

EDUCATION IN JAPAN: TESTING THE LIMITS OF ASIAN EDUCATION

La Educación en Japón: Revisando los límites de la Educación en Asia

David Blake Willis
e-mail: dwillis108@gmail.com
University of Santa Barbara (California, USA)

Jeremy Rapple
e-mail: jeremyrapple@yahoo.com
University of Tokio (Japan)

ABSTRACT: A re-imagining of education is taking place throughout the world with the 21st century in mind and nowhere is this being tested, probed, and critiqued more than in Asia. This new era sees social phenomena as polycentric and polycontextual rather than bilateral or unidirectional. Asia is first and foremost where education in the 21st century is seeing its most spectacular engagement and growth. We view the Japanese example with its multiple, textured approaches as one of the heralds of this new global conversation for an education that responds to the transnational, transcultural characteristics of the new age that has dawned upon us. Combining Confucian, North American, European, and global approaches – all of which are having an impact on other nations of Asia – Japan represents the cutting edge of a new wave for understanding education that has movement as a central motif and strategy.

Key words: Education, Asia, Japan.

RESUMEN: La educación esta siendo imaginada de nuevo en todo el mundo, sin embargo, el lugar donde está siendo más puesta a prueba, explorada y criticada es en Asia. Esta nueva era percibe los fenómenos sociales como poli-céntricos y poli-contextuales y no como algo bilateral ni unidireccional. Asia es el lugar donde se ve el crecimiento y compromiso más espectacular de la educación en el siglo XXI. Nosotros vemos el caso de Japón con sus múltiples enfoques, como el símbolo de esta conversión global, que responde a las características transnacionales y transculturales de esta nueva era. La combinación del confucionismo y de actitudes norteamericanas, europeas y globales -que tienen un impacto también en otras naciones en Asia- en Japón representa la vanguardia de una nueva concepción de la educación, que tiene el movimiento como su tema y estrategia centrales.

Palabras clave: Educación, Asia, Japón.

Fecha de recepción: 2-IX-2011
Fecha de aceptación: 14-IX-2011

1. Education in Japan: Reimagining and Testing the Limits of Asian Education

A re-imagining of education is taking place throughout the world with the 21st century in mind and nowhere is this being tested, probed, and critiqued more than in Asia¹. This new era sees social phenomena as polycentric and polycontextual rather than bilateral or unidirectional. We now see globalization in the field of education as taking place through myriad conceptual optics (Arnové, 2009), one of which is the regional view represented by Asia and, within Asia, by Japan. It is no longer an era for education created as a series of national images alone, of multiples we can tally and tabulate, a methodology «lost in an interminable accretion of examples» (Cowen, 1996, p. 166). This broader understanding of flows and interconnectivity (Appadurai, 1996, 2000) makes for a richer intellectual project and a re-imagining of «Education in Asia».

Asia is first and foremost where education in the 21st century is seeing its most spectacular engagement and growth. We view the Japanese example with its multiple, textured approaches as one of the heralds of this new global conversation for an education that responds to the transnational, transcultural characteristics of the new age that has dawned upon us. With mobilities, flows, transfers, and circulations now ever-present in the local as well as the global (Hannerz, 1996, 2000; Rappleye, 2007; Phillips, 2009), what the Japanese example offers us is a representative «testing of the limits of Asian education». Combining Confucian, North American, European, and global approaches – all of which are having an impact on other nations of Asia – Japan represents the cutting edge of a new wave for understanding education that has movement as a central motif and strategy.

What we are seeing is thus *the global circulation of public cultures*², something the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reminds us is now on a common playing ground, even if from time to time the field is uneven and the pitfalls of past power alignments disrupt our shared spaces of discourse. What are these «public cultures»? More than simply the old-fashioned «public» of traditional power alignments, national governments, or state-educational systems, the new multiple voices of «public cultures» force upon educational systems a different openness to global, regional, and local phenomena³. Many of these public cultures are the «Others» of a different era. Some are newly created communities, classes, diaspora, and other deterritorialized phenomena. Their experiences and voices are closer to the *axis mundi* of daily life in a globalized world.

Hidden until recently, yet representative of the new global milieu, these «public cultures» are now positioned alongside the older yet still dominant views of

¹ Stephen Carney noted this and other insights (personal communication, December 7, 2010) in his review of this work. As he said, «globalization» is, among other things, useful for exposing the constructions of the past.

² This phrase was coined for a session of the American Anthropological Association's Annual Meeting in 2010 by Arjun Appadurai.

³ The «interpretation of cultures» which Clifford Geertz reconceptualized in the 1970s and 1980s rapidly transformed the social sciences during the 1990s, with the work of Hannerz (1992), Bhabha (1994),

elite policy makers as a «grassroots globalization» that seriously questions the educational projects of the nation state (Appadurai, 2000). PISA is one such elite project; the construction of «best practices» under neo-liberalism another; and yet another the rankings race in Higher Education⁴. All are examples of an official globalizing discourse surrounding education in the early 21st century. There are many more, all reshaping, and being reshaped by, the global circulation of educational ideas. Yet at the same time they are all interacting, spawning, and producing the «public cultures» that embed and are embedded within the global circuit of messages and meaning-making.

Understanding education in Asia begins with a reengagement of Japan, a re-mapping of the historical colonial and neo-colonial roots of education in Japan and further afield. We begin with an acknowledgement of the dominance and hegemony of the 20th century: the high tide of imperialism. Like «culture», education as a «discipline» was often treated in this era as a tool that informed colonial strategies of rule over those clearly seen as inferior. This view, predicated on the imaginings of colonizers, native modernizers, and academic authorities alike, replaced rich pre-modern flows with fabricated national borders and sustained an era of educational research that failed to look beyond legal boundaries between states. Today this «methodological nationalism» (Robertson and Dale, 2005; Dale and Robertson, 2009) continues to pervade much of education and thus holds the field back from joining the most dynamic sections of the larger global Academy.

These paradigms continue to permeate domestic discourses of education as well, but built upon them is also perhaps an even more distorting disciplinary artifact: «advocacy» comparison, a vision of education that continues to imagine the Other as simply a tool of legitimation, leverage and authority for domestic reform debates⁵. As evidenced by the parallel visions of the American *A Nation at Risk* report of the 1980s and subsequent follow-ups, as well as the series of Japanese educational reform commissions that recently witnessed «*A Nation at Risk Crosses the Pacific*» (Takayama, 2008), «comparison» both within and without Japan has been heavily linked to domestic political projects (Rappleve, 2012).

The World was looking «in» and Japan was looking «out». This political manipulation of images overlaid an earlier Orientalizing; an «Othering» which, we hardly need remind ourselves, is still taking place, producing a body of scholarship that has had an important impact yet equally significant distortions⁶. What we have

and then Appadurai (1996) speaking for an increased and provocative complexity around the concept of «culture», one that has only recently begun to have an impact on Japan studies and comparative education.

⁴ As seen in results published by PISA in December 2010. The performance of Shanghai, the first time a city/region rather than a nation was allowed to participate in this «international» test, «stunned» the world of education. Similar «shocks» have occurred when the Higher Education rankings have been announced, either by the *Times Higher Education* or Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

⁵ We created this term as we reflected on Cowen's (2006) distinction between «academic» and «applied» comparative education. We see «advocacy comparative education» as intimately linked with the latter: arguably both are produced by dominant political discourses, though this is more obvious and explicit in the former.

⁶ We include here ourselves, in a recent publication where we problematized the topic of «Frontiers of Education: Japan as «Global Model» or «Nation at Risk?»» (Willis, Yamamura, & Rappleve 2008) in much the same binary way we are now critiquing.

here, more than twenty years later, are the still-glowing embers of policy from above, from elites determined to meld societies in their image and with their own «rational» purposes. Yet theirs is only a partial story now as the new flows of education and cultural change increasingly alter society in unforeseen ways, helping us as scholars to center our awareness on «grassroots globalization», on refining an «academic comparative», and on moving towards reconnecting Japanese educational scholarship to the World and the World to Japanese scholarship.

The key here is that Japan has been a *co-production*. Education defined Japan in the 1980s and early 1990s as a progressive place from which to learn, albeit in a simplistic and essentialized way. Similarly, Japan defined education itself by helping to return the discipline to its functionalist roots, convincing us that the discipline could proceed by learning from bounded cases and seeking law-like rules from them. Both approaches were, however, «imaginings» rather than the full story, missing important realities on the ground at the time and reinforcing outmoded images of the world, just at the moment when a break from the past was arguably most needed.

In «re-imagining» Asian education in the global conversation, we begin with the point that we are all still deeply implicated in the Others own series of projects, but that we can now also approach this in different ways. This new co-production is a collaborative project, not one that organizes life into distinct dialectical spheres that eventually find themselves at odds with each other or determined by a «rational» Self alone. We must reconceptualize what Japan means, working towards the transcendence of Self and Other, rising above older images and paradigms. In so doing, we re-imagine our own visions of not simply Asia, but of education itself.

2. Opening Spaces: Roots and Routes of Education

We begin with a journey to the past, to those giants of scholarship upon whose shoulders we stand, but who could also not know the larger world that was beginning to take shape (Larsen, 2009). Some did what they could to challenge the assumptions of the past and to re-channel the flows of thought and comparison. Yet, more often than not these scholars were all too willing to work within established parameters. As a consequence, both an Orientalizing of education and then an «advocacy» approach to the field established conceptual narratives that led to a series of unhelpful paths and directions. These narratives channeled studies of education in Japan in particular into slow-moving waters; into a self-referential swirl far from the major currents of philosophical thought. How can we understand these earlier scholars, their roots and routes?

We begin here by critically revisiting some of the dominant paradigms of what Japan and the Japanese have meant in the past for non-Japanese. We note first how previous flows and circulations have been blocked from our view today by the accretions of Orientalism, past and present, an amnesia to the past that leads to a dearth of imagination about the possibilities for a different kind of co-

production, one that would take Self and Other out of the respective eddies and again back into synergetic confluence. The fires of militarism, imperialism, and nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s led to an imagining of a dramatic other side, a backward country of collective masses; a country that had not yet been «enlightened» or found the «true» path of democracy and human rights.

The American Occupation attempted to remake Japan and Japanese education based on such assumptions. Here we note the influence of anthropologists, in particular, blinkered by Orientalizing assumptions and the search for essential Others that characterized the discipline, scholars who were often all-too willing to lend their «expertise» to dominant interpretations of Japan⁷. A remarkable study commissioned by the American War Department during World War II, for example, would have a disproportionate impact on visions of Japan, arguably right up to the present day: Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946)⁸. This signal work became the fountainhead of views on Japan, a legitimation and projection of our fears, hopes, and desires on this island nation, separating it as unique and eye opening. These assumptions were perhaps mobilized nowhere more so than in the field of education.

The American Occupation remade Japanese public education, or so it wished to believe, largely on the back of such anthropological assumptions. The goal was nothing short of the spiritual and cultural reeducation of the entire Japanese population. It was an approach that diverged from the Allied Occupation of Germany where the purge of Nazism was seen as sufficient. A political reeducation and purge would not suffice in Japan because it was Oriental culture that had supposedly given rise to Japanese militarism⁹. Thus there was talk of replacing the Japanese script with the Western European alphabet and high hopes that Japan would become more «Christian»-like. The Occupation, working with the «expert» advice of anthropologists, even attempted a «stamping out» of the Shintoist, Buddhist, and Confucian elements of Japan's culture¹⁰. What was remarkable, though,

⁷ In many ways the pattern for these «scientific-cum-political» projects had been set by the British colonization of India and the legions of ethnographers, bureaucrats, and clerks who descended on the subcontinent in a flurry of epic documentation, nomenclature, and historicizing in the 19th and early 20th century. The work of Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks provides us with excellent accounts of these projects and their impact on worldwide visions of the imperial encounter with the Other. See also McCulloch (2009). We note, with a great deal of disappointment, the apparent continuation of the mix of a lack of reflexivity or personal ambition that now finds anthropologists employed by the US military in places such as Afghanistan using their «expertise» to help «subdue» the natives.

⁸ Benedict was a key figure in the establishment of Anthropology as a discipline with her book *Patterns of Culture* before World War II. The fortunes of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* have risen and fallen depending on particular academic fashions, it might be added, and we appear now to be in another ascendant phase of acceptance for her work. A recent discussion can be found in *Japan Focus*: C. Douglas Lummis, Ruth Benedict's Obituary for Japanese Culture, July 19, 2007, accessed on November 27, 2010 at http://www.japanfocus.org/-C_Douglas-Lummis/2474 and Toru Uno & C. Douglas Lummis, «Ruth Benedict's Obituary for Japanese Culture: an exchange,» accessed November 27, 2010, http://japanfocus.org/-Toru_UNO_C_D_Lummis/2597.

⁹ For an excellent comparative account of the differences between the US Occupation of Japan and Germany in relation to education, see Shibata (2005), whose recent work also reflects the shift away from the older paradigm that we are describing here (see Shibata, 2010; Ohkura & Shibata, 2009)

¹⁰ As John Dower has noted in his magisterial *Embracing Defeat*: «For the victors, occupying defeated

was the omission that Japan had «borrowed» the German model in the 1880s, from the Constitution right down to Prussian school uniforms.

Japan was a hybrid, a mixing, a coming together – a product of global flows and transfer. But the «expertise» of anthropology made it possible to avoid admitting that perhaps the Japanese military monster with its grab for colonies, its notions of racial superiority, and its appeals to the divine was really more a reflection, *a circulation back*, of the Western Self than an Oriental Other. Embarrassing as some of these recollections may be for a (Western) World that now prides itself on openness and multiculturalism (and even more so for scholars who uncritically accepted such notions, either of Japan or their respective disciplines), it is important to review the strata of historical accretions. We need to perform «an archeology of past assumptions and beliefs» such as these, if we are to open the flows of scholarship to new channels of meaning and original academic production, connecting Japanese education and educators to global flows and to each other.

Historically, these flows were not only channeled by those looking in from the outside. The war also produced a range of Japanese imaginings of the World, an Occidentalism (Buruma & Margalit, 2004), that continued to flourish after the war and that had its counterpart in the post-war *nihonjinron* («theories of Japanese uniqueness»: a unique «race»). Produced originally by scholars and then elaborated on by the media and politicians, this powerful literature was vast, ranging from history and sociology to philosophy and science. And it was a pattern that has been repeated again and again throughout the nations of Asia.

The overall theme for Japan was one of «development in isolation of an island nation» (*shimaguni*) with a distinct language and a powerfully different collectivism. All these differences supposedly made Japan immune to analysis by outsiders. *Nihonjinron*, as propounded by scholars such as Doi Takeo and Nakane Chie and published mostly in Japanese, was clearly a process of Self-Othering. Western scholars of the 1950s and 1960s followed in this tradition, just as they are doing now in China, Southeast Asia, and India, bringing not only positivist assumptions concerning development to education, economics, and politics but, not without paradox, extending the logic of anthropology to the study of Japan.

Educators of this era confined themselves to studies of educational history or infused the Japanese example with the powerful new authority of «advocacy» education: the *discourse of development*. Rapid growth in the 1960s and 1970s was a time when it was easy to imagine Japan from afar as a «development» success story¹¹. Through such an optic it was simply assumed that Japan was becoming

Germany had none of the *exoticism* of what took place in Japan: the total control over a pagan, «Oriental» society by white men who were (unequivocally, in General MacArthur's view) engaged in a Christian mission. The occupation of Japan was the last immodest exercise in the colonial conceit known as «the white man's burden» (2000, p. 23).

¹¹ The beginnings of the analyses of Japanese public education were during the American Occupation. Well-reported by Herbert Passin in his *Society and Education in Japan* (1965), this was to be the opening acts of the drama of Japan's sudden arrival on the international stage, which we see in the 1980s as a nation with impeccable test scores, regimented producers of engineers, scientists, and technocrats («Japan as Number One»

more like us, albeit at a slower rate of growth. Both the earlier image of cultural «outlier» and «exception» and the «development success story» were necessary to provide the motive force behind the swell of attraction that would soon add another layer of distortions: the political use of Japanese education in America's and the world's shift to neo-liberalism.

3. Towards a Reimagining of Japanese and Asian Education: A Conceptual Guide

3.1. «Real» Versus «Imagined»... Or Reimagining the «Real»?

A conceptual framework that renders explicit the confluences of domestic and international flows in Japan and Asia. The distinction between «real» and «imagined» globalization (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, Schriewer 2003) and the notion of multiple international borders and attention to the permeabilities and immunities of translations along those borders (Cowen, 1997, 2000, 2003) are what we should be turning our attention to next.

Such a conceptual apparatus is clearly only one of many potential ways of understanding recent change, but we believe it is sufficiently general enough to embrace a variety of theoretical approaches, disciplinary perspectives, and topics, but yet also catalyze a genuine conversation across the chapters to move us beyond mere description towards conceptual and theoretical elaboration. We also felt that this theoretical frame, derived as it was from work in the field of comparative education, would at once both position the work firmly within the field and also find immediate connection to work done on other national contexts in Asia and elsewhere using similar lenses. In what follows then we first sketch this framework in general terms, followed by an exploration of how our authors have engaged with it and what that tells us about both Japan and the new «global» dimension of education¹².

How might we consider the various ways that recent reforms in Japan can be understood as either *real* or *imagined*, substantive versus merely semantic, in education in Asia and Japan? The inspiration here is from recent work on globalization by Jürgen Schriewer (2003) and Gita Steiner-Khamsi (2004) who argue that although there often appears to be worldwide convergence around a specific set of educational reform prescriptions (see for example Ramirez, 2003; Baker

in Ezra Vogel's famous book by the same title). This collection of historical documents and commentaries from the early modern era through the Occupation was a springboard for historical reports by comparative educators on the role of education in the making of the Japanese developmental state in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹² Such a framework derives from Anglo-American comparative education and could be seen as replicating the dominance of Western knowledge production (Takayama, this volume), yet while this has been true there are also significant changes taking place. Steiner-Khamsi and Schriewer, two widely cited scholars, are Persian and German, for example, and can hardly be seen as Anglo-American. Moreover, the authors of the chapters here were encouraged to utilize or introduce concepts from Japanese or other non-Western scholars in their chapters. For our own chapters, we chose to use the names of key scholars from comparative education to firmly position the work in an established and leading body of comparative work.

& LeTendre, 2005), upon closer inspection we find that much of this change is more *imagined* than *real*.

Although discerning what is *real* versus what is *imagined* vis-à-vis education flows is both complex (Rappleye, 2006) and risks devolving into deeper questions of metaphysics and semantics, this perspective forces us to move beyond smooth *imagining* from afar to engage with *realities* on the ground. That is, it moves us beyond the unthinking *imaginings* catalyzed by a mere reading of policy documents, gathered from media reports, the tone and tenor of public debates and the momentum of outmoded research paradigms. It forces us to instead investigate the *realities* of closed-door political battles, critical silences or suppressed «knowledge» within on-going debates, reform processes evolving in actual educational institutions, and new perspectives suggested by leading research further afield.

3.2. Borderlands in Asian Education: Permeabilities, Immunities, and Circulations

We especially notice the increasingly diverse societies in Asia (and Japan). These are active borderlands, with complex, overlapping, and disjunctive features. This cultural dynamic in Asia and Japan is now one of flow, uncertainty, and disjuncture; and is replacing older visions of stability, order, and systems. As can be observed globally, these cultural flows are transnational and transcultural. One way of making sense of such multiplex interactions is to use Appadurai's idea of *-scapes* (1990), phenomena very much like landscapes: fluid, irregular shapes that change our perspective according to how or from what position we view them. As in some of our earlier work (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 2009) and like Stephen Carney (2009), we suggest that Appadurai helps us appreciate the ways in which *-scapes* reveal global cultural flows: *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *finanscapes*, *ideoscapes*, and, as we propose here in this book, *eduscapes*¹³.

What we envision broadly are eduscapes which present constructs of meaning that embrace rather than ignore experiential and situational referents, landscapes that are the building blocks of new «imagined worlds» in Japan. These are not always the same as the imagined worlds of official, media, government or business minds, either; or for that matter of conventional, discipline-based academics. They are, clearly, the voices and reports of those participating in border contexts. Whether these are traditional borders in Japanese and Asian societies or new borderlands are «border experiences» that reflect institutional, societal, and cultural changes in Asia and Japan.

These «borders and borderlands», in turn, call forth «permeabilities» that denote crossroads and specific confluences of change and transformation. By centering the «margins» through such a concept we redirect attention away from a (supposed) «core» of Japanese and Asian cultures and educational experiences

¹³ One of the first uses of this term in the field of education, to our knowledge, was in a symposium by one of us at WCCES 2001, subsequently published in 2002 (Willis, 2002). The term now has wide currency and has been used in a variety of contexts.

with all its implications of continuity, immovability, and uniqueness. We refocus the research gaze on Japan's processes of change and interaction with the outside world but push for borders to be conceptualized in ways that extended beyond a mere legal demarcation of territorial States. To begin to capture this we utilize the work of Robert Cowen (1997, 2000, 2003), who has called attention to the ways that globalization can be conceptualized along *multiple* borders: political, social, and economic, but also psychological, cultural, and imaginative¹⁴.

We have long held that «border crossings» present themselves as ideal venues to witness the negotiation of «external» flows and concomitant process of «in-internal» formation (Willis et al, 2008; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 2009), particularly as they indicate the possibilities of mixing, of creoles, creolising and hybrid cultures on the ground in local cultural contexts (Bhabha, 1997a, 1997b; Willis, 2001a, 2001b; Graburn, Ertl, & Tierney, 2007; Cohen and Toninato, 2009). Yet, Cowen's innovation for us was to think in terms of development of a wider conceptualization, of a «*permiology*» and «*immunology*,» analyses of what is allowed to enter and what is rejected from «outside,» across multiple borders *simultaneously*. That is, Cowen directs us to question what influences and which flows are permitted to pass through particular borders, which ideas can circulate and which are resisted or only selectively embraced?

Centering these «margins» and revealing multiple border openings/closings is a conceptual innovation that moves us still further away from «methodological nationalism» and towards a regional view of phenomena. This attracted us because it seemed to resonate with the particular geographic and historic position of Asia and Japan. It is in fact the deep historical relationship of Japan with these border questions, more strikingly vivid in its contrasts than that of most nations and so deeply *encoded* in the history, language, and culture of Japan (Morris-Suzuki, 1998), that makes for an extraordinarily compelling example for education in Asia. In embracing Cowen's call to investigate *permeability* and *immunity* across multiple borders, we thus better understand Asia and Japan, but at the same time we invoke Japan's «comparative advantage» as we begin the task of trying to write increasingly sophisticated and innovative immunological records of educational systems.

We should also prioritize rupture: how the «end of catch-up» has left Japan, over the past two decades, without models or a clear vision of the future, or indeed of its place in the World amid the ambiguity of global «signals». Japan no longer orients itself, at least explicitly, on the light of comparison. In this way, the Other, «catch-up», and the West are always *multi-vocal*, used skillfully and in different ways to affect particular openings along certain borders, even while shutting down others. Revisiting history is important for a wider project of «reimagining»

¹⁴ This echoes the important work around cosmopolitanism by Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, & Chakrabarty (2002) and Appiah (2006), not to mention Ong (1999), Mignolo (2000), and Nederveen Pieterse (2004). Cosmopolitanism is an emergent discourse, «an ethics for a global era» and a set of «obligations to others... that stretch beyond those to whom we are related... or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship» (Appiah 2006: 15).

as the interactions of the past directly channel the global flows and circulations of the present.

Centering the «margins» is rather more complex than it might first appear. Perhaps precisely because global «signals» are *multi-vocal* they produce multiple responses. What we find in the elaborations of Cowen's notions of *permeability* and *immunity* are the makings of a more sophisticated approach to understanding the complex confluence of the global and domestic. Together the chapters force us to conceptualize multiple borders, but also to further extend this work to focus on the concomitance, complementarities, and contestations that arise as border flows come together on domestic reform scenes. If we take another step by conceptualizing that the real impacts of these flows, operate under, yet are in a dialectic with, an equally variegated reform discourse *imagining* various responses to the *multi-vocality* of global «signals», then we arrive at a conceptualization of globalization that is expansive, multilayered and defies simplicity.

That is, it is arguably only through simultaneous attention to *real*, albeit select, openings along economic, social, political borders *and* the ways that discursive formations operating around such opening *imagine* the World, that we can locate all the various dimensions of globalization on education reform. This is true of both Japan and elsewhere around the World. Yet the distinct advantage of Japan is that the country's unique historical location, rapid reversal of economic fortunes, accelerated pace of social change (aging society and influx of immigrants), and highly elaborated discourse around culture allows us to identify these confluences much more clearly and permits us to articulate the aforementioned concomitance, complementarity, and contestations with greater clarity, with all the potential for conceptual and theoretical advances.

4. Dialogic Spaces: «The Conversation of the Global» and Education

What does all of the above suggest about Asia and Japan in terms of education and in particular how it should be re-imagined today? The well-worn images of Japan as «outlier» or sealed off from the rest of the World are highly distorting, a legacy of the past that leads us to *imagine* Japan and Japanese educational change as something quite removed from *reality*. Arguably neither Japan nor Japanese education has been easy for outside observers to understand, given both the mixed messages from Japan itself and the high walls of geographic location, sophisticated cultural codes, and an imposing language (at least for Western scholars). And this is becoming true for the study of other educational systems in Asia, especially China and India.

In the previous era of continuity and *immobilism* a slow refining of those essential images may have been sufficient. Yet, Japan, and by extension Japanese education, has now undergone dramatic change, making the level of distortion created by *refining continuity*, rather than *reimagining change*, all that much more distorting. Japanese education has long been overdue for a reimagining, but arguably never so much as now. It is these earlier, but surprisingly persistent images of

Japan, founded in part on an Orientalizing worldview and in part by the distortions of «advocacy education» that have kept scholarship on Japan from developing in complex ways. It is arguably these same earlier, persistent *imaginings* and the lack of complexity they engender that also prevent Japan's return to its rightful place as a key pole of comparison in the «global conversation». Japan will continue to change, necessitating further reimagining for the foreseeable future. Here, as elsewhere, context is paramount (Steiner-Khamsi, 2009), yet no longer topical does not mean no longer relevant.

First, Japan's process or trial-and-error in attempting to respond to globalization and find direction and consensus in its own «lost wanderings» domestically deserves study in its own right¹⁵. This will, once the system «settles» (assuming it will, for better or for worse), provide the foundation for detailing change processes with a much higher level of sophistication. By attempting to re-imagine now *in the midst of tremendous flux*, we wish to break the silence of the 1990s about Japan (and education in Asia) and lay the foundation for more sophisticated archaeologies of a «reformed» system in the future.

Second, by pushing for conceptual and theoretical innovation we speak for a wider educational conversation. One cannot understand the world without understanding Asia and especially Japan. Conceptual and theoretical engagement in education, rather than mere description, become a major bridge to connect with discussions elsewhere. By taking up this challenge, we model the type of global positioning that work on Asia and Japan should take in the future.

Finally, and of central importance, we note how such a move helps us simultaneously re-imagine «education» and push for a different type of co-production. We need «to re-imagine education» as a «dialogic space» (Freire, 1985) wherein scholars both in English-speaking, Western «centers» and non-English-speaking, non-Western «peripheries» make equal contributions to the theoretical knowledge production of the field¹⁶. In this space, scholars in both English-speaking, Western «centers» and non-English-speaking, non-Western «peripheries» can make what Keita Takayama terms «equal contributions to theoretical knowledge production». The notion of «interpretive communities» proposed by David Harvey may be helpful here as well. Drawing on earlier work, Harvey (1989) argued decades ago that one feature that demarcates the post-modern from the modern is that within such communities, «individuals and groups are held to control mutually within these domains what they consider to be valid knowledge» in this «dialogic space».

The point is that the deluge of recent policy change can no longer be envisaged in purely domestic terms. Nor can it be understood simply through a «cultural» lens, or grasped in its entirety through looking through the lenses of «advocacy education» Substantive «reimagining» begins with attention to both domestic and international dimensions, a focus on how these forces converge and

¹⁵ See the final section of the chapter by Rappleye & Kariya for a sophisticated discussion along these lines.

¹⁶ The idea of a space for dialogue derives from the work of Paulo Freire (1985).

become translated into new forms of educational policy and practice, and – finally – how this reflects, diverges, supports, or complicates research in other national contexts worldwide as it moves towards transcendence of Self and Other. Substantive «reimagining» arguably never ends, but at least it stakes its final form in a truly inclusive dialogue or polylogue amongst foreign and domestic scholars that rejects the knowledge/power imbalances of the past, are as attuned to the «global» as to the «local».

We are reminded that this mutually constitutive project is immediate as well. Our «reimagining of Asia and Japan» is not only a reimagining vis-à-vis the past, but a «reimagining» in other ways as well. Japan, with its contemporary insecurities, is being defined by the «Other», for example: by an ascendant China, an «imperial» USA, a «rogue» North Korea, and an aggressive market capitalism, among others. (Ironically, one area it does not seem to be responding to is the multi-cultural reality of contemporary Japanese society: Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2009). What is important is that we understand what is helping frame «reality» and offer our own vision of co-production as a counterweight. Yet we emphasize that this is merely a start. There are clearly dimensions missing, not the least being how youth *imagine* themselves in a new «global» space, despite the *realities* in which they live, and how this affects education. More ethnographic work on students themselves might reveal how Japanese youth are being slowly but surely swept up in the new *imaginative* regimes offered by globalization, especially global capitalism, in its now familiar forms: YouTube, Facebook, Mixi, *Ni Channeru*, Anime, Twitter, Uniqlo, Starbucks, Manga, YouTube, iPhone/iTunes, «brand» merchandise, and so on. And this extends in similar ways to the rest of Asia.

While these changes are certainly not new, the disjunctures have clearly widened in recent years, despite the stark *realities* of a deepening recession, youth un/underemployment, and increasing loss of traditional markers of identity. How do Japanese and other Asian students negotiate the *imaginings* afforded by globalization with the *realities* of, say, less disposable income, increasingly explicit social stratification and an intensifying moral-identity message conveyed through schools and so on? This question leads to others: Will these youth accept cultural nationalist's claims that a return to the cultural past will enrich both their own lives and Japan and thus push forward with their studies? Will they embrace the increasingly multicultural world they live in, perhaps using an increasingly less competitive educational environment to explore the both their changing local neighborhoods and the World beyond? Or will they increasingly view «success in education» with suspicion. And with a future approximating that of their parents seemingly denied, will they become detached from school and rather than embrace the World choose to simply «enjoy» the present or cloister themselves away from society?¹⁷

¹⁷ We note here the path-breaking work of Stephen Carney and Ulla Madsen on such issues (see Madsen & Carney, 2010).

Here an extension of the *real versus imagined* framework also suggests new pathways for future research: work on the lived experience of contemporary Japanese and other Asian youth themselves (a good example is Goodman, Imoto, & Toivonen, 2011; see also the work of Ruth Hayhoe and Heidi Ross on China); not simply how they are forced, more than any other group in Japan today, to negotiate the dual realities of «globalization» and the collapse of the post-war political, economic, and moral settlement, but how this creates tensions in their educational experiences. Unquestionably, the elephant in the room for Japan and Asian education, too is the long-neglected theme of gender (Stromquist, 2009). These are just some of the myriad opportunities for anthropologists who are willing to leave behind the Orientalism and «methodological nationalism» of the past to reenter the new conversation, showing us how global flows are immediate and negotiated (and then renegotiated) by those targeted by immense new reforms.

But let us be clear: our call here is just the beginning of a movement to help restore the voices of suppressed forms of knowledge, to rethink the confining assumptions of the past, to stimulate mutual dialogue and debate, and to unite around problematiques *of our own making*. To the degree that we succeed and scholars after us take up the challenge, we will also find, arguably, the highest path of and for an understanding of Asian and Japanese Education.

References

- APPADURAI, A. (1990) Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy, *Public Culture*, 2 (2) Spring: pp. 1-24.
- APPADURAI, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Public Worlds)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- APPADURAI, A (2000) Guest Editor. *Globalization*. Special Issue of *Public Culture*, Millennial Quartet, 12 (1) Winter.
- APIAH, K. A. (2006) *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York: Norton.
- ARNOVE, R. (2009) World-systems analysis and comparative education in the age of globalization, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 101-120).
- BENEDICT, R. (1946) *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Benhabib, Seyla (2002) *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- BENNETT, W. (1987) *Epilogue to Japanese Education Today: Implications for American Education*. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education.
- BHABHA, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.
- BHABHA, H. (Guest Editor) (1997a) «Front lines/border posts,» *Critical Inquiry*, Spring, Volume 23, Number 3.
- BHABHA, H. (1997b) «Life at the border: hybrid identities of the present,» *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol 14, Number 1.

- BRECKENRIDGE, C. A., POLLOCK, S., BHABHA, H. & CHAKRABARTY, D. (eds) (2002) *Cosmopolitanism*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- BURKS, A. W. (1985) *The Modernizers: Overseas Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- BURUMA, I. & MARGALIT, A. (2004) *Occidentalism: The West In the Eyes of Its Enemies*. New York: Penguin Books.
- CARNEY, S. (2009) Negotiating Policy in an Age of Globalization: exploring educational «policyscapes» in Denmark, Nepal, and China, *Comparative Education Review*, 53(1): pp. 63-88.
- CAVE, P. (2001) Educational Reform in Japan in the 1990s: «Individuality» and Other Uncertainties, *Comparative Education*, v. 3, no. 2, pp. 173-191.
- COHEN, R. & TONINATO, P. (2009) *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- COWEN, R. (1996) Last past the post: comparative education, modernity and perhaps post-modernity, *Comparative Education*, 32(2): pp. 151-170.
- COWEN, R. (1997) Late-modernity and the rules of chaos: an initial note on transitologies and rims, in Robin Alexander, Marilyn Osborn & David Phillips (Eds.) *Learning from Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Education Research (Volume 2 – Policy, Professionals, and Development)* (pp. 73-88). Oxford: Symposium Books.
- COWEN, R. (2000) Comparing futures or comparing pasts?, *Comparative Education*, 36 (3): pp. 333-342.
- COWEN, R. (2006) Acting comparatively upon the educational world: puzzles and possibilities, *Oxford Review of Education*, 32 (5): pp. 561-573.
- COWEN, R. & KAZAMIAS, A. M. (2009) *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- CUMMINGS, W. K., & ALTBACH, P. G. (Eds.) (1997) *The Challenge of Eastern Asian Education: Implications for America*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997.
- DALE, P. (1986) *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- DALE, R., and ROBERTSON, S. (2009) Beyond methodological «isms» in comparative education in an era of globalisation, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 1113-1128).
- DECOKER, G. (2002) *National Standards and School Reform in the United States and Japan*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- DOWER, J. (2000) *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- DUKE, B. (1986) *The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America*. London, Praeger.
- FREIRE, P. (1985) *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey.
- GOODMAN, R. (2003) The why, what and how of educational reform in Japan, in Roger Goodman & David Phillips (Eds.) *Can the Japanese Change Their Education System?* (pp. 7-30). Oxford: Symposium.
- GOODMAN, R. (2007) The concept of kokusai-ka and Japanese education reform, *Globalisation, Societies, and Education*, 5(1): pp. 71-87.

- GOODMAN, R., IMOTO, Y. & TOIVONEN, T. (2011) *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From Returnees to NEETs*. Oxford and London: Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies.
- GORDON, J., FUJITA, H., KARIYA, T. & LETENDRE, G. (2010) *Challenges to Japanese Education: Economics, Reform, and Human Rights*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- GRABURN, N., ERTL, J., AND TIERNEY, K. R. (2007) *Multiculturalism in the New Japan: Crossing the Boundaries Within*. London: Berghahn.
- HANNERZ, U. (1992) *Cultural Complexity*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- HANNERZ, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge.
- HANNERZ, U. (2000) *Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids: Keywords in Transnational Anthropology*. Website, *Transnational Communities Working Paper Series*, Oxford: Oxford University. 15 Oct 2000 <<http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/hannerz.pdf>>, accessed Nov 30, 2010.
- HARVEY, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. London: Blackwell.
- HOOD, C. (2001) *Japanese Education Reform: Nakasone's Legacy*. London: Routledge.
- JEYNER, W. (2008) What we should and should not learn from the Japanese and other East Asian education systems, *Education Policy*, 22(6): pp. 900-927.
- LARSEN, M. A. (2009) Comparative education, Postmodernity, and historical research: honouring ancestors, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 1045-1060).
- LARSEN, M. A. (Ed.) (2010) *New Thinking in Comparative Education: Honouring Robert Cowen*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- LEESTMA, R. & WALBERG, H. (Eds) (1992) *Japanese Educational Productivity*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.
- LETENDRE, G. (1999) *Competitor or Ally? Japan's Role in American Educational Debates*. New York: Falmer Press.
- LEWIS, C. (1995) *Educating Hearts and Minds: Reflections on Japanese Preschool and Elementary Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MADSEN, U. & CARNEY, S. (2010) Education in an age of radical uncertainty: youth and schooling in urban Nepal, *Globalisation, Societies, and Education*, 8(4) [In press].
- MATSUDA, T. (ed.) (2001) *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific: In Search of Emerging Cultures and Shared Values in the Japan-America Borderlands*, Hiroshima: Keisuisha.
- MCCULLOCH, G. (2009) Empires and education: the British Empire, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 169-180).
- MIGNOLO, W. D. (2000) *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- MITCHELL, D. (2010) *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*. London: Sceptre.
- MORRIS-SUZUKI, T. (1998) *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- MORRIS-SUZUKI, T. (2002) «Immigration and Citizenship in Contemporary Japan,» in Javed Maswood et al. (Eds), *Japan – Change and Continuity*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- NEDERVEEN, P. J. (2004) *Globalization & Culture: Global Mélange*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- OHKURA, K. & SHIBATA, M. (2009) Globalization and education in Japan, in Tom Popkewitz & Fazal Rizvi (Eds.) *Globalization and the Study of Education: 108th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 160-179). Madison, WI: Blackwell.
- ONG, A. (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- PASSIN, H. (1965) *Society and Education in Japan*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- PHILLIPS, D. (2009) Aspects of educational transfer, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 1061-1078).
- POPKEWITZ, T. S. (2009) The double gestures of cosmopolitanism and comparative studies of education, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 385-402).
- RABINOW, P. (1984) *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Vintage.
- RAMÍREZ, F. (2003). The global model and national legacies, in Kathryn Anderson-Levitt (Ed.) *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory* (pp. 239-254). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- RAPPLEYE, J. (2007) *Exploring Cross-national Attraction in Education: Some Historical Comparisons of American and Chinese Attraction to Japanese Education* (Oxford Studies in Comparative Education). Oxford: Symposium Books.
- RAPPLEYE, J. (2012) *Theorizing Educational Policy Transfer in an Era of Globalization: History – Spatiality – Comparison*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- ROBERTSON, S. L. & DALE, R. (2008) Researching education in a globalising era: beyond methodological nationalism, methodological statism, methodological educationism, and spatial fetishism, in Julia Resnik (Ed.) *The Production of Educational Knowledge in the Global Era*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- ROHLEN, T. (1983) *Japan's High Schools*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- ROHLEN, T. & LETENDRE, G. (1998) *Teaching and Learning in Japan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SCHOPPA, L. (1991). *Education Reform in Japan: A Case of Immobilist Politics*. London: Routledge.
- SCHRIEWER, J. (2003). Globalisation in education: process and discourse, *Policy Futures in Education*, 1(2): pp. 271-283.
- SHIBATA, M. (2005) *Japan and Germany Under the U.S. Occupation: A Comparative Study of Post-War Education Reform*. Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books.
- SHIBATA, M. (2010) Rethinking the context of international politics in comparative education: an analysis of Japanese education policy in search for a modern self, in Marianne A. Larsen (Ed.) *New Thinking in Comparative Education: Honouring Robert Cowen*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- STEINER-KHAMSI, G. (2004). *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- STEINER-KHAMSI, G. (2009) Comparison: *quo vadis?*, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 1143-1158).
- STEVENSON, H. & STIGLER, J. (1992) *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education*. New York: Summit Books.

- STROMQUIST, N. P. (2009) Feminism, liberation, and education, in Robert Cowen & Andreas Kazamias, *International Handbook of Comparative Education*. Heidelberg: Springer (pp. 1027-1044).
- TAKAYAMA, K. (2007) *A Nation at Risk* crosses the Pacific: transnational borrowing of the U.S. crisis discourse in the debate on education reform in Japan, *Comparative Education Review*, 51 (4): pp. 423-446.
- TAKAYAMA, K. (2008) Beyond Orientalism in comparative education: challenging the binary opposition between Japanese and American education, *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(1): pp. 19-34.
- TAKAYAMA, K. (Ms.) Rethinking «culture,» «difference,» and «comparison»: A genealogical review of comparative studies of Japanese schooling.
- TOBIN, J. (1999) Method and meaning in comparative classroom ethnography, in Robin Alexander, Patricia Broadfoot & David Phillips (Eds.) *Learning from Comparing: New Directions in Comparative Educational Research* (pp. 113-134). Oxford: Symposium books.
- URRY, J. (2003) *Global Complexity*, Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- VERTOVEC, S. & COHEN, R. (eds) (2003) *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WHITE, M. (1987) *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children*. New York: Free Press.
- WILLIS, D.B. (2001a) Creole times: notes on understanding creolization for transnational Japan-America, in Takeshi Matsuda (Ed.) *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific: In Search of Emerging Cultures and Shared Values in the Japan-America Borderlands*. Hiroshima: Keisuisha.
- WILLIS, D.B. (2001b) Pacific Creoles: The Power of Hybridity in Japanese-American Relations, in T. Matsuda (ed.) *The Age of Creolization in the Pacific: In Search of Emerging Cultures and Shared Values in the Japan-America Borderlands*, Hiroshima: Keisuisha.
- WILLIS, D.B. (2002) Citizenship challenges for Japanese Education for the 21st Century: «Pure» or «Multicultural»? Multicultural Citizenship Education in Japan, in WCCES Commission 6 Special Congress Issue Japanese Education in Transition, *International Education Journal*, Volume 3 Number 5 October, pp. 16-32.
- WILLIS, D.B. (2009) Dejima: Creolization and Enclaves of Difference in Transnational Japan, in David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, (Eds.) (2009) *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* (pp. 239-263). London: Routledge.
- WILLIS, D.B. and MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU, S. (Eds.) (2009) *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- WILLIS, D.B., YAMAMURA, S. & RAPPEYE, J. (2008) Frontiers of education: Japan as «global model» or «Nation at Risk»? *International Review of Education*, Vol. 54: pp. 493-515.
- YOSHIMI, S. & KANG, S. (2001) *Gurobaru-ka no enkin-bo: Atarashii kokyo-kukan wo motomete* (Perspectives on Globalization: In Search of a New Public Space), Tokyo: Iwanami.

