Beyond the Dichotomy: Engaging a Deeper Dialogue About Our Interdependent Futures Between the Western and Non-Western Horizon

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What does “Beyond the Western Horizon” mean? What is the implications of “a deeper dialogue about our independent futures”? What is the connection between these two expressions? It seems that the latter is meant as response to the former. But how? The seven authors in this special issue attempt to answer these questions by drawing mainly on Walter Mignolo’s rethinking of the trends of “Rewesternization” and “Dewesternization” over the past decade and his champion of decolonial and spiritual turn based on the theoretical resources from non-Western world to make suggestions for educational research in the Anthropocene.

The authors provide informative and insightful perspectives to help us think and go beyond the Western horizon. Takayama (2020) discusses the Shinto’s decolonial potentials and points out the significance of localized Shinto for reimaging education for sustainable futures. By revolving around the connotation of Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi’s “Butterfly Dream,” Silova (2020) highlights the idea of “pluriverse (in the making)” and the importance of re-engaging with more-than-human worlds. Li (2020) suggests a transformative pedagogy inspired by Confucius ethics, Buddhist teaching of no-self, and Dewey’s common faith to address the issue of climate
change. Taylor (2020) also tackles the ecological issues by using some key ideas such as “ecological imaginations” and “journeying to shadow places” from the renowned Australian critical eco-feminist Val Plumwood. You (2020) tries to exhibit the religious and aesthetic dimensions of learning experience inbuilt in Confucius’ philosophy for reflecting the dominance of the constructivist notion of experience. Komatsu & Rappleye (2020) explore the implications of radical relationality and self-negation of the philosophy of Kyoto School and its connections to other projects in this special issue.

It is chiefly because of the authors’ intention to go “Beyond the Western Horizon” that there seem to be some similarity among these papers. The first commonality is that they focus on the educational and ecological problems caused by the Western philosophy, especially from Descartes onward, and tries to go back to their own traditions to find alternatives to confront those problems. In this way, it appears that things originated from the West become baleful to human condition and those from the non-West could be the antidote for human survival and human flourishing. To some extent, this seemingly dichotomy between the West and non-West could result from the resistance of different traditions to Western hegemony. However, although these traditions are various, as they are responding to similar or even the same problems caused by the West, would it be a tendency that in this dichotomy there are some common characteristics among the “members” of the non-West camp that in some way paradoxically homogenize their diversity? For example, could it be that the notion of “pluriverse” or “non-binary” type of cosmology that is taken as one of the striking marks of the non-West traditions leads to neglecting other aspects and distinctions? Some authors have noticed this tendency, which could be further thematicized when responding to decolonial turn.

It is true that we could know ourselves better and form our self-identities by identifying and recognizing others and knowing them. That said, we may have a tendency to misconceptualize ourselves due to our distorting others. Fortunately, we and others are always coexisting in certain form of relations. This “relationality” or relational mode of human condition would make it possible for us to know more properly both ourselves and “many others.” The idea of relational mode, relationality, or, more precisely, human relations/relationships with other creatures or with universe has been mentioned by most of the authors of this issue. This is another similarity among them. As such, could relationality be a realm for considering the decolonial turn and the relationship between the so-called West and non-West, which may echo the vision of “Toward a Deeper Dialogue About Our Interdependent Futures”? To put it further, hinged on the notion of “relationality,” would it be possible for us to think from an intercultural perspective about the theory and practice of “Comparative and International Education” with the West without landing ourselves in nationalism and regionalism?

To a certain extent, the ideas of the authors of this issue can be encapsulated into Confucian proposition of “renovating the tradition by returning to its roots” (fanben kaixin, 返本开新). One
of the implications of this proposition is to revive a tradition by rediscovering its sinew and reintroducing it for us as points of reference to help us dwell in this world. If “Beyond the Western Horizon” denotes returning to one’s own tradition to locate resources that could be used to overcome the difficulties with current human situation, then how to identify those abundant resources within our own traditions and to make them relevant to our modern times or to recontextualize them as contending and insightful discourses in the global context for educational research will be a great challenge. For instance, what kind of language would be used in this course that can communicate the spirit of a tradition properly? Moreover, the related question would be whether this spiritual and decolonial turn from the Western horizon is necessary or not. At the material and practical levels of the modern world, for example, the educational system, curriculum design, and form of government have been largely constructed with reference to the West, would it become a sort of metaphysical preservation of the traditions to resist against the impact of Westernization? Also, would this work be merely scholarly if educators and teachers in schools and educational institutions (already heavily “Westernized”) do not regard it as a serious topic? In this respect, transforming and translating the inspirations and insights (re)gained in the process of decolonial shift and from the traditions into languages that are familiar to and used by educators and teachers may be a workable way for scholars and researchers in the field of “Comparative and International Education” to actualize their project to go beyond the Western horizon. Educators and teachers in schools and educational institutions could then think with or from the viewpoint of those inspirations and insight to deal with problems in concrete situation of education.

The foregoing observations are not meant to call into doubt the authors’ objectives, but rather raise some thoughts inspired by and some responses to their works. In the age of globalization where the boundary between the West and the non-West is blurred and the “relationality” becomes more important, reconsidering the insights, wisdoms, and anything “material” of various traditions might be more consequential for thinking about the sustainability challenge. They might also have certain potential contributions to the educational theories and practice of human beings.

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Note

1. The way I understand the notion of “relationality” has been influenced by Wei-Ming Tu’s discussion of “self” and the human-relatedness. Generally speaking, it refers to this process: Learning to be a son or daughter is mainly informed and enriched by being and learning to be a father or mother and at the same
time learning to be a father or mother is informed and enriched by being and learning to be a son or daughter. Learning to be a son or daughter and a father or mother is also informed and enriched by being a student, a teacher, and so on (Tu, 1985, p. 58). As for the concept of “many others,” I was inspired by Vincent Shen’s interpretation. Shen (2018) used “many others” to indicate people and things and covers Confucian concept of “five relationships,” Daoist concept of “myriads of things,” and Buddhist concept of “all sentient beings.”

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