In Pursuit of Another Conversation:
Social Justice as Educational Discussion

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This paper explores a point of discussion between the views expressed in lectures by Paul Standish and Yasuo Imai. Although they initially share the same scepticism about the contemporary educational discourse concerning social justice, their philosophical deliberations seem ultimately to diverge. With reference to the works of Minoru Murai, this paper explores the foundational questions that Imai and Standish have in common throughout their arguments. To begin this bridging process, I will first create an imaginary conversation between Imai and Murai about justice and violence in education. After that, I will examine how Murai would engage with Standish on the matter of social justice in educational studies. At the end of the paper, I will discuss a way to integrate at the philosophical level Imai's and Standish's arguments with Murai's further educational discussion.

INTRODUCTION: ANOTHER PARTICIPANT IN CONVERSATION

Two international conferences entitled *Culture and Subjectivity in Translation* at Kyoto University and *Translation* and *the Understanding of Other Cultures* at the University of Tokyo in December 2011 invited the present author to deliberate on two philosophical issues: (1) Social Justice in Educational Research, and (2) Violence in Education. At these conferences, these issues were specifically addressed by two outstanding contemporary educational philosophers, Paul Standish and Yasuo Imai. In this article, I attempt to develop the philosophical conversations between Standish and Imai. To do so, I wish to draw another contemporary Japanese philosopher, Minoru Murai, into the debate. Murai's philosophical framework contributes to the elucidation of the philosophical conversation for two reasons. First, Murai has an interest in this topic in common with Standish and Imai. Murai assumes that the issue of social justice is so important that the usage of the term 'social justice' 'does bear some critical examination' (Standish 2012, p. 17). In particular, Murai shares with Imai and Standish the assumption that, if we want to understand the phenomena, we have to pay some attention 'to the nature of the language itself' (p. 19), and to 'experience a difference between semantic fields' (p. 21).

Second, Murai's discussion connects Imai's argument to Standish's. Imai explains that his argument 'shares skepticism about a certain concept of "justice" with the keynote speech of Prof. Standish' (Imai, 2011, p. 1). As their arguments develop, however, their philosophical foci seem to be different. For example, Standish says that 'there is a continuing need to be sensitized to the rhetorical inflation of this and similar terms' (Standish, 2012, p. 25). Standish makes the critical remark that because of the rhetorical correctness of the sound of the term 'social justice', some educational researchers have taken advantage of the term to justify their research. As a result, Standish points out that its theoretical background marks a distance from 'certain central aspects of education' (ibid.). Furthermore, for Standish, social justice as an educational issue is affected by the unbalanced

relationship between Orientalism and Occidentalism when the term 'social justice' is translated from one language to another:

> This, I think, reinforces the bad aspects of policy-borrowing and reduces the possibilities of exchange between countries. At the same time it foregrounds *shukan-teki* ways of thinking and being at the expense of the greater openness and possibility of the *shutai-teki* (pp. 24-25).

Here, his focus transfers to a word concerning subjectivity, which is translatable both as *shukan* and *shutai* in Japanese. Standish explains the difference between *shukan* and *shutai* as follows:

> In popular terms *shukan* can have negative associations related to a kind of lack of objectivity, to being too subjective in one's consideration of things, or perhaps being too egotistical… *shutai* by contrast, a term less visible in philosophy as it was then established in Japan, can imply a kind of independence of thought, or perhaps better a self-reliance or resourcefulness, such that one is not too easily influenced by others (pp. 22-23).

For Standish, it is against the character of the term 'social justice', if what is referred to by this term in the process of crossing different languages and cultures causes us not recognise subjectivity as *shutai-teki*.

In contrast, Imai's discussion of justice is focused on educational violence drawing on Walter Benjamin's theoretical framework. Imai says:

> Educational violence, though it is self-positing and even 'expiatory', always remains violence. Thus education has structural difficulties in justifying itself in the sense of accountability. Within the field of education, educational violence appears to be immune to any criticism because of its self-positing and law-free structure. Precisely because of this structure, educational violence suffers from a fatal incapacity to justify itself, once it is asked for its accountability from outside the field of education. This apparently is the situation with which present-day educational violence is forced to be confronted (Imai, 2011, p. 3).

For Imai, the matter of justice in education is a serious philosophical question because, as Benjamin discussed, violence is unavoidable in education. Therefore, Imai's philosophical concern is about whether a discussion of justice in education can be consistent with the features of education (which commonly include certain types of violence).

As described above, these philosopher's arguments on the same topic are so distinctive that it seems to be difficult to find a point of philosophical agreement. In order to find a point of interaction between Imai's and Standish's arguments, it is necessary to find a line of thought that can act as a bridge between them. I believe that Murai is qualified to act as such because his idea is 'a digression' (Standish, 2012, p. 17). Here, 'digression' means that Murai's perspective allows Imai's and Standish's arguments to go back to the subject in question: education. To begin this bridging process in the next section, I first create an imaginary conversation between Imai and Murai about justice and violence in education.

EDUCATION AND INDOCTRINATION

In this section, I explore how Murai would respond to the issue of educational violence as it is

discussed by Imai. Murai's argument about the issue of violence in education is equivalent to the discussion of the definition of the term 'education'. Specifically, it differentiates education from indoctrination. Richard Gatchel examines the relationship between these two words in the West from a historical perspective. According to him, during the medieval period in Europe, there was no distinction between indoctrination and education because the purpose of educational institutions was simply to implant Christian doctrine. Gatchel says: 'Since about the seventeenth century, increasing expression of and experimentation with concepts of democracy have brought with them considerably different ideas about education' (Gatchel, 1972, p. 11). The distinction between indoctrination and education becomes a live issue with the development of the idea of democracy. Since individuals have the right to make decisions in a democratic society, they are required to be deliberative, creative, and critical, rather than merely being passive to authority. As a result of shifting the image of the ideal society, the social expectations concerning education were also changed. The meaning of indoctrination was changed from being synonymous with education to becoming the antithesis of education.

There are two major strands of thought regarding the issue of indoctrination. First, in Western society, the issue of indoctrination in education was comprehensively discussed, especially in the 1970s, by applying analytic philosophical methodology. In general, analytic philosophers are interested in mapping out the semantic border between education and indoctrination (Snook, 1972). For them, it is important to define what education is and what indoctrination is, because they believe that indoctrination should be avoided. Second, there are two major reasons to debate the issue of indoctrination: ideological influences and religious indoctrinations (Snook, 1970). Ideological indoctrination is meant to brainwash people into accepting a particular ideology (e.g. Communism in the previous century), and religious indoctrination is meant to implant extreme religious attitudes.

Murai's interest in discussing justice and violence in education is to reflect on these arguments in Japanese social contexts. For Murai, the problem is that the distinction between indoctrination and education has never been taken up as a serious subject for discussion for educational studies in Japan. According to Murai, *kyouiku,* widely translated as 'education' in contemporary Japanese society, is an imported word from China. The origin of *kyouiku* is *The Mencius*, a classic of Confucian philosophy. Although Japan has a long history of importing Confucian philosophy, including *The Mencius*, *kyouiku* was not commonly used to describe teaching or learning in Japanese society until the Meiji period (1868 to 1912) (Murai, 2005, pp. 29-30). Murai points out that at the beginning of the Meiji period, Toshimichi Ohkubo, who was employed to establish the modern school system in Japan, initially translated 'education' not as *kyouiku* but as *kyouka,* which means 'indoctrination' if directly translated from Japanese to English(ibid.). Murai explains that the term indoctrination is rather appropriate to express the actuality of the modern school system in Japan. This is because, according to Murai, the organization of the Japanese modern school system was designed to Westernize, industrialize, and modernize people and society by denying the uniqueness of Japanese culture (Murai, 2000, p. 15). Murai also demonstrates this tendency through the example of another translation problem in education. He points out that *gimu-kyouiku* in Japanese is currently translated as compulsory education. However, its original translation was *kyousei-kyouiku* or *kyouhaku-kyouiku*. The direct translation of *kyousei-kyouiku* in English is 'forced education' and *kyouhaku-kyouiku* in English is 'threatened education' (p. 22). Murai argues that even though *kyouka* was re-translated as *kyouiku*, and *kyouhaku-kyouiku* or *kyousei-kyouiku* was re-translated as *gimu-kyouiku*, original

translations clarify the content of modern school education in Japan. The point at issue for Murai is that changing the word from *kyouka* to *kyouiku* does not change the quality of the meaning suggested by the term. Thus, Japanese society has been using a term for 'education' that means indoctrination (Murai, 2005, p. 30). Here, Murai's response to Imai's discussion is clear. Murai agrees with Imai's analysis that violence is unavoidable in education because the meaning of 'education' is historically distorted in educational discourse. If the content of the word 'education' contains 'indoctrination', then education can never be consistent with the idea of justice.

Imai is also concerned about another kind of educational violence besides that involved in schooling. For example, Imai points out the possibility of violence in child rearing. At the moment of teaching children some basic discipline, their parents can (and do) use violence in the name of education. These issues are, however, still examined whether it is education or indoctrination in the context of Murai's theoretical framework.

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

Next, I examine how Murai would engage with Standish on the matter of social justice in educational studies. Murai would do so by focusing on the examination of the character of educational studies. Murai's concern is actually addressed in the very first sentence of Standish's lecture: ' "Social justice" is a phrase that recurs with some force in contemporary political and academic discussion' (Standish, 2012, p. 17). In contrast with Standish's argument, Murai discusses this issue from the macro-viewpoint. It means that Murai does not develop his philosophical argument in translation between languages. Instead, he deliberates issues in translation between academic disciplines. In other words, the matter of subjectivity is to be discussed as if educational studies were characterized as an independent academic discipline. Murai critically comments that since the modern educational system and its content have been controlled by social, political, and economic situations, educational studies has never established its own academic independence.

In *Shintei Kyouiku kara no Minaoshi,* Murai demonstrates how Education Studies has been parasitic on other academic disciplines and, as a result, how educational questions have been distorted and answered by political, economic, legal, or scientific viewpoints.[1] Thus, Murai claims that one of the most important roles of the philosophy of education is to examine the inherent nature of educational thought by contrasting it with specifically political, economic, legal, and scientific thought about the same issues. It means that, for Murai, the foundational problem of the issue of social justice in education is whether or not educational questions are answered by a distinctively educational mode of enquiry. Walter Feinberg, a contemporary American educational philosopher who discusses social justice issues, also highlights the importance of the distinction between educational thought and political thought. Feinberg says:

> I believe that there is an important distinction between political democracy and educational democracy that can help us to sort out different kinds of claims regarding the responsibility of schools in promoting certain identities. This distinction is frequently overlooked by educators who wish to use education to advance a certain form of enlightened, democratic understanding and who believe that one can determine the right thing to do politically on the basis of deciding what the right thing to do is educationally. It is also overlooked by political theorists who hold that the right thing to do educationally can be deduced by

determining what the right thing to do is politically (Feinberg, 1998, p. 27).

What, then, is the educational way of discussing social justice? Murai describes it using an example from Greek Mythology, *Antigone* (Murai, 1996a, p. 45). According to Murai, the story of *Antigone* teaches the issue of subjectivity in social justice and educational thought. In the story, social rules and laws are initially created for people living well. However, as time goes on, those laws and rules become a dead letter and an authority themselves. As a result of the confusion of subjectivity, rules lose their original purpose, that is, to promote human living. This is how the outcome of a creation intended to promote social justice can become unjust. Murai points out that the tragedy of *Antigone* provides a warning for contemporary education because the development of educational studies and schooling is not always consistent with social improvement. Rather, for him, it seems to be a cause of more problems in society (Murai, 1978, p. 58). For Murai, the foundational problem of *Antigone* is the confusion of subjectivity. And, it indicates Murai's response to Standish's argument. Murai would ask more explanation to Standish concerning how his examination of social justice can contribute to the development of the *educational* way of thinking as the subject of the discussion.

GOODNESS AS HUMAN DISPOSITION

I will now examine a way to integrate Imai's and Standish's arguments with Murai's further educational discussion. Murai's approach to Imai's argument was to show that the distinction between education and indoctrination is fundamental in examining the relationship between education and violence. On the other hand, Murai's argument toward Standish's philosophical analysis was that the distinction between educational modes of thought and other ways of thinking, such as political or economic thought, should be the initial point of departure in examining the issue of social justice in educational studies. As described above, Murai responded differently to each thinker's argument. However, the foundational question posed by these responses integrates all three thinkers. It is to ask why 'one can scarcely imagine a form of human life for which justice does not remain a question' (Standish, 2012, p. 17)? And, this question should be answered from an educational perspective.

To explore the question in an educational framework, Murai claims that it is necessary to discuss the matter of goodness as a human disposition. Here, Murai selects the term, 'disposition', as opposed to other possible terms in English such as 'tendency' or 'nature' (Murai, 2000, p. 238). Murai's idea of the human disposition is that every single person is trying to live well. According to Murai, his idea of human disposition is not the view of human nature as fundamentally good, bad, or neutral as it has been discussed as a philosophical question since ancient Confucian philosophy as well as in Greek philosophy. Unlike traditional ways of understanding human nature as a noun, Murai tries to capture the human disposition as a continuously active verb, *seeking* for goodness.

Murai claims that this way of understanding the human disposition directly affects the definition of the term 'education'. Murai defines education, or *Kyouiku*, as follows:

> All parents wish their children to become good. All adults wish young people to grow good…human beings have been sharing the same desire. Any activity supported by this desire is what we call 'education'. We can say that, in a sense, the meaning of 'education' originates with the desire that human beings have for the goodness of young people. We also can say that the meaning of education will be with those human beings in the future (Murai, 1975, p. 2)

(Translation by the author).[2]

Murai examines his own definition of education/*kyouiku* with reference to Israel Scheffler's analysis of language. In *The Language of Education,* Scheffler categorizes varieties of definitions of education such as stipulative definitions, descriptive definitions, and programmatic definitions (Scheffler, 1960). Murai, however, contends that his definition of education/*kyouiku* is categorized by none of those. Instead, Murai calls his definition of education a 'generative definition', or *Hasseiteki Teigi*. This is because his definition of education is trying to describe the universal conditions that explain why education as a movement has been created among human beings (Murai, 2005, p. 53). In addition, like the definition of human disposition, Murai's definition of education is as a continuously active verb (Murai, 2011, pp. 10-11). This is important for Murai because the issue of goodness is not whether or not people can acquire it(as it is when considered as a noun or some type of abstract possession). For Murai, goodness consists in the fact that people are endlessly seeking for goodness to cultivate themselves until the end of their lives. Therefore, for Murai, the discussion of social justice in education should be examined concurrently with the matter of goodness as the human disposition (Murai, 1996b, pp. 130-131).

Here, Murai's argument concerning goodness as the human disposition has a feature that allows it to engage with Standish's argument concerning translation. Standish says:

> This dismissal then leads to the complacent assumption that this is just a matter of translation, that translation is primarily a technical matter, and that differences between languages are merely to be overcome…Think of this as a suppression of thought, of which the monolingual person may be unaware (Standish, 2012, p. 21).

Standish points out that humanity should not be lost in the process of translation. Standish applies Stanley Cavell's philosophical argument as a way to explore a solution: 'I do not seek to shore up my own identity but rather am ready for new possibilities—that is, ready to become' (p. 8). This acceptance of the ambiguity of the human disposition is analogous to Murai's argument concerning educational thought. Murai claims that the idea that good education creates anxiety is not part of mainstream educational thought. For Murai, to understand 'education' as beautifully solving problems is to misunderstand the human disposition. Rather, according to a distinctively educational way of thinking, education always carries uncertainty and anxiety, because the human disposition is always seeking for goodness (Murai, 1978, p. 78). Murai's idea of goodness as human disposition can also share Imai's concern over the issue of violence in education. Again, for Murai, human beings are endlessly in improvement. This idea does include the possibility of failures. It indicates that the line between indoctrination as violence and education as nonviolence is always extremely thin. It accepts that people sometimes make mistakes. This is an acceptable struggle for Murai because, for him, it is much more important to note that people have the potential to reflect on themselves, for example, to wonder if they make mistakes because they are seeking to be good.

Murai addresses the complexity of goodness in terms of the difficulty of translating 'goodness' between English and Japanese. 'Goodness' in English is usually translated as *yosa* in Japanese. However, *yosa* in Japanese not only includes various meanings, but also carries various Chinese letters. For example, Murai quotes a poem created by Emperor Tenmu (Murai, 2005, p. 93):

淑人乃　良跡吉見而　好常言師　芳野吉見与　良人四来三

(*Yoki hito no／Yoshi to yoku mite／Yoshi to ihishi／Yoshino yoku miyo／Yoki hito yokumitsu*) (Nakanishi, 1978, p. 62)

Good men from the past／took a good look saying what a good place it was.／Take a good look at Yoshino, the good field／which they declared to be good!／The good men of nowadays should take a good look (Marra, 2010, p. 26).[3]

In the original Japanese poem, *yoshi* is phonetically repeated eight times. But *yoshi* is literally expressed with six different Chinese characters and they all have different meanings. However, in the English translation of the poem, all eight *yoshi* are translated as 'good'. Michael F. Marra explains the complexity of the notion of goodness in the poem. He says:

[T] he term 'Yoshi' 好シ (good), pointing at something which is likable because of either its ethical goodness or physical appeal…'Yoshi', however is a very ambiguous term with a variety of meanings: good (as opposed to evil), skilled, healthy, intelligent, effective, noble, prosperous, pleasant, friendly, profitable, valuable, auspicious, happy, etc. A famous tongue-twister from the *Man'yoshu* plays on a variety of meanings of the adjective 'Yoshi,' conjugated in a variety of ways. It is a homage to the beautiful landscape of the Yoshino mountains, whose name—'the Fair Field'—incorporates the adjective 'good, fair, beautiful, attractive' (*Yoshi*) (Marra, 2010, p. 26).

Murai intends to express goodness as a human disposition in the same way as it is used in this poem. He wishes to address a struggle to capture the meaning. It is impossible to apply any linguistic techniques to articulate goodness because goodness has various meanings and changes its meaning according to different perspectives and to moral, cultural, and religious contexts (Murai, 2005, p. 93). If we attempt to simplify the meaning by proclaiming what goodness is, or by replacing it with something else as an essence of goodness, we will only lose the quality of goodness from the word itself (Murai, 1994, pp. 182, 184, 187).

Here, Murai's understanding of educational thought requires audiences to change their default way of dealing with educational issues, because the human disposition that is subject to educational ideas is more complex than current thinking allows. This entails that educational studies has a double role. First, educational research may have a role as a specialized area of another field, for example 'educational psychology'. This type of sub-specialized field is the mainstream paradigm of educational research in the contemporary academic world. Second, the role of educational studies is to engage educational thought itself. Any educational research should be examined on the basis of how it contributes to the development of the educational way of thinking.

If we take into account the complicated nature of education, we may be able to find a further possibility of interaction between Imai's and Standish's arguments. However, it is demanding for audiences to keep shouldering this sense of the intricateness of education. Audiences are especially at risk to lose the key point, which is to be aware of education's ambiguous foundations when they need to understand varieties of profound thoughts. This suggests that if audiences lose their grip on the subject of educational thought under consideration, they would be under the illusion that Standish's and Imai's discussions depart from each other. As a result, they may even lose elements of their own subjectivities as audiences. Murai's philosophical perspective helps those audiences to recover their

own subjectivity. His argument can do so because he consistently reclaims the educational thought. In other words, Murai's contribution to the conversation echoes a phrase from the French Opera, *Maitre Pathelin*: 'Revenons a nos moutons!'. Or: 'Let's get back to the subject at hand'.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, in response to the lectures given by Standish and Imai, I have explored an intersection between their philosophical arguments about social justice. By creating an imaginary conversation between Imai and Murai, and between Standish and Murai, the foundational philosophical issue shared by all three thinkers has been clarified. This was the question of why human beings care for social justice and the discussion of these issues in relation to education. By sharing a philosophical foundation — 'for the sake of educational thought' — at the macro level, these three thinkers distinctively explore their disagreements at the micro level. Standish developed a position on the nature of translation between languages and cultures. Imai provided what he considered to be a better understanding of the relationship between violence, education, and justice. To integrate these two thinkers' ideas, Murai explored the distinctively educational way of thinking by applying philosophical concepts. The conversation between Murai, Standish, and Imai teaches us that it is important for philosophers to continuously communicate with other thinkers as well as their broader audiences when outlining their thoughts. Furthermore, the conversation shows us the responsibility of the audience to maintain active participation in the development of philosophical thoughts for education.

NOTES

1. Murai repeatedly discusses the issue of the establishment of educational thought in his works. For example, see: Murai, 1994, p. 36.
2. See: Murai, 2005, p. 53. Murai reflects on the background of giving the definition of education.
3. Marra introduces the poem as follows 'Man'yoshu 1:27, by Emperor Tenmu (r. 673-686), who composed this poem on the Fifth Day of the Fifth Month 679 during an excursion to Yoshino' (Marra, 2010, p. 26).

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