

BOOK REVIEW:

Post-imperial perspectives on Indigenous education: Lessons from Japan and Australia

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BOOK REVIEW: Peter Anderson, Koji Maeda, Zane Diamond and Chizu Sato (eds.). (2021). *Post-imperial perspectives on Indigenous education: Lessons from Japan and Australia*. London: Routledge. ISBN 9780367001957. pp.268.

Post-imperial perspectives on Indigenous education attracts us to other ‘posts’, including postmodernism, postcolonialism and post-globalisation, in research that challenge dominant philosophical foundations of education. The editors state that *The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (2007), specifically Articles 14, 15, 21 and 31, influences the book’s agenda:

We are not promoting an anti-imperial stance in this book but, rather, we are examining the nature of Indigenous peoples before and after UNDRIP and whether the *sui generis* rights (rights of themselves, already existing before the formation of the nation-states of Japan and Australia) of Indigenous Peoples are now becoming recognised . . . we examine the potential of the ancestral education systems of the Indigenous People of both nations to be brought into mainstream, formal education system. (p. 3)

Esteemed scholars in Indigenous education in Australia and Japan, led by editors Peter Anderson, Koji Maeda, Zane Diamond and Chizu Sato, identify policy initiatives useful for comparative education research and Critical Indigenous Studies. In three parts, the book presents a comparative analysis of Indigenous education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and the Ainu of Japan as First Nations peoples. They share common experiences of colonisation and imperialism, including dispossession of their lands, exploitation of resources and their labour, and suppression of their cultural practices. Legacies of these shared experiences are evident in contemporary Australia and Japan in the absence of recognition of Indigeneity, rights to self-determination and marginalisation manifested by hegemonic policies and practices.

Chapters in this book map out historical experiences and perspectives of education initiatives, the development of Indigenous education post-UNDRIP and challenges for post-imperial education in Australia and Japan. This comparative analysis focuses on teacher education in the higher education sector because teacher education is central to contemporary and future prioritisation of Indigenous education. It will potentially educate teachers to engage with truth-telling by respectfully including Indigenous perspectives and knowledges in curricula and pedagogical practice. The authors argue that education offers authentic empowerment and agency to a pathway to Indigenous sovereignty by engagement of truth-telling and Indigenous voices in curricula and pedagogical decision-

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making. Although historical differences exist in imperial and colonial settlements and establishments, an assimilationist agenda unifies Australian and Japanese education systems and practices.

One of the book's remarkable features is the inclusion of challenging images, accompanied by a timeline of indigenous education in both countries (Chapter 1). These images depict different policy eras and highlight historical contexts of resistance to colonial or imperial directives. Images, beginning in Chapter 2, capture Indigenous knowledges (e.g., ancestral ways of knowing, being and doing, which informed and guided nurturing cultural continuity, educating the young, promoting identity and belonging to place) and thriving Indigenous communities before colonial settlement and the later dispossession of the sovereignty of Indigenous lands. Yet the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives has not yet been central to educational policy and processes, as argued in various chapters in this publication.

The book acknowledges the challenges of Indigenous advancement to sovereignty through authentic education in teacher education and the higher education sector. It also details progress in response to and beyond endorsement of the UNDRIP, including the Closing the Gap Campaign, Reconciliation Action Plans, affirmative action for Indigenous employment in schools and universities, and embedding Indigenous understandings into the national curricula in Australia. However, questions concerning their effectiveness remain to date. For example, *Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al., 2012) offered a framework for supporting access, success and transitions from schools to colleges and universities to enhance education and employment opportunities, recommended recognition of community needs and invited higher education institutions to respectfully engage in partnership and collaboration with Indigenous communities. It also recommended strengthening Indigenous research, Indigenous staff and leadership within higher education. Maeda and Okano (2013) discussed the Urespa project, which began at Sapporo University in 2010 (see also Chapter 11). Access to schooling and transition to higher education for Ainu students are the primary aims of the Urespa project. A special measure to remove discrimination and exploitative employment was also a key aspect of the Urespa project. Private higher education institutions are embracing the project's aims and 'mutual learning' approach, which gives hope for progress in Ainu education (because of the large number of private universities in Japan).

The book reveals that both national governments' responses to Indigenous Peoples' education advancement are politically and morally contested in the two nation-states, as seen in discussions about government policies post the UNDRIP. A common thread evident in both contexts is that progress in Indigenous higher education depends fundamentally on individual institutions, Indigenous Peoples' leadership and their non-Indigenous advocates. The book's final part (Chapters 11 and 12) considers the ways forward, inviting readers to understand historical experiences and contemporary challenges in Indigenous higher education and collectively appeal to academe to decolonise its practices.

Scholars in comparative education often theorise and critique educational processes with conceptual frameworks originating from the West, North and South hemispheres. These include discourses of developed and developing countries, and linguistic and cultural

diversities. Liberal multiculturalism, diversity, equity, and social justice agendas often work with contestable understandings of ‘equality’, which assume one standard of success and supposed pathways to greater opportunity. Not surprisingly, Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and Ainu in Japan are classified as minority cultural groups, defined by cultural differences from the ‘superior’ dominant colonial settler society (Chapter 3). This categorisation illuminates the lack of recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples as First Peoples of these lands and territories. Regrettably, the Western modern education First Nations Peoples experience has often been founded on a deficit model and understanding of First Nations Peoples and their sovereign rights.

Globally, while the UNDRIP has provided ample opportunities for reconciliation between settler and Indigenous First Nations Peoples, truth-telling of the colonial history and its ongoing legacies are rigorously contested in the context of collective amnesia of the atrocities of colonial impact on Indigenous populations. Recent experiences of embedding Indigenous perspectives by foregrounding the UNDRIP in one Australian university indicated how, after the endorsement of the UNDRIP in 2009, there remains the gap in the understanding of this Declaration by staff and students. Scholars in Indigenous Studies are challenged to incorporate global frameworks and experiences that can support the work of decolonising deficit understandings of the rights of Indigenous peoples within their own contexts.

Returning to the examination of post-imperialism from temporal and philosophical perspectives, readers may question how this concept relates to the complex global and national policy frameworks, institutional structures and sovereignty of each nation-state. These political realities are influenced by contemporary ideologies of imperialism and geopolitical agendas. Questions around imperialism and colonisation remain at the centre of nationhood, politics and identity for Australia and Japan.

I argue scholars of critical Indigenous Studies and Comparative Education benefit from embracing the book’s invitation to learn from the experiences of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Ainu peoples in maintaining and advancing Indigenous worldview in a new world order. We draw from the strength of Indigenous resistance to colonial and racialised power structures and forms of domination. Indigenous wisdom and protocols are reflected in historical and contemporary voices for recognition of Indigenous rights, and advancement of claims to ancestral knowledges, lands and resources. For scholars in Indigenous Studies and Comparative Education, our critical engagements with ‘posts’ must also interrogate the philosophical foundations of post-imperialism, postmodern or post-globalisation through postcolonial perspectives. Such engagement is more likely to counter conservative social, political and cultural influences while promoting justice for First Nations Peoples.

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