that they wanted to show the outside world (researchers and others) that they were doing their job efficiently. Although we informed them that we would not mention their name or the institution's name, they were worried that their weaknesses would be exposed if we selected underperforming teachers and students, and they might get into trouble with parents and/or higher authorities. Their concerns/worries might be shaped by school inspection traditions in Bangladesh. As noted previously, since the British colonial period in Bangladesh, teachers' and schools' performances have been evaluated by school inspection personnel, who have the authority to make decisions about their job security and school funding.

### ***Using survey questionnaires***

Many of us confronted some challenges while administering survey questionnaires in the Bangladeshi context. Here, we present two of our cases.

#### *Case 6: informing participants of the terminologies used in the questionnaire*

I planned to use a questionnaire to get an overview of the implemented school science curriculum in Bangladesh from a scientific-literacy perspective. Because of the time-saving and economical benefits of mailed questionnaires (Creswell, 2008, 2009), I planned, initially, to mail the questionnaires to the

respondents. However, I reflected on how my conceptions of scientific literacy, shaped by Western literature, might be different from those of the teacher respondents in Bangladesh. Moreover, it was unlikely that they would be familiar with the term 'scientific literacy'. On the basis of these reflections, I changed my plan from using mailed questionnaires to arranging several workshops for in-service teachers. The workshops were designed in two phases. In the first phase, I presented a worldwide scenario of the school science curriculum from a scientific-literacy perspective and discussed the experiences of the science curriculum with the teachers from this perspective. In this manner, they were introduced to the terminology. In the second phase, teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire.

*Case 7: presenting the questionnaire according to the participants' background*

I used a Likert-type questionnaire, with the purpose of determining the attitudes of secondary students in Bangladesh towards science. In this quantitative study, I felt that the students might have problems with the concepts and questions regarding attitudes towards science, as the questionnaire I prepared was based on Western literature. As a first step, I translated the questionnaire into the participants' language (Bengali). In the data collection stage, I gave the questionnaires to the participants and read out and explained each question. I asked the participants to respond to each question after my explanation of each question. After the participants had returned all the questionnaires, I talked to each of the participants, to determine their opinion of the strategy I had followed. They provided positive feedback and they also said that this strategy helped them considerably in understanding the questions and in answering them.

Although the questionnaires in both these cases clearly stated that teachers'/students' own perspectives would be valued, and that there were no right or wrong answers, both the researchers noticed that the participants still seemed to want to search for the 'right'/'desirable'/'positively valued' answers. One explanation for this phenomenon might be – as is the case in many Asian countries – Bangladesh's examination-driven education system, where 'right' or 'wrong' answers are valued. In order to respond to this issue, both researchers started by discussing with the participants their intentions in using the questionnaire and their expectations of them as participants.

In these two cases, although the researchers had a perception that a clear statement of purpose in the questionnaire would be enough to notify participants about their roles, their physical presence allowed them to identify the respondents' tendency to want to provide a desirable answer, rather than expressing their own views. The researchers' verbal communication with the participants seemed sufficient to overcome this challenge.

Western methodologies suggest that a clear statement of purpose in questionnaires will be sufficient to elicit a voluntary response from intended

participants, and mailed questionnaires have much benefit in saving money and time, but the researchers found some uncertainties in obtaining valid data through these processes. As a result, the method of collecting data was a response to the challenges with which the researchers were confronted.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed the challenges in collecting research data in the context of Bangladesh, when following Western research approaches. The challenges included difficulties in getting permission from key authorities, recruiting intended participants, using survey questionnaires and minimizing power relations.

The scenarios presented in this chapter suggest a close relationship with our cultural colonial heritage and the influence of contemporary international politics. As mentioned, Bangladesh was a colony of the British Empire for nearly 200 years. This centuries-long colonization process has played a central role in moulding its culture, as reflected in everyday activities of its society. As we indicated above, the challenges we faced were mainly due to two possible reasons: (1) participants' and gatekeepers' limited ideas about research, and (2) fear of information trafficking. The participants and gatekeepers (e.g., directors and head teachers) involved in our studies viewed our research activities as an evaluation of their performance. Their experience has previously been limited to studies designed to evaluate the success or failure of projects implemented by government and funded by donor agencies. This may have led them to worry about associated consequences if their performance did not meet the projects' standards. This is, arguably, a legacy of our colonial past, wherein teachers' and schools' performances have been evaluated by visiting school inspectors. Teachers' attitudes may be influenced by this practice of evaluation, so that they become worried when asked to participate in research.

In our studies, we experienced that gatekeepers (e.g., the director general of the Ministry of Education) had little trust in us, because we were studying in Western universities. They feared that we might transfer important information to the West through our research, and that the information could be used against our national interest. We argue that their distrust of the West may also originate from our colonial past, when the British East India Company came to the Indian subcontinent for business purposes, but, later, started political activities, captured political power and ruled the Indian subcontinent for nearly 200 years. This fear of being ruled or deceived by foreigners consequently created general distrust of the West in people's minds. This distrust might be enhanced by the contemporary 'war on terror', which many Muslims around the world see as a war against Islam.

From the above discussion, we see that Bangladesh's colonial past and present global politics help shape people's attitudes towards research. Nonetheless, we, the authors of this chapter, take the position that it would

be difficult to avoid the domination of the West in knowledge production and transfer, because of its socio-economic and political supremacy. We also believe that knowledge cannot be located in a particular domain and controlled by any single actor: rather, knowledge is emergent and embedded in sociocultural processes (Styhre, 2003). As Chen (2010) argued, generating culturally grounded knowledge and research methodology in Asian contexts is a significant way to understand the sociocultural processes in Asia. However, it may take considerably more time, money and effort to produce culturally grounded knowledge and methodology in Asian contexts, on top of the difficulty of avoiding the influence of Western knowledge and methodology. We have already mentioned that Western knowledge presides over the world, owing to its socio-economic and political superiority, set against a backdrop of colonization, globalization and the cold war. Asian researchers like us have, in the past, built our knowledge by pursuing what the West suggests is important. In our research projects, we tried to apply Western approaches in Asian contexts, to extract knowledge that is situated locally. We faced numerous challenges, owing to the differences in the cultural and historical traditions of the West and Bangladesh. To address these challenges, we modified our Western approach to better suit the local values and cultures. That is, we negotiated our roles by instigating a dialogue between Western knowledge and the local reality or situation. This, in fact, facilitates a modified approach that is not exclusively Western, nor Asian, but where each complements the other. This is a cyclical process that follows the same path, but each time it makes and adds new knowledge to the world body of knowledge. We, therefore, need to initiate dialogue between the West and Asia to make Western research methodology more culturally appropriate in Asian contexts. In addition, we feel the need for dialogue among Asian scholars that might help Asian societies to use each other as reference points for understanding ourselves better and generating culturally appropriate knowledge in Asian contexts.

We would like to conclude this chapter with the argument that it is time to increase the number of meeting points for Asian scholars, especially in Asia, which is what Chen (2010) encourages Asian scholars to do. Thus, in line with Chen, Asia as method may become a common platform for scholars to think about Asia and their own worldviews, in line with their own sociocultural norms and values (Nguyen et al., 2009). Asia as method is, obviously, not a slogan but a practice, which begins with multiplying the sources of our research readings to include the knowledge produced in Asia. Asia as method is local, but also has the quality of being trans-border, trans-regional and even intercontinental. Finally, we firmly agree with Chen's (2010) assertion that one Asian society may benefit from another Asian society's experience of dealing with similar issues. We hope that our experience of applying Western research methodology in the Bangladesh context provides some important insights for researchers in similar contexts.

## **Reflection on the chapter**

### ***How was Chen's idea conceptualized by us?***

Though Chen's idea did not seem fully unfamiliar to us at the beginning, we found it difficult to conceptualize this 'slippery' notion of Asia as method. As we went through Chen's book, we became acquainted with many dimensions of his idea with which we were not, previously, familiar. As a result, we faced difficulties in getting a clear and coherent picture of Asia as method. When we presented our draft paper in a symposium, we found other groups of Asian researchers who, also, had struggled to come up with a sound and sharp picture of this idea. The processes of sharing, presentation, reviewing and reading articles on Chen's work written by other scholars helped us shape the idea better.

### ***What were the challenges we faced in using the concept?***

We felt that none of us belonged to this area of analysis/study. The main challenge was to interpret our experiences in light of Chen's idea. As noted previously, our education system was introduced by the British colonial power, and the system is still heavily influenced by Western practices, and we were educated in this de facto Western education system. Consequently, we grew up 'knowing' that Western knowledge is the authentic knowledge. Therefore, to interpret any event with a lens other than a Western-based lens was difficult for us.

### ***How Asia as method helps understanding in our research***

Our understanding of Asia as method has helped us to approach our own research differently. For instance, one of us had used (limited) Western literature to develop a conceptual understanding of 'scientific mindset' for his PhD research. After gaining some insights into Asia as method, he felt an urge to explore an Asian frame of reference to understand his research problem. As a result, he found a huge volume of literature from India, which has the same historical and cultural background as Bangladesh, on 'scientific mindset' and is now using those sources to construct meanings from his findings. Consequently, it was easy for the researcher to construct a better and more contextualized understanding of his central term through the broadened perspective Chen's work offered.

### ***Do we need to consider anything else?***

Chen emphasizes freeing our mind from the influence of colonization, imperialization and the cold war, as they are deeply rooted in many Asian contexts, eventually posing challenges for Asian scholars when they attempt

to move forward in their knowledge generation. In the context of Bangladesh, we would argue for considering other ways to liberate our minds and move forward. In particular, the influence of religious ideology plays a vital part in shaping people's mindset. For example, a considerable part of the population neither accepts Western knowledge nor tries to generate local knowledge. Instead, it relies on Islamic knowledge and continues a solely Islam-based education system in Bangladesh, adding another dimension to the East–West binary of Chen's critique.

## Note

- 1 The underlying concepts have been elaborated in Kenway's chapter, Chapter 1 of this volume.

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# 9 Against Asia-centric methods

## Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production

*Michael Singh*

### **Introduction**

The chapter offers many significant insights about the challenging possibilities for transcultural knowledge co-production. To do so, this study presents findings from Australia–China knowledge co-production made possible via the Research Oriented, School-Engaged Teacher–Researcher Education (ROSETE) curriculum at the University of Western Sydney. The first section of this chapter interrogates key insights from Chen’s (2010)<sup>1</sup> work, contributing to the debates over his questionable claims for Asia-centric methods. In situating this curriculum within the important debates relating to Chen’s work, I aim to further our work of reconstituting the scholarly disputation within the field of internationalizing (Euro-American) education. Following an exploration of the challenging possibilities for Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production, the key analysis section is grounded in the data from the ROSETE curriculum. The analysis has been structured to clearly address a series of interrelated curriculum questions (Lin, 2012).

In this chapter, I argue that the inconsistencies in Chen’s (2010) account, as opposed to the earlier arguments developed by Alatas (2006) and Connell (2007), provide a more important focus for the generative critiques that inform the ROSETE curriculum, which began to take form in 2005 (Singh, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, Singh and Sproats, 2005). In particular, Chen’s Asia-centric method aims ‘to generate a system of multiple reference points that can break away from the self-reproducing neocolonial framework that structures the trajectories and flow of desire’ (Chen, 2010, p. 101). However, this provides little ground for the revising design of the ROSETE curriculum, a curriculum that focuses on the more innovative task of the Australia–China co-production of theoretic–linguistic knowledge. Moreover, the idea of Asian inter-referencing gives little recognition to the historical role of the ‘East’ in directly informing Western research methods: for example, the history of the Islamic East that underwrites the development of Western science (see Lyons, 2009; Dallal, 2010; Belting, 2011; Freely, 2011; Beckwith, 2012). It may be that the ‘West as method’ is now the dominant condition of local/global knowledge production (Lin, 2012; Rhee, 2013). However, given the

considerable amount of evidence to the contrary, the assertion that the West led the world in knowledge production and knowledge transfer over the centuries is contestable. Claims that knowledge flows one way, from the West to Asia, are, similarly, questionable in light of substantial historical evidence that demonstrates otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Historical research indicates that knowledge flows are more often a multidirectional flow, both during the period of Western imperialism/colonialism and prior to this (Blaut, 1993; Cook, 2007). To ignore this important element of history means compromising the discourse of a one-way flow of knowledge into ‘Asia’ as a result of the anti-communist/anti-capitalist cold war, Western colonialism and Japanese and Taiwanese imperialism as harbingers of new forms of (inter-Asian) stratification and domination.

This chapter goes beyond making intra-Asia citations to creating joint ventures in developing Australian and Chinese capabilities for theory generation, to internationalizing as opposed to Westernizing education and to mapping curriculum possibilities for multiplying theoretical references points beyond the dominant Euro-American resources. Unfortunately, Chen does not clarify the meaning of, nor does he problematize, the term ‘Asia’; however, its ‘scope can be inferred from the many references made to East, South, and Southeast Asia more specifically’ (Ng, 2013, p. 90). Although Chen gestures toward Asian heterogeneity, Anderson observes that, ‘the Asian ecumene . . . is more or less reduced to Northeast Asia or Chinese East Asia’ (2012, p. 447). Although this Australia–China joint venture reminds us of the awkward Mediterranean term ‘Asia’, I see it as helping to make problematic the idea of Australia as not being Asian. First, Australia was initially colonised by non-Western peoples who came from South East Asia. Second, it was as a result of just 70 years of prohibition of non-Western immigrants settling this land that it became White’.

### **Questioning Asia-centric methods**

The chapter offers insights into the challenging possibilities for multiplying theoretical frames of reference (Alatas, 2006) through the transcultural co-production of theoretic–linguistic knowledge. In doing so, I go beyond limitations of Chen’s notion of ‘Asia as method [that is] multiplying the sources of our readings to include those produced in other parts of Asia’ (2010, p. 255). The problem is that this Asia-centric idea offers little chance for ‘breaking away from the East–West binary structure’ (Chen, 2010, p. 216). Chen’s discussion seems to be framed as a dichotomy: Taiwan versus the West, China versus the West, and Japan versus the West. Chen’s project for inter-referencing Asia is an effort to bring about ‘a higher and larger category [to] compete with the West . . . and to beat the West in cultural terms’ (2010, p. 92). His cultural strategy of generating ‘a system of multiple reference points’ (Chen, 2010, p. 101) is directed at redressing his concern ‘that non-Western civilizations may fall into the logic of colonial competition and

struggle over which represents the Other of the West' (Chen, 2010, p. 93). For Chen, critical syncretism is necessary to shift and to multiply objects of identification beyond 'China', 'India', 'Islam' and 'the Orient'. These structuring divisions can be breached. This makes possible alliances outside one's own limited frame of identity and place. Alliances have to be made outside the frame provided by the sentiments of nationalism and the horizon of ethnic identity. For Chen, the purpose here is to create an overarching struggle to compete with, and beat, the West. 'Suspension of national interest [as a] first and last priority' Chen (2010, p. 101) is developing Asia-centric, as opposed to worldly methods (Singh, 2013b).

Lin (2012, p. 167) argues that, 'we need to outgrow the binary categories of the West and the rest. . . . Then I no longer talk, think or construe the world in these binary categories'. Likewise, the task for us is to discover ways to break through this analytical impasse, rather than to conduct another critique, by reconsidering the history of transcultural knowledge exchange to establish how Australia–China knowledge co-production can be imagined and reimagined in various places over time (see Hobson, 2004; Cook, 2007; Zijlmans and van Damme, 2008; Dallal, 2010; Goody, 2010; Belting, 2011; Freely, 2011; Beckwith, 2012). Moving away from the West as the sole frame of reference for theorizing and critique does not make an exclusionary project such as intra-Asia intellectual inter-referencing viable.

These limitations arise owing to Chen's not explaining what the exclusionary agenda means for someone who studied for his Bachelor's degree at a Catholic university and undertook his Master's and Doctoral degrees in the US, where he also worked as a cultural studies lecturer. Moreover, Chen was a 'baby boomer' who grew up in an economy where he 'benefited from the U.S. cold war economic policies' (Lin, 2012, p. 155), policies that include military protection and massive imports of manufactured products. Chen is part of the generation that grew up during the 1960s and 1970s and witnessed 'the dramatic transition of a poverty-stricken post-war society in the 1950s and 1960s to an economically booming city in the 1970s and 1980s' (Lin, 2012, p. 156). The idea that China is separate from the USA is questionable, given that large numbers of Chinese, from everywhere around the world, are part of the USA, and the USA is in so many ways a part of China. Are Chinese-in-America and Americans-in-China to be excluded from his Asia-centric method? Chen explores his psychocultural unconscious for reasons why he is so deeply colonized by modern, middle-class desires, attitudes and beliefs. As Lin (2012, p. 154) explains, this meant that Chen and his family had:

[a higher] income, better living and health conditions, greater educational opportunities, and . . . Western popular culture and Western ideas and practices in everyday life, compared with their parents' generation. [Chen] also learnt and mastered to varying degrees English, the language of Western modernity, in a school system which has been modelled on some form of modern school systems in the West.

To understand the subjectivity of Chen, ‘we have to recognize that the United States has not merely defined [his] identities but has become deeply embedded within [his] subjectivity . . . America constitutes [his] subjectivity . . . it means that [he is] Americanized, if not American’ (Chen, 2010, pp. 178–9).

Let me briefly explain how I use this chapter to situate the work of Chen (2010), a US-educated academic, ‘trained in Western postmodernist critical theory’ (Lin, 2012, p. 154). As Lin notes, a key problem is that ‘Chen is, first and foremost, a cultural studies scholar, not an education and curriculum inquirer’ (Lin, 2012, p. 175). As a teacher–researcher, I am interested in exploring and contributing to pedagogical and curriculum innovations for local–international engagement in learning and earning (Singh and Harreveld, 2014). I am interested in the co-production of theoretic–linguistic knowledge, especially via theses and the education of teacher–researchers, and the dissemination of this knowledge, especially via publications authored jointly by Australian and Chinese researchers.

Further, unlike Chen, I am not interested in the question of how to solve the problem of foreignness or ‘*wai-sheng-ren*’ (outside-province person). Like Honig (2001), my main research question concerns what educational problems might ‘foreignness’ help insiders – non-foreigners – solve. Importantly, Chen gives me a significant reason for doing so, namely that, ‘the prevailing triumphalist sentiment underlying the so-called peaceful rise of mainland China has also evoked anxieties and could easily trigger racial confrontations’ (Chen, 2010, p. 259). It is not clear how an Asia-centric method can address Han Chinese racism becoming a local/global problem.

I am interested, more specifically, in the question of how ‘foreignness’ can help ‘me’, not quite a white Westerner, deal with the ‘West’ as already constituting my view about what counts as superior, modern and civilized modes of theorizing and critique. How might I negotiate the co-production of Australian–Chinese theoretic–linguistic knowledge through educational research? What epistemological, methodological or theoretical frames of reference can I develop for this educational work? How might I introduce and apply Australian–Chinese theoretic–linguistic tools in curriculum and pedagogical studies of Australian, or even Chilean, education (Qi, 2013)?

In addition, Chen makes decolonization, de-cold war and deimperialization central themes in his ‘emotionally unsettling’ (Lin, 2012, p. 175) publication. These very concepts configure an interrelationship of connectivity, such that, the ‘superior cultural self’ is defined in relation to the ‘inferior cultural other’ (Lin, 2012, p. 169). Thus, to deal with Chen’s three concerns, I might assume this requires processes for double knowing, in both the place that is regarded as the centre and that which is seen as the periphery, because they are regarded as relational, as intimately connected. This is the case for Australia and China with respect to trade, direct investment, business migration, tourism and international students. However, Chen’s interest is in harnessing popular emotional energy to ‘transform it into a motor of change’ directed ‘toward regional reconciliation’ and against ‘international forces’ (Chen, 2010,

p. 159). Chen highlights the emotional conditions or structures of sentiment for those he identifies as the victims of the cold war, imperialism and colonialism. However, Berry reminds us that the pain and trauma of the Chinese people over the past century arise, not only from these centrifugal forces of violence, but also from the ‘self-inflicted barbarism’ (Berry, 2008, p. 1) of centripetal forces. For instance, Taiwan’s ‘anti-communist cleansing’ in the 1950s eradicated intellectuals who criticized the Guomindang government, thereby destroying the capability, knowledge and ideas required for critique. However, because Chen ignores these centrifugal forces in the multiplicity of structures of domination, his work could become a narcissistic vehicle for nationalism, chauvinism, ultra-nationalism and racism. This is despite Chen’s desire to ‘move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions . . . of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism, or nationalistic xenophobia’ (Chen, 2010, p. 99).

Supposedly, for Chen (2010) at least, people are constrained by, and locked into, the unconscious apprehension of their daily needs and are thus judged as having no time for critique. In other words, Chen says they are bereft of the means to construct a rational project for changing their present to make history anew. This presents a serious problem for Chen’s argument:

[His] assumption that xenophobia and imperialism are found in the ‘unconscious’ is itself an oxymoron. Who is then authorised to de-imperialise other subjects without being affected by the pervasive effects of imperialisation and racism? Concomitant with the notion of the ‘unconscious’ is how rifts in cross-Straits relations are understood by discordant ‘structures of sentiment’, which may be unable to address the contingency of how different subjects on both sides variously view each other in different contexts.

(Ng, 2013, p. 89)

Chen’s (2010) use of ‘unconsciousness’ echoes Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘habitus’, which is said to explain the structuring and binding of non-Western people’s (the Kabyles’) disposition to tradition: their sense of what can or cannot be achieved is said to be based on their collective past experience (see Singh and Huang, 2013). Specifically, Bourdieu (1977) uses habitus to claim that the Kabyles need to satisfy their immediate material demands for subsistence, and that this means they have no time for critique. This ‘temporal immediacy’ is used to explain why the Kabyles did not have the reflexive consciousness to engage in the critiques necessary to assess their potential chances of realizing long-term goals. Habitus means that non-Western people do not have the capacity for rational calculation and, therefore, are unable to become a force for change. Similarly, Ng (2013, p. 89) observes that Chen’s claim about certain phenomena being ‘unconscious is itself an oxymoron’, raising the important question of who has the authorized consciousness to deimperialize those subjects who are ‘unconscious’ of the pervasive effects

of imperialism, colonialism, the cold war and racism. Although the concept of habitus denies non-Western people the capacity for critique, fortunately, there are sociologists such as Bourdieu (1977) and cultural studies scholars such as Chen (2010) who claim to be capable of revealing the domination conditioning people's lives.

The British-Indian economist and philosopher Sen rebuffed these ideas decades ago, recognizing that people have much more intelligence than either Chen or Bourdieu grants them:

In situations of long-standing deprivation, the victims do not go on grieving and lamenting all the time, and very often make great efforts to take pleasure in small mercies and to cut down personal desires to modest – realistic – proportions. Indeed, in situations of adversity which the victims cannot individually change, prudential reasoning would suggest that the victims should concentrate their desires on those limited things that they can possibly achieve, rather than fruitlessly pinning their hopes on the unattainable.

(Sen, 1992, p. 55)

Importantly, Chen's (2010) work seeks to make connections with scholars situated both inside and outside Asia who offer non-Western theoretical frames of reference, while not excluding those from the West. Our concern is that Euro-American methods of theorizing, which provide an exclusive and exclusionary conceptual framework for categorizing and representing the world's different societies and their characteristics, have gained added privilege in knowledge production through the internationalization of Australian education. The structuring of knowledge is such that Western/metropolitan/developed/industrialized concepts are connected to the analysis of non-West/rural/underdeveloped/agricultural data to establish what is desirable and progressive (Chen, 2010, p. 277). An educative means of honing the methodology for local-international educational research is to produce combinatory theoretic-linguistic tools from 'Southeast Asia, Papua New Guinea, the Middle East, Australasia, and the Pacific . . . Otherwise, we could face the prospect of replacing Eurocentrism with Sinocentrism – an exclusionary focus on Chinese East Asia that might [be] . . . nationalist or nativist' (Anderson, 2012, p. 448). The task for the ROSETE curriculum is to multiply frames of theoretical reference in our educational research and education of researchers, so that Euro-American intellectual hegemony can be subjected to productive, critical work that moves all sources of theorizing and critique forward.

### **Australia-China theoretic-linguistic knowledge co-production**

Lin reminds us of the limitations of Chen's work, noting that he is 'first and foremost a critical cultural studies scholar, [and] it is not his major objective to personally engage in projects that decolonize curriculum inquiry and

educational practice in Asia' (2012, p. 155). My focus is education and educational research. I am concerned with designing innovative pedagogical and curricular strategies to overcome the binary inherent in unquestioning acceptance of Euro-American theorizing and critique (and accepting these as the only resources for educational research) or reacting against this to negate any and all Euro-American knowledge. I acknowledge the serious structural limitations currently conditioning the world's knowledge production; however, unlike Chen (2010), who provides the emotional energy meant to activate and unify critical intellectuals in Asia, my interest is in the worldly production of critical, theoretical knowledge. Unlike Chen (2010, p. 23), I see no reason for restricting the articulation of counter-hegemonic alliances geared to knowledge production to Asia, but see these being forged through worldly interactions and efforts. Anderson argues that this does not require the 'negation or denial of Euro-American [theorizing] but rather it allows us to treat this Western body of knowledge' (Anderson, 2102, p. 448) as one intellectual resource to be tested among many others. Moreover, intellectually free, independent Asian researchers, educators and scholars 'should be in a position to explore cultural and intellectual exchanges with people in other parts of the world so that not just Asia but the whole globe would come to provide a new method of analysis' (Iriye, 2011, p. 221).

This chapter reflects part of the longitudinal study of the ROSETE curriculum, which was initiated in 2005. The ROSETE curriculum at the University of Western Sydney has pioneered a higher-degree research programme that is developing an Australia–China method of theoretic–linguistic knowledge production. I am not convinced that language is, necessarily, restricted to mobilizing nativist movements and nationalist feelings. There are more languages than there are nations in the world, as Chen (2010, p. 87) claims. I see multilingualism as an expression of people's worldly capabilities (Singh, 2013a). Thus, although the higher-degree research students in this programme all come from China, especially from Jilin and Zhejiang Provinces, it must be emphasized that there is not one 'non-English-speaking background' or 'English as a foreign language' student engaged in the ROSETE curriculum. This is because all of the students involved are multilingual, and, therefore, the ROSETE curriculum was deliberately designed to deepen and extend these capabilities by promoting theorizing using Chinese intellectual tools. Our recent studies of post-monolingual learning (Singh and Cui, 2011) have challenged the assumption mistakenly made by some Chinese and Australian students and academics that English is superior to Chinese in terms of its capacity for theorizing.

The following analysis of the ROSETE curriculum is framed by a set of research questions that are pertinent to current Euro-American-centred teacher education and the internationalization of Western-centric education. Informed by Lin's (2012) critique of Chen's ideas, these questions concern goals, pedagogies, content, knowledge structures, desires and sentiments, worldviews and cultural imagination. Key features of the ROSETE curriculum include

bringing forward Asian theoretic–linguistic knowledge, with the curriculum itself being framed in terms of the interrelated concepts of *xingzhi* and *zhixing* research. The programme promotes the multidirectional flows of theoretic–linguistic knowledge through extending and deepening the critical capabilities of Asian educational researchers, exploring the similarities in modes of theorizing between Australia and Asia. The curriculum is testing the universality of theoretic–linguistic tools through small-space transformations. Thus, this chapter does what Chen’s book does not (Ng, 2013): it elaborates on the current extent and potential efficacy of deploying this strategy. The degree to which Chen disappears in the following analysis is, itself, a measure of just how far removed his cultural studies are from education and curriculum enquiry (Lin, 2012, p. 175).

### **Pushing forward Chinese theoretic–linguistic knowledge**

Chen (2010) wants his target readers to see themselves as among the weak, as victims of cold war and imperial and colonial structures of domination, and he wants to invite them to try out the subject positions of other, similarly marginal or struggling people. In contrast, the ROSETE curriculum focuses on extending and deepening the capabilities of students from China for critique and theorizing, beginning with the presupposition that, intellectually, they are equal to this task and, then, working to verify that this is so. Thus, a key research question to be asked of the ROSETE curriculum is: how is its goal of preparing beginning teacher–researchers to push forward Chinese theoretic–linguistic knowledge achieved? There is a tendency to sanctify Euro-American knowledge, with terms such as *concepts* and *theories*, and some Australian universities use Euro-American knowledge to add promotional value to their product range:

The University of Western Sydney is one of Australia’s largest providers of professional teachers, with around 1,000 new graduates each year. And with good reason – when developing our programs, we undertook extensive research into the changing environment of teaching and education *not only in Australia, but also Europe and North America*, to produce the best educators of today and the future.

(University of Western Sydney, 2011, p. 5, 2013, p. 5; italics added)

This commitment to Euro-American research is underwritten by a programme of monolingual literacy theory that uses multiple English-only pedagogies to define immigrants and refugees as illiterate. In contrast, Chinese theoretic–linguistic knowledge is referred to using dismissive terms such as *local wisdom*. The naming of Chinese concepts, metaphors and images as ‘old sayings’ does little to either demystify theorizing as a means of knowledge creation, bring forward inter-referencing for Australia–China intellectual engagement or effect Australia–China co-production of knowledge. The

naming of Chinese concepts, metaphors and images as local wisdom implies that Euro-American ideas are the only source of theories, categories and analytical constructs, reinforcing the world's dependence on them (Alatas, 2006).

How might non-Western theoretic–linguistic knowledge be activated and mobilized in the White, Western, anglophone academy? The ROSETE curriculum recognized and acknowledged that introducing Chinese theoretical tools and modes of critique in this context would require systematic justification and explanation to transform the unfamiliar Chinese knowledge into accessible Anglo–Chinese ideas. Moreover, mobilizing research candidates to use Chinese modes of critique and theorizing invited them to activate innovative explorations of their own intellectual culture, while developing their capabilities to theorize, without necessarily knowing how to do this, if it was possible, or whether it was worthwhile. The processes developed through the ROSETE curriculum encourage candidates to conceptualize, contextualize, challenge and connect (Singh and Chen, 2012; Singh and Huang, 2013; also see Manathunga, 2013). Thus, a key aspect of this process of Australia–China theorizing entails locating selected Chinese concepts, metaphors and images in relation to Chinese intellectual traditions and contemporary Chinese uses of them. The use of Chinese concepts as theoretical tools is made more effective by their intellectual lineage and the sociohistorical context in which they are used being explained. In their theses, the candidates can create a glossary or concept map of the Anglo–Chinese terms they have generated. Through dialogic collaboration, Australia–China (Huang, 2011; Meng, 2013; Qi, 2013) and Australia–India (Handa, 2013; Lloyds, 2013) theoretic–linguistic tools have been formed, opening up the prospects of developing more sophisticated and rigorous analytical resources.

Many research projects produce and collect much raw data. O'Brien explains that it is raw in the sense that the 'data is initially undisciplined and unordered', (O'Brien, 2013, p. 223) and, therefore, providing little, if any, insight into new knowledge. It is the intellectual labour involved in the work of analysis that brings order and discipline to the raw data. This ordering is expressed through the method of research writing, which clarifies how the data contribute to new knowledge in the identified field of engagement.

The ROSETE curriculum is internationally recognized for creating intellectual spaces for non-Western candidates to explore the uses of their theoretic–linguistic resources in their Western education (Manathunga, 2013). This entails opening the Euro-American-centred, anglophone academy to non-Western theorizing and the co-production of new conceptual knowledge that has affinity with, and is energized by, the trajectories in new and emerging fields. Through mobilizing – pushing forward – multiple modes of Chinese theorizing and critique, the ROSETE curriculum activates perturbations in Australia's Euro-American theoretical dependency. By working collaboratively with non-White Australian educators, these early-career researchers select those parts of Euro-American Western knowledge that they find useful

and blend them with Chinese theoretic–linguistic knowledge, claiming ownership of both. In the following section, I illustrate how the processes of conceptualizing, contextualizing, challenging and connecting have been used to generate two Australia–China concepts central to the ROSETE curriculum.

### **Pedagogy: *xingzhi* and *zhixing* teacher research**

An important question to be asked of the ROSETE curriculum concerns the pedagogical strategies used to prepare early-career teacher–researchers to generate Australia–China modes of theorizing. These strategies entail bringing forward Chinese concepts, metaphors and images and using them as analytical tools in educational research. The concepts of *xingzhi teacher research* and *zhixing teacher research* are examples of Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production that animate the ROSETE curriculum. These concepts push forward the productive tension between *knowledge/learning (zhi)* and *action/doing (xing)*. The relationship between *knowledge/learning (zhi)* and *action/doing (xing)* is an important focus for scholarly debate in China. The issue at stake is whether knowledge/knowing and doing/action are invariably connected or are, necessarily, separate and independent from each other, no matter how close they may become.

To *contextualize* these concepts, it is important to note that the combination of *xing*, meaning ‘to do or action’, with *zhi*, meaning ‘to be aware of or to know’, was connected with action research processes to link transformative action and theoretical knowledge. This notion was devised and developed by Tao Xingzhi (1891–1946), a former doctoral student of John Dewey, who, upon his return to China in the 1920s, developed a programme of rural reconstruction through teachers and schools engaging in action–knowledge research in local communities.<sup>3</sup> Tao Xingzhi’s argument is that ‘knowledge derived from “doing”, or direct experience [is] a conscientious activity that involves working with one’s mind while working with one’s hand’ (Yao, 2002a, p. 255): by moving school into society into school, Tao Xingzhi could employ educational methods that combined exercising both ‘the hands and the brain; and laboring while also working one’s mind [which meant] there was no extracurricular life nor were there courses outside of life’ (Zhiwen, 2008, p. 10).

The idea of action research provided an initial framework for the ROSETE curriculum. However, the concept of *xingzhi teacher research* extends this to capture the importance of early-career teacher–researchers, most of whom are young women, making practical improvements in students’ learning via their actions (*xing*) of teaching to inform the co-construction of theoretic–linguistic knowledge (*zhi*) using Australia–China conceptual tools (Singh et al., 2013). Of course, these early-career researchers wait anxiously for examiners’ reports and peer reviews to say, ‘you are told that your imitation is not quite right: you are still not like “us”; you are, in essence, inferior’ (Chen, 2010, p. 86).

Drawing on Tao's conceptualization of *xing* and *zhi*, I *connected* the concept of *xingzhi* and *teacher research* to frame the Master of Education (Honours) strand in the ROSETE curriculum. *Xingzhi* teacher research accentuates the significance of teachers' generating theoretical knowledge through pedagogical action (Singh, 2013b). In this professional learning programme, *xingzhi teacher research* puts the emphasis on improving school students' learning as the primary focus and rationale for improving the teacher-researchers' theoretic-pedagogical capabilities. The ROSETE curriculum offers Australia's only local-international, Australia-China partnership-driven Master of Education (Honours) programme for educating teacher-researchers to make Chinese learnable for students in the nation's primary and secondary schools, where English is their primary language of instruction and daily means of communication. The 2-year Master's degree includes an intensive 18-month programme whereby they generate primary evidence about making Chinese learnable for Australian school students, to inform and change embedded processes linked to whole-school organizational learning and reform. They contribute to the advancement of knowledge about making Chinese learnable through collaborative methods directed at their teaching practices. All of this is underwritten by long-term, large-scale planning (2008-18).

The core of the ROSETE curriculum is its stimulation of the circulation of Chinese (e.g. Huang, 2011; Meng, 2013; Qi, 2013) and Indian (e.g. Handa, 2013; Lloyds, 2013) theoretic-linguistic concepts by mobilization of Chinese or Indian metaphors as conceptual tools for analysing evidence arising in Australian education research. Thus, the ROSETE curriculum takes up the *challenge* of how Chinese students in Australia might deal with Euro-American theoretic-linguistic expansionism to contribute to the production of Australia-China theoretic-linguistic resources from their multiple sources of intellectual inheritance. The central challenge posed by the ROSETE curriculum for Australian universities is whether they have the capability to mobilize non-Western students to, first, generate Australia-Asia modes of theorizing by promoting analytical tools from their diverse intellectual cultures and, then, test these in empirical studies in Australia (Singh 2013a; Singh and Meng, 2013; Singh and Qi, 2013).

This section has proposed concrete strategies to assist in: formulating worthwhile and relevant theoretic-linguistic resources; meeting the need to demystify theory building; opening up the range of intellectual resources from which researchers can make choices for theorizing; and developing international rather than Euro-American schema for evaluating such open-minded modes of theorizing. The results of these Master's and Doctoral research projects show that, like Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus', Chen's (2010) idea of 'unconsciousness' among Asian scholars is an overstatement (Qi, 2013). Unfortunately, both these ideas stem from Euro-American critical and cultural theorists who take on the self-appointed mandate of unmasking the supposedly unrecognized domination of, in this case, Asian educational researchers to enlighten, empower and emancipate them (Fay,

1987; Boltanski, 2011; Chambers, 2013). The ROSETE curriculum has demonstrated ways to advance Australia–China educational knowledge that operate on the presupposition that Chinese educational researchers have important resources for critique and theorizing, and then sets out to verify this premise (Fast et al., 2013). This curriculum is working to advance Chinese educational researchers as a new generation of theoretic–linguistic actors capable of demystifying principles and procedures for theorizing and taking leadership in the politics of innovative knowledge production.

## **Discussion**

I acknowledge that there are those who would cast the ROSETE curriculum as a danger to nation-centred, Western-oriented education and in-school, classroom-centric policies. Moreover, I recognize that I might be challenged over naïvety with respect to the domestic politics of knowledge within multi-ethnic China. Further, I concede that the ROSETE curriculum may be open to attack for failing to address the complex intersection between the transnational, ‘West versus the rest’ politics of knowledge and intranational struggles over knowledge, as Chen (2010) does with respect to *wai-sheng-ren* (outside-province person) and the indigenous people of Taiwan. Although I can only touch briefly on these issues, I conclude this chapter with a robust defence of the ROSETE curriculum against any such potential counterclaims.

With respect to a suggestion that the ROSETE curriculum is a danger to the Western-centrism in Australian education, it should be noted that Western culture did not develop in a vacuum, but benefitted, immeasurably, from flows of resources, including knowledge from the non-Western intellectual world (see Lyons, 2009; Dallal, 2010; Belting, 2011; Freely, 2011; Beckwith, 2012). Although the West may now be the dominating perspective of local/global knowledge production, this was not always the case, nor is it likely to continue in the future (Blaut, 1993; Hobson, 2004; Cook, 2007; Zijlmans and van Damme, 2008; Goody, 2010). This being so, there is a need for a more worldly (Singh, 2013b), rather than Asia-centric, approach to theorizing. This is necessary to address Chen’s ‘problem of racism in the Han-centric worldview [which] is located within the structure of the [China’s] imperial order’ (Chen, 2010, p. 257).

The ROSETE curriculum is contributing to a rethinking of in-school, classroom-centric policies and programmes. In effect, the ROSETE curriculum constitutes a local–international ‘innovation hub’ (Singh and Harreveld, 2014), consisting of a concentrated cluster of government education departments, a university, schools and a publishing house, harnessing the power of grounded action and knowledge production for (1) innovations in the learning and teaching of Chinese; (2) innovations in Australia–China knowledge co-production regarding making Chinese learnable; as well as (3) providing a long-term stimulus to the future mobility of both Australian and Chinese students. Importantly, these have, now, stimulated the redesign of the ROSETE

curriculum to bridge academic and occupational domains, embedding efforts to make Chinese learnable in Australia–China relationships via innovation industries and jobs in tourism, business migration, international students and direct foreign investment. This means introducing the ROSETE curriculum in innovation hubs catering for industries requiring human creativity and ingenuity to generate new ideas for new products and services. These jobs can take various forms in diverse fields, such as advanced manufacturing, information, communication and surveillance technologies, life sciences, medical devices, robotics, new materials and nanotechnology. The ROSETE curriculum gives specificity to the local–international relations of production and education. An undertaking central to Chen’s ‘geographical–historical materialism’ (Chen, 2010, p. 110) is to producing yin–yang relationships between learning and earning. For Chen, geographical–historical materialism is ‘concentrated on the level of the mode and relations of production’ (Chen, 2010, p. 110), and this is where the ROSETE curriculum enters the picture, as part of the material conditions of Australia–China mediating links.

Through the ROSETE curriculum, students explore the domestic politics of linguistic standardization and knowledge construction within multi-ethnic China (Davies, 2007; Wang and Phillion, 2009; Grose, 2012). This includes reading studies of Chinese-language textbooks by researchers from China who analyse the ideological forces manifested in the books and argue that, as a closed knowledge system, these textbooks serve the interests the government and its cultural elites have in social control, rather than in the education of children (Liu, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Moreover, mindful of its necessary intellectual coexistence with Han and Western knowledge, the prospects for the intellectual enfranchisement of indigenous peoples have been explored through a study of the educational travels of Tibetan knowledge. This identified key educational enablers of accessibility to Tibetan knowledge: advances in Tibetan information technology, the growth in Tibetan publications and publishing channels, and the employment of intellectual experts in Tibetan knowledge (Singh and Qi, 2013). I understand, also, that this type of information is used to reinforce the negativity towards China as communist, poor, backward, uncivilized, or un-modern, reinforcing ‘what is good, superior, modern, civilized [i.e. Western] versus what is bad, inferior, backward, uncivilized [i.e. Chinese]’ (Lin, 2012, pp. 161–2). However, given the nationalization through the Han-ization process, which began in 1953 and saw more than 400 registered, named ethnic groups throughout the country categorized into just over 50 ethnic groups just 10 years later, Chen’s observation on Han racism warrants further attention:

Han racism existed long before China’s encounter with the West and is found today in mainland China’s interactions with its Asian neighbours and within the Han population itself. Unpacking the specificity of racist logic in our own societies may open up new perspectives on racist practices in other locations.

(Chen, 2010, pp. 259–60)

Further, I acknowledge that I might, possibly, be challenged over naïvety with respect to the domestic politics of language and knowledge within multi-ethnic, multi-racist Australia, but this, too, is addressed in the ROSETE curriculum. For instance, students are made aware that, compared with White Australian graduates, international Chinese graduates from the ROSETE curriculum have much higher capabilities. They have capabilities in multilingualism, cross-cultural knowledge and in-depth knowledge of Australian educational culture and are proficient in Australian English. However, like high-achieving, international Chinese graduates in fields such as accounting (James and Otsuka, 2009), they have difficulty finding professional work in Australia and remain a marginalized group within today's Australian society, where the hiring of White Australians is privileged. Further, McGowan and Potter (2008) argue that international Chinese students are fuelling the impetus to lower academic standards in Australian universities, where the economic priority is on recruiting full-fee-paying students. This White Australian perspective is reinforced by antagonism towards achievement-oriented, international Chinese students wanting to immigrate to Australia and become permanent residents, if not citizens: apparently, Chinese students doing so override educational ethics. Moreover, Berg (2011) reports that Australia's requirements for high English-language proficiency intensify English-only monolingualism and associated racial biases, similarly to the language dictation test central to the 'White Australia' policy,<sup>4</sup> which worked to ensure Australia's (White) racial purity, to protect Australia from Asian labour and to protect against any Asian invasion. Thus, as Chen suggests, there is a need to move beyond multiculturalism, which, as an expression of the incomplete project of decolonization, 'recognizes differences but conceals the dominant ethnic position of the agent who classifies and divides' (Chen, 2010, p. 97) through cultural strategies such as 'nice white' colonialism.

## **Conclusion**

Chinese and Australian educational researchers mobilize intellectual collaboration that honours deep-level, intra-Asian collaboration, specifically by contributing to the localization/internationalization, if not the Asianization, of otherwise Euro-American-centred Australian education. Our concept of Australia–China theoretic–linguistic knowledge co-production does not privilege an Asia-centric method of theorizing. It contributes to re-theorizing the power relationships at stake in the production of theoretical knowledge through multilingualism. This means employing local/global concepts, metaphors and images as vehicles for the localization/internationalization of education in Australia – and elsewhere. For instance, Handa (2013) and Lloyds (2013) both reworked Indian concepts, metaphors and images into analytical tools in their doctoral research, thereby contributing to the debate over the universal value of such knowledge (e.g. Handa, 2013; Lloyds, 2013). In these particular doctoral projects, the aim was to form and inform a new

generation of Indian educational researchers capable of mobilizing theoretic–linguistic knowledge in intellectual dialogue with the West.

This discussion demonstrates efforts directed at re-envisioning the contribution Chinese theorizing can make to the localization/internationalization of Australia’s anglophone, Euro-American-centred education. In it, I want to work against adopting a relativist position (Makarychev and Morozov, 2013). I am not claiming that Euro-American theorizing is unable to provide a useful understanding of the specifics of education in China; to do so would contradict our efforts to employ Chinese and Indian theoretical tools in the analysis of education in Australia. Thus, I am not working to ‘discover’, ‘produce’ or ‘legitimize’ parochial, nativist modes of theorizing (Chen, 2010). As Ng (2013) suggests, those adopting an Asia-centric method will need considerable theoretical self-reflexivity and vigilance, given that, ‘the severe competition for global power [is likely to] bring China back to the old binary logic of China and the West, and Sinocentrism would once again cause China to ignore the rest of the world’ (Chen, 2010, p. 13).

The theoretic–linguistic orientation of the ROSETE curriculum is directed towards a *post-monolingual, post-Euro-American-centred* approach to the localization/internationalization of education in Australia, China and elsewhere. In particular, as part of the programme, I am researching the incorporation of non-West theoretic–linguistic resources and conceptual contributions by non-Western scholars to establish what it might mean to make education (more) democratic (Singh and Meng, 2013). The programme’s orientation is worldly rather than parochial, aiming to transform the privileging of monolingual learning (i.e., both English- and Chinese-only pedagogies) and Euro-American theorizing and modes of critique in the field of education. Thus, I see Euro-American modes of critical theorizing as being subsumed and not displaced by Asia-centric methods. A new era of worldly critical theorizing (Singh, 2013a) is being generated by the centrifugal and centripetal forces of colonialism, imperialism and war. Accordingly, the ROSETE curriculum is producing theoretic–linguistic resources that invite worldwide debate, rather than seeking security in the privilege of parochialism.

## Notes

- 1 First published in 2006 in Chinese.
- 2 See Goody, 2010, Hobson, 2004, and Zijlmans and van Damme, 2008, for a historically informed understanding of local/global knowledge flows.
- 3 Tao Xingzhi attached great importance to women’s education, initiating the admission of girls to universities after he returned to China from the United States, thereby markedly improving women’s education and their social standing (Zhiwen, 2008).
- 4 What is known as the White Australia Policy was introduced in Australia in 1901 and operated during the first half of the twentieth century. It was fully repudiated in 1973, when it became illegal for race to be a component of an immigration decision.

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## 10 A collaborative postscript

Imagination, aspiration,  
anticipation and hesitation

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Studies research collective<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Encouraging scholars to conduct Asian studies in Asia and inspiring them to build new transnational intellectual alliances and solidarities are among Chen's driving imperatives. In this final chapter, we discuss these and other Chen-related dictates, deliberating on our experiences of working together to write this book and on some of the challenges that arose. We draw together thoughts from the reflective sessions we held as we were redrafting our chapters, our end-of-chapter observations and our earlier reading group discussions: this chapter is a collective reflection in which we look back.

However, our book, overall, is about imagining a future, about how pedagogies for Asian research students studying education in the 'West' might be, in Chen's terms, deimperialized, decolonized and de-cold war. It speaks to both graduate students and to PhD and Master's degrees supervisors, who may or may not be 'Asian'.

In thinking about the future, we draw on Appadurai's *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the global condition* to help us. He says: 'We need to construct an understanding of the future by examining the interactions between three notable human preoccupations that shape the future as cultural fact, that is, as a form of difference. These are imagination, anticipation and aspiration' (2013, p. 286).

His book is primarily addressed to anthropologists, but it can, equally, be addressed to educationists. Appadurai's insistence on 'imagination, anticipation and aspiration' has strong affinities with Chen's focus on what he calls 'structures of sentiment', 'cultural imaginaries' and, ultimately, with the importance of attending to subjectivity when proposing changes for the future. Indeed, Chen says, 'we must reopen the past for reflection in order to make moments of liberation possible in the future' (2010, p. x).

Appadurai claims that, given the complex, constantly changing and often-unexpected configurations of globalization, 'we need to commit ourselves to

a partisan position . . . and that is to be mediators, facilitators and promoters of the ethics of possibility against the ethics of probability' (Appadurai, 2013, p. 299). By an ethics of possibility, he means:

those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what I have called the capacity to aspire and to widen the field of informed, creative and critical citizenship.

(Appadurai, 2013, p. 295)

He argues that this cannot 'be applied abstractly or in those domains from which we are most distant or disconnected. It must begin in at home; in our institutions, our disciplines, and our methods' (Appadurai, 2013, p. 300).

## **Imagination**

Our book seeks to promote a defiant research imagination that is informed by Appadurai's ethics of possibility, rather than probability. First and foremost, this applies to Asian research students studying education in the 'West', but also, ultimately, to our other colleagues in education faculties.

At the start of the project, the 'field of imagination' for some of us was revealed in the following remarks.

I think the Western is the best. So I don't want to cover things just from Asia, I want to cover the best in the world.

I think thousands of international students struggle to use Asian concepts to do their research. They have the same struggle as us.

Our intervention is one that acknowledges that, for change to happen, we must ask such questions as, 'Why do we think the West is the best?'. It recognizes that we must, also, struggle to reimagine ourselves and consider ways to encourage others to reimagine us.

Encouraging others to reimagine us was particularly important for participants, given many of the stereotypes that prevail in Western universities about Asian students. These often construct us as passive rather than active or critical learners, implying that critical thinking only belongs to the West. This stereotype arises from a perception that we all come from education systems that construct us as passive learners (see the reflective section of Chapter 2). We debated whether this is the case in the education systems of our homelands. For example, one of us talks about education in Hong Kong, saying, 'It's spoon feeding . . . What the teachers teach you, you eat it'. But, in response, another argues that students are 'thinking slowly and consuming it, rather than simply eating it'. And yet another of us says, 'It doesn't mean students are not critical. What is being taught maybe has something to do with

the structure of the institution and things like that. Individually, it does not mean that students don't practice these critical thinking skills.'

We all participated in this project as active and critical citizens of the university. Collectively and individually, we sought to take responsibility for our own intellectual journey, rather than relying on figures of authority within the Education Faculty to steer us, although, at times, they did provide us with some help.<sup>2</sup> In Appadurai's words, we were 'mediators, facilitators and promoters' of our own learning – certainly not passive. This is how we, variously, saw it:

Maybe we have different ideas, but *why* we have different ideas about the same issue is the question? I think when you share something, you learn a lot.

What we need to highlight is how Chen has provided us with some tools to critically interpret events. We all come up with different phenomena and what's important is how Chen has awakened in us that sense of criticality.

Chen does not really raise completely new ideas but what I find really interesting about reading Chen's book is that he talks about his experience, his country's experience. Chen mentions shifting the reference point. As we are reading Chen's book, we're looking for different reference points than just what the West often writes about. As we're reading Chen's book and we look at our own projects, this is actually what Chen refers to, looking at some other part of it to problematize ourselves.

We sought to reconfigure our own intellectual horizons, to move past the reproduction of power/knowledge relationships, be they geopolitical or institutional, to try to reimagine our discipline and its methodologies with the help of Chen and others who also have striven to work with, through and beyond Chen's thinking.

The project engaged with an eagerness we all had to be involved in something bigger than our own particular PhD projects, to make the most of studying in a foreign country with many people who are, similarly, temporarily relocated. It spoke to our aspiration to belong, contribute and help build a research community willing to try to imagine research differently, not only in Australia, but also in our home countries, when/if we return to them.

We mentioned, in the Introduction, that graduate students flocked to this project like 'moths to a flame', not just at Monash University, but also at events we were involved in at other universities and at academic conferences. One obvious reason is that the project involved a form of 'recognition', in Nancy Fraser's terms (2001): it affirmed our Asian-ness as opposed to the Australian-ness in which we were immersed. And, in so doing, it spoke to the manner in which students who come from 'other/othered' countries may develop affinities

across nation-states that they may not otherwise feel. The following remarks illustrate the point.

For me, the way I perceive myself in a different context is slightly different. I don't perceive myself as Vietnamese, but I perceive myself in the broader spectrum with other Asians. When I was in the United States, I didn't think of myself as Vietnamese, I thought of myself as Asian. So when I see a Chinese, I feel close to the Chinese person. When I'm in Vietnam, if a Chinese person came and visited, I would think, 'He's so different'.

When you're somewhere else, you tend to draw on who you're not. So for example, back home, I never think of myself as Indonesian-Muslim. That's something you take for granted. But here, it's like the religion is being foregrounded and my skin colour as well.

As an international student away from home . . . you may not find a lot of international students from the same country in the same subject, in the same faculty, so you just think, 'It's a student from an Asian country, we can form a community so we support each other'.

In a sense, then, the project addressed existing, unsettled, territorial sensibilities. It provided additional circumstances in which such fresh affinities could flourish, new learning about each other's countries could occur, and in which new, more transnational imaginations could emerge. At the start of the project, we felt quite ignorant about each other's countries. We wanted to know more. But, we also wondered why we knew so much about some countries in Asia and so little about others. Why was it that certain countries were more conspicuous on our radar than others, and why did certain issues within certain countries have prominence? Why, for example, is religion always in the forefront with regard to Indonesia? This led some of us to the view that Chen did not actually go far enough with regard to certain issues, such as the power of religion and its implications for knowledge.

Chen emphasizes freeing our minds from the influence of colonization, imperialization and the cold war, as they are deeply rooted in many Asian contexts, eventually posing challenges for Asian scholars when they attempt to move forward in their knowledge generation. In the context of Bangladesh, we would argue for considering other ways to liberate our minds and move forward. In particular, the influence of religious ideology plays a vital part in shaping people's mindset. For example, a considerable part of the population neither accepts Western knowledge nor tries to generate local knowledge. Instead, it relies on Islamic knowledge and continues a solely Islam-based education system in Bangladesh. . . . This

distrust might be enhanced by the contemporary ‘war on terror’, which many Muslims around the world see as a war against Islam.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 8)

And, of course, we wondered about the implications of Chen’s geographical location for his thinking. Chen was seen to have a primary interest in East Asia, and this was frustrating for those of us from other parts of Asia who wondered about his relevance to us/them.

Moreover, as we delved deeper into Chen’s theoretical constructs, the tensions and dilemmas of working with his ideas became more apparent. While fully acknowledging the powerful analytical device that Chen offers, we also realize that his ideas and notion of ‘Asia’ do not always speak to the Indonesian context. As an example, we could hardly relate to his ‘de-cold war’ concept, as, historically, Indonesia was not directly involved in this. Thus, we feel disconnected.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 6)

At the end of the project, we had expanded the field of our imagination, but we felt the need to know more, not just about each other’s countries, but about the power/knowledge relationships between and within them. We figured that such knowing is central to reimagining research relationships in Asia. We all acknowledged the importance of hearing different voices from different countries and, also, different voices from within them.

Indeed, we were not only engaging with our national differences. We entered this project with different knowledge bases, disciplinary and theoretical orientations and politics. Further, some of us came from quite senior positions in our home countries and had the sensibilities that often accompany seniority. Others had no such sensibilities and entered the project with decidedly less confidence and sense of authority. Some of us began with reasonably sound knowledge of the various literatures that informed Chen’s book. Others had no familiarity, and his ideas were new. The notion of a ‘defiant research imagination’ had different meanings for each of us. Despite this, we all believe that the project contributed to our individual and collective ‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai, 2013, p. 295) as researchers.

## **Aspiration**

Chen argues that Asia as method is about us trying to ‘transform our selves’ (2010, p. 212). No matter what our starting points, throughout this project, we had our habits of thinking challenged, and we engaged in ‘incessant internal dialogue’ (see the reflective section in Chapter 5).

One of our many aspirations was to avoid buying into the East–West binary in ways that confirm rather than destabilize it. For, as Chen insists, the goal is moving beyond ‘the binary deadlock of either worshipping the West (e.g.,

following their theories, knowledge, epistemologies, cultures) or reacting against it (e.g., negating anything from the West)' (2010, p. 173). However, as this reflection points out, binary thinking was very much the starting point for some of us, and moving beyond it involved concerted effort:

Before reading Chen's book and participating in the 'Asia as method' project, our backgrounds as English-language teacher trainers and novice researchers had been largely shaped by the East–West dichotomy, deeply entrenched in our educational experiences as well as lived cultures. As researchers, we often found ourselves examining local phenomena through the eyes of Westerners and ended up either criticizing or indulging ourselves with impractical solutions, which might be totally socioculturally incompatible with the local base-entities. As such, we were deeply caught in the dilemma of East and West ourselves, whereas contemporary linguistic, cultural and professional issues (such as those addressed in our chapter) have coerced us to confront it as active and critical participants in the world.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 7)

Actually, as we look back over our chapters, there remains something of the West as primary reference point, despite our efforts. The East–West binary is so infused in the layers of the global imagination that to escape it is difficult.

We were very wary of simply reversing the binary and of becoming Asia-centric. The following narrative illustrates the dilemmas many of us faced.

First, Chen's ideas seemed enlightened, they challenged my usual thinking about, my usual way of doing research. But then the more I engaged with him, the more I tried to resist Western theories and perspectives. But then I tried for a balance. I said to myself, 'Please, come on, let's look at a balanced way, East and West, Chen's and others'. And I can see that in doing this I myself am polarising the East and the West in these kind of dialogues and these kind of conversations, and I don't know how to get away from that.

Moving beyond the binary involved an expansion of perspectives. It meant engaging complexity. We tried to see ourselves in ways that did not involve the 'imperialist eye' or national or cultural identity restraints. Along with Chen, we were very keen to 'multiply our frames of reference' (Chen, 2010, p. 223), as well as increase our 'objects of identification' (Chen, 2010, p. 99). We wanted to attend to numerous structures of knowledge, of domination within and beyond Asia. This extended quotation from our discussions sums up the exhilaration this invoked in some of us.

I think of myself as a point of reference in the sea of references. Working with Chen and working with other PhD students might drive me back to

doing my research in Asia, especially this idea of geo-colonial historical materialism. It's very useful. I used to see things in a very linear way. Especially when I assessed one event or one phenomenon. I used to think of one way to interpret that. But now, it opens me up to flexible and alternative ways of discoursing about one event. It leads me to try to find the complexities and the connections between this event and other events.

So that's why I think that, when I work with other people and their ideas and their theories, it might drive me back to my internal dialogue, 'How is it important? Does it have any relevance to my research and how can I learn about other countries?' It can enrich my understanding of the world, especially my purpose to interpret these many realities.

It's not just a matter of agency, it's not a matter of we can't do research in Western countries, but it's a matter of how we see the realities and how complex they are. That's why I like the concept of a defiant research imagination. It draws me back to myself, to my agency, my reflexivity and my openness to other cultures and other theories that may help me to be more critical . . . I think that, in a way, Chen and others like him led me to draw it all together, they helped me to interpret just one research question. I think it's tremendously helpful.

## **Anticipation**

As we indicated in the Introduction, we invited other scholars from many different locations to join us in this project, particularly, but not exclusively, those from non-Western traditions. Lin asserts that, 'knowledge production (e.g., textbook/curriculum production, university research and publication, teacher preparation) and knowledge circulation (e.g. schooling, curriculum, and pedagogy) constitute the major sites in which imperialism operates and exercises its power' (2012, p. 164).

Clearly, according to this logic, those living and working at the centres of various empires of knowledge must move beyond what Stuart Hall calls 'the West as Method' (Hall, 1992). This means that our non-Asian academic colleagues in education faculties needed to engage with the sorts of issue we were raising. The time seemed ripe. Asia was strongly on the agenda in Australian political circles at the time, and Australia was thinking hard about its place in Asia.

Australia is geographically located *in* Asia, but it is not *of* Asia. It is a wealthy, minority (world status) country surrounded by many countries that are neither wealthy nor minor. It has strong historical links with Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations, but its political and military alignments are, primarily, with the USA and Europe. That said, Australia is, as Takayama (2014) points out, a 'rich peripheral country', plagued by a sense of

ambivalence about its own identity internally and on the world and regional stages (see, further, Kenway and Fahey, 2011).

Australia has strong trade links with South Korea, Japan and, particularly, China. And, it is because of the increasing dependency of Australia on these trade links (not to mention its higher-education system's dependence on international students from Asia) that it has become much more conscious of its need to better attend to its Asian neighbours. This impulse is signalled in the policy document *Australia in the Asian Century* (Australian Government, 2012) and, in terms of education, by the fact that, 'teachers and principals recognized the social and cultural value of teaching about Asia, but were less aware of the benefits of Asia related learning in the light of Asia's importance for future employment opportunities and economic development in Australia' (Halse et al., 2013, p. 117). The Australian Curriculum has named *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* as one of only three cross-curriculum priorities (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014). It seeks to ensure that Australian students learn about and recognize the diversity within and between the countries in the Asian region. It also aims to develop students' knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia and the rest of the world.

It might be added, as Rizvi (2012) notes, that the not-too-subtle subtext to such policy mantra is usually instrumental and economically opportunistic. Asia is certainly not viewed in the ways Chen proposed, as an 'imaginary anchoring point', as a shifting historical, political, cultural, as well as economic, entity.

All that said, given the enormous push in Australia with regard to such things as 'Australia in the Asian century', 'Asian literacy' and, indeed, 'Asian literate research' (Takayama, 2014), we had hoped that our Australian colleagues would be drawn to the project. It was regrettable that, despite our attempts to involve local, Australian PhD students, very few showed much interest. When inviting Monash University PhD students to be involved, the editors found the following:

When you talk to some students not from the Asia-Pacific regions, from Australia to be honest, when you ask them to participate in the project, they will ask you lots of questions to make sure that the book suits their needs. Asian students say, 'The book project is very good, I want to write something to suit the book'. But Australian people are different. They consider it but say, 'I don't think I will put lots of effort into this book because the book is not in my area'.

Further, we anticipated involving our colleagues in the Education Faculty at Monash University, given the need for teacher education to prepare teachers to teach the Australian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priorities with regard to Asia, as indicated above. It was also unfortunate that few members of

academic staff became involved and explored, with us, the implications of Asia as method for curriculum and educational enquiry and practice. After all, as indicated, the responsibility for ‘deimperialization’, in Chen’s terms, starts with those who benefit most from imperialist knowledge patterns and practices. ‘As an Asian scholar who lectures in an Australian university, I feel that it is my responsibility to serve as a sliding door that facilitates a dialogue between the East and the West to educate the world’ (see Chapter 3).

## **Hesitation**

In Chapter 1, Kenway says Chen’s ‘is not a comfortable intellectual project . . . it is not just an intellectual project . . . but also [about] “culture and mind, desire and body”’ (Chen 2010, p. x). So, let us now talk about discomfort and its various sources. Although this was a project that sought to shift our ‘horizons of hope’, our aspirations and imaginations came up against many hesitations. Despite our collective eagerness to be involved in this thinking and writing project, our hopes were constantly tinged with discomfort. We often wavered and faltered as we tried to bring to the surface our own psyches, including our unconscious attitudes and beliefs about colonization, decolonization, the cold war and de-cold war.

Undertaking such work was no easy task, as the reflections of some of our authors from Bangladesh and Indonesia make particularly clear.

The main challenge was to interpret our experiences in light of Chen’s idea. As noted previously, our education system was introduced by the British colonial power, and the system is still heavily influenced by Western practices. We . . . were educated in this de facto Western education system. Consequently, we grew up knowing that Western knowledge is the authentic knowledge. Therefore, to interpret any event with a lens other than a Western-based lens was difficult for us.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 8)

Admittedly, however, understanding and working with Chen’s theoretical concepts is not an easy endeavour, as engaging with Chen’s ideas was challenging at many different levels. At the conceptual level, while realizing the potential of Chen’s line of enquiry to provoke and unsettle our habitual practices of thought, we feel his arguments themselves are difficult to grasp and pin down. In our attempt to understand Chen’s ideas, we constantly asked ourselves whether we had interpreted them ‘the right way’.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 6)

There are many barriers to doing the sort of collective work that Chen proposes, not the least being those that arise from academic cultures and subcultures. We experienced some anxieties about our mode of working with

Chen's ideas. We did not want to lionize him or to look like his supplicants. The following remark epitomizes how some of us felt about this: 'I don't know about others here but I had the feeling of being colonized by his ideas'. One of our more junior peers worried that, as 'novice researchers' in the 'very nervous stage', some of us were vulnerable to being colonized. She felt that we needed to work with other ideas to ensure that we did not get locked into one way of theorizing, one ideology.

Indeed, working with one thinker was a source of discomfort to many of us, given the usual academic propensity to 'compare and contrast' perspectives. There was an urge to position Chen in broader fields and not to put him on a pedestal. The following remark neatly encapsulates such views:

Instead of treating Chen as a single isolated thinker, would there be a way to actually position him in a common community, which we're part of, rather than keep him a bit like an icon? How do we de-icon Chen a little bit, move with him a bit more. Because when I was writing about our engagement, I think he's up there and I'm down here, and I hate that idea very much. I want him to come here and talk with me.

For others, many of Chen's arguments and the key scholars he works with were familiar, and we did not want to appear as neophytes. This, again, would have constructed us as passive learners. We were, therefore, keen to make it clear that we were not simply clones of Chen, thoughtlessly and uncritically transferring his ideas from critical cultural studies to the field of education studies.

We believe that one way to critically engage a body of thought is to try to work with some of its central ideas and to see if they help to deepen analysis and understanding, or if they offer new and compelling angles of scrutiny. Another is to put it to work in a different field and to see how well it travels across fields. In working with Chen, these have been our *modi operandi*. We have adopted something of a 'toolkit' approach with regard to Chen's conceptual resources. Consequently, we have not tried to work with his entire *oeuvre*, nor complied, to the letter, with all his driving imperatives. Importantly, though, in the process of working with Chen, we have deepened our understanding of his body of thought.

Then, there is the fact that he is not writing from an educational perspective. Some felt that Chen's ideas are too abstract and not sufficiently practical for an applied field such as education.

At the practical level, we found many of his concepts rather too abstract and technical. For us, as education practitioners who unfailingly seek 'pedagogical implications' in almost every line of enquiry, Chen's concepts sometimes do not appear sufficiently grounded and workable enough and are, thus, difficult to translate at the classroom level.

(See the reflective section in Chapter 6)

However, we reminded each other that, 'Chen is actually writing about culture and sociology in general, rather than education', and that it was up to us to take his ideas into the realm of education and 'push them further'. This raised the question: What sort of pushing, and what sort of politics, if any?

'We're just scholars, we're just students doing academic research in our academic field. We don't want to raise too many issues around political stuff', it was argued. This person's concerns were about international relationships and politics. S/he did not want the book to mention such politics and insisted that, 'We're doing academic research in this book collection', and, 'if we're doing too much' about international politics 'it's too complicated. It's beyond our ability'. Struggling to see the relationships between such politics and the work we were doing, s/he argued, 'It's not relevant, we don't need to mention that'.

It emerged that one of this person's concerns was that, if the book was translated into the language of his/her home country, this might place him/her in a difficult political position. This concern was not unique to him/her. We discussed various problems of translation, how the book would touch on many political sensitivities, and what this might mean if/when the authors return home.

On the other hand, the idea of publishing in many languages was appealing in terms of 'getting the word out'. For we acknowledged, of course, that monolingualism is a barrier to this sort of transnational research. The imperative to work across national differences and borders is much easier said than done. Although we all wrote our PhDs in English, we, collectively, came from many non-English-speaking countries and diverse cultural backgrounds. We were, thus, not necessarily able to access each other's primary or secondary sources.

For Western people, most of them speak English, it's easy for them to communicate with each other. But in Asia, it's hard, because they have different traditions, different languages, it's hard for them to have a good conversation between each other. I can say it's hard for me to read something in other languages.

The big challenge is the obstacles of languages, as language is usually regarded as the carrier of culture. Although Asian scholars have published numerous academic papers in English in the international arena, this literature cannot provide enough material for us to use the idea of Asia as an 'imaginary anchoring point' (Chen, 2010).

(See the reflective section in Chapter 2)

Academic cultures and language limitations are just two of the barriers that arise in trying to build new, transnational, intellectual alliances and solidarities. There are deep rifts that exist within Asia and in relation to Asia and other parts of the world.

For some of us, then, Chen was regarded as too political. Some felt, for example, that, given the lingering presence of cold war antagonisms, Chen's

perspectives might not be well received when the authors returned to their home countries, where people are expected to take sides through a cold war imaginary. Lin explains this imaginary well when she says:

[When you position the] good guy (the democratic West) versus the bad guy (the Communist East), or vice versa . . . this imaginary reinforces the colonial imaginary of a hierarchical structure with which the colonized makes evaluations in the world; what is good, what is superior, modern, civilized versus bad, inferior backward, uncivilized.

(2012, p. 162)

To challenge such thinking was regarded as, potentially, dangerous.

Chen makes the point that, ‘if critiques remain within the limits of the nationalist framework, it will not be possible to work towards regional reconciliation’ (2010, p. 159). He points to the importance of affect (feeling) when it comes to the national, the colonial and the post-colonial, and to the fact that the affective investments and attachments of all three need to be acknowledged.

‘It is difficult to build alliances between scholars in Asia’, one of us argued, claiming there are many ‘mindsets’ that get in the way. We certainly acknowledged the many barriers to undertaking the type of transnational imagining proposed by Chen. A major barrier was nationalism, another person explains, inviting us to talk about:

the nation as the basic defining unit. How come we know that it’s problematic, but we always come back to it? How do we escape from this idea? We know it’s very problematic and lots of stereotyping and prejudice stems from it, essentialism and all such negative connotations are attached to it. But it’s just hard to escape from the notion of taking national entity as the basic defining unit. How do we deal with this?

Making one of our aspirations clear, it was proclaimed, ‘We need to change this. We can’t move on if we don’t, if we keep doing things with the same mindset as we had yesterday’. But changing was difficult. The politics of knowledge is transnational, regional, national and subnational. These politics intersect and are hard to untangle.

Nationalism was a major issue among us, and people recounted stories, not just of Western colonialism and American imperialism, but of wars and international tensions within Asia itself. Some of these arise from a history of war and intra-Asian colonialism. Within Asia, over the years, there have been various colonizing projects by the major powers of China and Japan. Even less-powerful countries have had their own imperial fantasies, seeking to move from being colonized to become neocolonialists. Such national tensions led to some strains within the group. Raw emotions were exposed. For example, we discussed the tense relationships within Indonesia in relation

to West Papua. Chen's idea that we could rise above such rifts through reflections, conversations and dialogues was seen as, simply, too utopian.

There is no doubt that, within Asia, there are international tensions. Further, within multi-ethnic countries, tensions exist between majority and minority ethnic groups. There are also many other power differences and divisions. One of the things we pondered was the rivalry between Asians that does not seem to be connected to the matters Chen raised. 'Why is it that Asians felt more threatened by other Asians, than by Western influences?', one person wondered. Another put it more colourfully: 'Why are we so allergic to other Asians?', saying, 'When I think back to when I was a student, as a Vietnamese scholar, I didn't quote Chinese scholars. And Chinese scholars, in the same class, didn't quote Japanese. We all quoted Western people'.

This led us to consider other tensions between Asians. For example, the question was raised: Why are mainland Chinese regarded by Singaporeans as more of a danger than the West?

I think we are threatened by fellow Asians more than by the West. I just came back from Singapore and that sentiment is everywhere in Singapore. . . . European culture pervades every aspect of culture there, theatre, architecture, everyday conversation, Starbucks and everything, and people just don't care. All of a sudden, a few Chinese brands came in, 'What is this brand? I don't like that'.

However, the tensions can also be on a much more personal scale, as the following comment indicates:

Suppose I work with you for a long time and I listen to you a lot, and I have no problem. . . . And one day Philip is better than me, he's published more, he gets a rise in salary. I'm threatened. Why? . . . I feel threatened because he's so similar to me, he's yellow, he's male, he's studying in the West, he's so similar. Suddenly, one day he's being valued by the system and I feel threatened.

So, these rivalries may be personal, they may be between communities, as well as between nations. It was insisted that, 'we need to be able to theorize [such rivalries]'. In fact, it seemed a constant refrain: 'We need to theorize this!'

### **Where to from here?**

We ended our reflections by acknowledging that there was so much more we could have done. As our peer reviewer, Michael Singh, pointed out, there are many matters that we did not explore. These include Asian patriarchy, capitalism, racism, chauvinism, heterosexism and nationalistic xenophobia. And, indeed, he suggests that it is worth asking whether Chen's agenda actually feeds into any of these.

Chen talks of the importance of ‘inter-referencing; that is, multiplying each other’s points of reference’ (2010, p. 212). An important follow-up project for us is to develop this further than we have been able to in this project and the book. We want to take this as our primary method of engagement with regard to theoretical frameworks, methodologies and epidemiologies, as well as the ontologies that we sought to reimagine. And, we want to link this work to the following call from Lin, who says, ‘There is an urgent need for research on the design of pedagogical and curricular strategies for facilitating the reconstitution of the imperialist and colonial cultural imaginaries and subjectivities’ (Lin, 2012, p. 155).

As this clearly indicates, there is a great deal of work still to be done. We are merely at the beginning of a long, intellectual journey.

## Notes

- 1 Dat Bao, Hosne Ara Begum, Paulus Kuswandono, Thuy Linh Le, Thi Nhai Nguyen, Siti Rohani, Mohammad Moninoor Roshid, Hai Ha Vu and Yujia Wang.
- 2 Monash University’s Education Faculty also provided some financial assistance to the project.

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