Invitation to Postcolonialism: Cross-Boundaries Approach to the Legacy of Imperialism

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The University of Osaka - Tongji University
Joint International and Interdisciplinary Forum:
Toward the Integration of Society and Knowledge
Official Forum Proceedings

Abstract

This essay presents a methodological perspective for confronting the legacy of imperialism by examining my own academic and social practice as a Japanese researcher. Postcolonial studies have developed as an academic field that investigates how the history of imperialism and colonialism shapes the contemporary world order. Although colonialism is often treated as a past event, its historical violence continues to be reproduced, solidifying structures of inequality and exclusion.

This essay reframes postcolonial studies as the result of an interplay between research activity and social practices. A case study of my academic and social practices as a Japanese researcher demonstrates that the movement toward decolonization unfolds through crossing disciplinary boundaries as well as national and regional boundaries, and that an intersectional perspective is essential when addressing postcolonial issues.

Drawing on insights from this case, this essay proposes a methodological framework termed the cross-boundaries approach. This approach encompasses three types of boundaries: (1) disciplinary boundary, (2) national and regional boundary, and (3) boundary among social divisions by race, gender, class, etc. Its significance lies not simply in traversing these boundaries, but in the process of continuously reflecting on oneself and reconfiguring research questions through encounters with others. Such a practice marks a starting point for confronting the legacy of imperialism in contemporary society.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Interdisciplinary research, Intersectionality, Autoethnography

1. Invitation to Postcolonialism

Postcolonial studies have developed as an academic field that examines how the history of imperialism and colonialism shapes the current world order. In contemporary society, where colonialism is often taken as a past event, reexamining how its historical violence and unequal power relations have formed a "system of knowledge" (Said, 1979, p.6) and been incorporated into present social structures remains an important challenge. In particular, for researchers who have adhered to the imperialist/colonizer position, postcolonial studies can be an opportunity to question their own positionality and academic practices.

Against this background, researchers in the Japanese-speaking world, including Kōya Nomura (2012, 2019), Mai Ishihara (2020, Ishihara & Murakami, 2024), and Fukuko Tamashiro (2022), have presented a perspective for interpreting structures of inequality and exclusion in contemporary society while considering the historical continuity of colonialism. They demonstrate the significance of reconsidering the legacy of imperialism, not simply as a historical issue, but as an issue sustained by systems of knowledge and embedded in current academic and social practices. At the same time, their discussions also contain a self-reflective opportunity to reexamine the position from which researchers themselves engage in postcolonial studies.

This essay aims to present a methodological framework for confronting the legacy of imperialism by examining my own academic and social practice as a Japanese researcher. In doing so, it focuses on three types of boundaries: (1) disciplinary boundary, (2) national and regional boundary, and (3) boundary among social divisions by race, gender, class, etc. By presenting a "cross-boundaries approach" that traverses three types of boundaries, this essay reconsiders postcolonial studies as the result of an interplay between research activity and social practice.

2. Confronting Undying Colonialism/Activating Postcolonial Studies

Addressing postcolonial issues involves an attempt to "transform contemporary society, which is built on the history of imperialism, by reexamining that history" (Takayanagi, 2025b, p.164). Michael W. Doyle, an American political scientist, focuses on the relationship between the metropole and its colony and defines empire as "a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society" (Doyle, 1986, p.45). Based on this definition, Doyle considers imperialism as "the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire" and argues that it can be implemented "by force, by

political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence." In other words, imperialism refers to the theory and practice by which a metropole dominates a distant territory and the indigenous peoples (Said, 1994).

Doyle (1986) argues that there are three steps required to explain the global expansion of empire: First, demonstrating the existence of control over the colony and indigenous peoples; Second, explaining why one state expands its territory and establishes such control; Third, elucidating why indigenous peoples submit or fail to resist effectively. Each step problematizes imperialist attitudes. Therefore, it is indispensable to examine the gestures and policies of people affiliated with the empire—politicians, diplomats, researchers, journalists, travelers, traders, intellectuals, investors, artists, and others— to undertake these tasks (Said, 1994).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said (1994) builds upon Doyle's arguments to conceptualize "colonialism" as a consequence of imperialism. It is a state in which an empire dominates a colony and deprives the indigenous peoples of their right to self-determination. Said (1994) further notes that even if colonialism has formally ended, imperialism "lingers where it has always been" (p.9), implemented in the cultural sphere through political, economic, and social practices. Formal colonialism has largely ended because many of the colonies have achieved independence. However, this does not mean the end of colonialism itself. As long as imperialism "lingers where it has always been," colonialism persists. The only difference is that the colonialist project ceases to be implemented in a "formal" manner and is now exercised in an "informal" and more sophisticated manner, and therefore, continues in a way that is difficult to recognize.

Given this situation, the prefix "post" in the term postcolonialism does not imply the end of colonialism (Nomura, 2012; 2019; Ukai, 1998). Colonialism persists. Nevertheless, in our everyday life, it is perceived as if it has already ended and spoken of as if it were a past event. The term "postcolonialism" is used to describe this situation of "undying colonialism—a colonialism that cannot and will not breathe its last breath" (Ukai, 1998, p.42).

Postcolonial studies is an academic practice that critically examines the past and present of imperialism to conceptualize the end of colonialism. And since colonialism is a historical condition created by imperialists and colonizers, it is the gestures and policies of people in these positions that should be problematized first. To contextualize it in terms of the Japanese state, it is the gestures and policies of Japanese people, including myself, that are in question. Nomura (2019) explains the tasks postcolonial studies should undertake as follows.

> Postcolonial studies, first and foremost, is an academic practice that problematizes the colonizer. To put it in the context of the Japanese state, it is an academic practice that problematizes the Japanese as the colonizer, thoroughly debunks the political character of the Japanese who let colonialism persist to this day, analyzes and elucidates the mechanisms by which its power operates, and thereby conceptualizes the end of colonialism. In discussions of postcolonialism, the Japanese cannot place themselves in a privileged position that exempts them from being problematized, that is, in a safe position of neutrality or objectivity. (p.31)

Doyle charts a path to problematize the global expansion of imperialism by proposing three tasks. In contrast, Nomura discusses the local context in which the Japanese exercise colonialism upon Okinawans, meticulously analyzes its mechanisms, and charts a path for Japanese people to engage in decolonization[1]. Based on Nomura's discussion, we can add two tasks for postcolonial studies: debunking the political character of the colonizer and analyzing and elucidating the mechanisms by which colonialism operates, thereby conceptualizing its end. These tasks require an understanding of imperialism and colonialism within local and transnational power relations. Therefore, postcolonial studies must consider both local and global contexts.

As outlined above, postcolonial studies not only critically examine the problems generated by imperialists and colonizers but also challenge the gestures and policies of people enjoying such positions. Consequently, even researchers positioned as imperialists or colonizers “cannot place themselves in a privileged position that exempts them from being problematized.” Therefore, when engaging in postcolonial studies, it is essential to reexamine one’s positionality and intellectual practice critically.

Hence, I will examine my academic and social practices as a case study. By analyzing my practices that span both inside and outside the academic world, I will trace my “decolonizing journey” (Mayuzumi, 2011).

[1] The first chapter of Nomura's (2019) book was translated into English by Annmaria Shimabuku (Nomura 2012, Shimabuku 2012a). Shimabuku(2012b) also reconsidered the issue of the U.S. military bases concentrated in Okinawa in a global context, reframing it as “the product of mutual colonialism by the United States and Japan” (p.131).

3. Tracing My Decolonizing Journey

I have engaged in various activities by leveraging my status as a researcher (graduate student), university systems, and social relationships. These activities served as opportunities to test my "zone of interest"[2] and broaden my horizons. This chapter focuses on the period since my enrollment in graduate school in 2022 to analyze my activities both inside and outside the academic world. By tracing the systematic conditions and social relationships within which I have thought and acted, I will explore the possibilities of decolonization.

This endeavor does not signify a complete disengagement from research complicit in colonization. Rather, it is "the beginning of and a pledge for our continuous labor of self-reflective interrogation" (Toyosaki, 2017, p.35). Even before writing this essay, I have repeatedly reflected on myself. Nevertheless, I say it is a "beginning" because now and here I am starting it anew. It is also "a pledge" because "self-reflective interrogation" will not be completed by this essay, but should be continued on different occasions by different people. It starts and restarts; it will never ultimately conclude. Therefore, it is "a pledge" not to end it now and here, but to undertake it again in the future.

Repeatedly asking "what brought me here?" (Garbe, 2024, p.701) in different contexts has allowed me to reflect on my position. Such endeavors enable me not only to "generate important epistemological insights within a particular research field" (Garbe, 2024, p.696) but also to examine the "complicity" (Marcus, 1997) in my academic and social practices.

3-1. University System and My Policy

My academic and social practices cannot be separated from the system of the university with which I am affiliated. The various privileges I have enjoyed as a graduate student have enabled me to access diverse opportunities, choices, and resources[3]. Instead of treating the systematic conditions as invisible premises, I will explicitly examine them as factors that have shaped my positioning as a researcher.

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[2] I borrow the term "zone of interest" from the title of a film directed by Jonathan Glazer, which tells the story of the camp commandant Rudolf Heß and his family, who lived peacefully next door to the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II.

[3] In *An Invitation: Queering Reproductive Justice*, Candace Bond-Theriault (2024) defines "privilege" as "the unencumbered ability to access opportunity, choice, and resources," and "oppression," the antithesis to privilege, as that which "hinders one's ability to exert one's free will without consequence or criminalization" (p. 17).

The University of Osaka, which I am affiliated with, has established the "Double-Wing Academic Architecture" (DWAA) as its goal for nurturing doctoral professionals (Figure 1). The "Double-Wing" refers to the "Fusion of Knowledge" and the "Integration of Knowledge with Society." In other words, in addition to "Deepening of Knowledge" conventionally undertaken by graduate education, this system aims to develop the skills to act across disciplinary boundaries as a researcher ("Fusion of Knowledge") and to cultivate the capability to engage in practical activities addressing societal issues as an intellectual ("Integration of Knowledge with Society")[4].

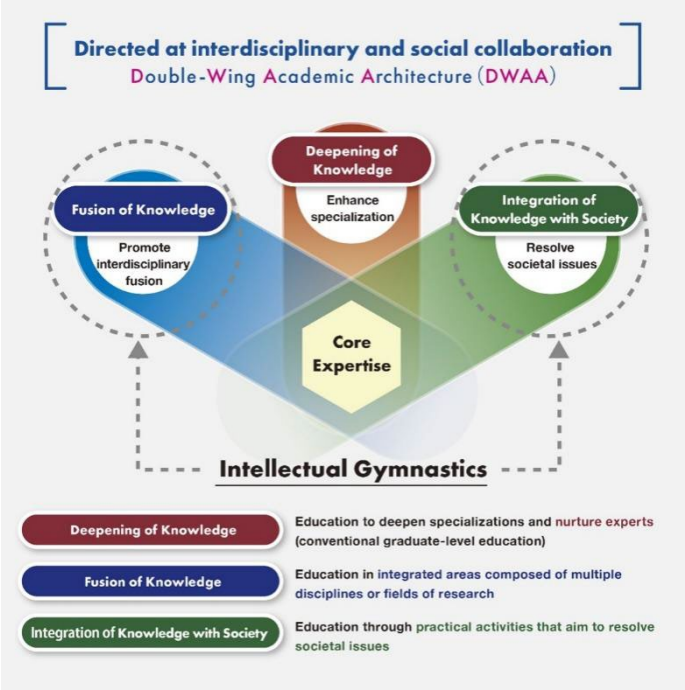

Figure 1: Double-Wing Academic Architecture.

Note. Three components of the Double-Wing Academic Architecture conceptualized by the University of Osaka. The University of Osaka, Institute for Transdisciplinary Graduate Degree Programs, n.d., (https://itgp.osaka-u.ac.jp/en/systems/dwaa/).

The three principles— "Deepening of Knowledge," "Fusion of Knowledge," and "Integration of Knowledge with Society"—exhibit a high degree of affinity with the direction of my academic and social practices. I have researched postcolonial theory through the texts of

[4] For example, the Cross-Boundary Innovation program to which I belong aims to "nurture highly skilled professionals who can conceptualize an 'ideal form' confronting the complex and challenging situation in a society and create new values by envisioning an alternative enhancement of knowledge and fusion of knowledge. In essence, it seeks to nurture individuals capable of guiding innovation across various boundaries, ultimately leading to the transformation of social systems"(The University of Osaka Cross-Boundary Innovation Program).

Gayatri C. Spivak[5] focusing on the complexities of oppression caused by race, gender, and class (“Deepening of Knowledge”), engaged in groundwork for postcolonial studies crossing disciplinary boundaries (“Fusion of Knowledge”), and attempted to build infrastructure for tackling ongoing colonialism (“The Integration of Knowledge with Society”). I have at times utilized opportunities and resources provided by the university system to conduct these activities. For example, the Cross-Boundary Innovation Program (hereafter referred to as CBI Program), to which I belong, aims to nurture individuals capable of undertaking practical activities to solve social problems and supports student activities conducted outside the academic world. I was involved in a peacebuilding activity related to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict during my undergraduate years, and I have engaged in activities on that conflict alongside my research after entering graduate school, sometimes utilizing the opportunities and resources provided by this program[6].

Another example is to be a member of the Next Generation Researcher Development Project that supports interdisciplinary collaborative research projects. I am currently taking advantage of the grant to conduct collaborative research[7]. In this way, part of my activities is made possible by utilizing the opportunities, choices, and resources provided by the university system.

The opportunities and resources provided by the university system have broadened choices for academic and practical activities inside and outside the academic world, while shaping my positioning as a researcher. However, activities within the system also entail constraints. In that case, I have sought opportunities outside of the university[8].

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[5] Spivak is a postcolonial thinker born in India. In her major work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988), Spivak questions the representation of women of color in academia, which has been dominated by white men, and the power relations that made this possible. Spivak has also suggested alternative directions of academic disciplines, including area studies and comparative literature (Spivak 2003, 2012).

[6] Regarding my activities on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during my undergraduate years, see Takayanagi (2025c). Additionally, I worked with my colleagues on a group project supported by the CBI Program after entering the graduate school (Fujisaka, 2024, June 25).

[7] As will be discussed later, the collaborative research project I am working on with my colleague aims to trace how the memories of Okinawan and Korean women, forced to be sexual slaves during the Battle of Okinawa, have been recorded and preserved in Okinawan and Korean societies. However, from 2026, the administrative officers of the project decided to regulate opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborative research. The idea of “Fusion of Knowledge” is misdirected by the officers, and the project, designed to encourage collaborative research, deprives researchers of opportunities for “challenging” collaborative research, including ours.

[8] It does not deny the fact that I have been complicit with the university system. The interplay between inside and outside the system matters.

Thus, my research interest has been shaped by the activities inside and outside the university system. It is the interplay of the possibilities opened up by that system and my activities beyond that system that allows me to contemplate. The next section examines the social activities I engaged in outside the academic world and traces the process of my unlearning. Sometimes these activities have been accompanied by tension with systematic conditions and international affairs.

3-2. Outside the Academic World: Learning from Activism and Fieldwork

My academic research is driven by the sense of incomprehension (Iwakan) I have felt through various activities. That sense triggers my thinking and leads me to read the texts of thinkers like Spivak, seeking clues to give words to something underlying the sense of incomprehension[9].

October 7, 2023, was a significant turning point for me (Takayanagi, 2025a). Hamas crossed the border of the Gaza Strip and attacked Israeli citizens that day, and Israel reacted with a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip. I had planned to visit Palestine/Israel from October 12 to November 2 as a part of my project in the CBI Program and participate in a program and an event organized by local NGOs and other organizations. This plan was developed through repeated contact with NGO members, researchers, and my friends. However, in light of the recommendation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the university policy on visiting abroad, and requests from the staff of the program, I had to abandon this plan.

After that, I was seized by an obsession that I had to do something. I started participating in events such as photo exhibitions and lectures. People I met there told me about information on demonstrations, and I began participating in them. Meeting the members of Maqluba[10] was particularly important for me. Not only did I learn a lot about grassroots solidarity movements from the members, but they also introduced me to activities within the sexual and gender minority community. This provided me with an opportunity to reflect on gender, sexuality, and

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[9] In a different place, I conceptualized this mode of thinking as a part of the project named Eastern metaphysics (Takayanagi, in press a). I also found the significance of this mode of thinking in Spivak's text. (Takayanagi, in press b) In her words, imagination is defined as "thinking absent things" (Spivak, 2012, p.16).

[10] Maqluba is a Japanese civic organization. Its name comes from the Arabic word maqluba, meaning "upside down" or "to turn over." Maqluba is also the name of a traditional Middle Eastern dish in which a pot of rice, vegetables, and meat is cooked together and then flipped upside down onto a plate before serving. By adopting this name, the group expresses its wish to "turn over" or transform the current situation in Palestine—challenging injustice and envisioning a more just and peaceful reality (Paresuchina to tsunagaru Shashinten Project Makuruba, 2024).

the social norms that govern them—issues I had long felt uneasy about but hadn't had a chance to think about or adequate resources.

Another important opportunity for me was participating in the "Participatory Mini-Project for Queer Palestine Solidarity" hosted by the Kansai Queer Film Festival on February 25, 2024. This event provided me with an opportunity to contemplate how to stand with the Palestinian from a queer perspective. It also brought me a chance to get to know people concerned not only with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also with postcolonial issues in the Japanese context.

These activities enabled me to learn about the discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, embedded in Japanese society. Consequently, my "zone of interest" expanded to encompass Japanese colonialism (Takayanagi, 2025c). Thus, I planned the project entitled "A Cross-Boundaries Examination of the Current State of Japanese Colonialism: Bridging Disciplinary, Regional, and Societal Boundaries," supported by the CBI Program. A part of this project was to organize the report session for the Kibotane Youth Tour 2025 Spring, which I participated in during March 2025(Fujisaka 2025)[11]. Additionally, I conducted fieldwork in Okinawa and Hokkaido to study the history and present state of Japanese colonialism.

Engaging in the solidarity movement with Palestinians and fieldwork in South Korea, Okinawa, and Hokkaido brought me chances to reexamine my thoughts and position while realizing my narrow horizon and accumulating a sense of incomprehension of Japanese history of colonialism. And it is precisely by transforming the sense of incomprehension into questions that my academic practice is driven.

3-3. Inside the Academic World: Deepening of Knowledge and Bridging Disciplinary Boundaries

My activities inside the academic world aim to revitalize postcolonial studies. I have sought to ensure that the findings of my theoretical research are accessible to researchers in other disciplines. Hence, I consider it essential not only to search for the achievements of postcolonial studies developed in various fields but also to learn about the challenges of research practice and the methodologies adopted in each discipline through exchanges with fellow researchers. Of course, it is impossible to be familiar with every academic field. My

[11] The Kibotane Youth Tour is a study tour organized by Kibo no Tane Kikin (the Seed of Hope Fund), which provides an opportunity for young Japanese to learn about the history of Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula and the issue of Japanese military "comfort women." This report session was voluntarily organized by four participants of the tour from the Kansai area, Japan, including me.

understanding of academic research is heavily shaped by my "zone of interest," as well as by the environments and social relationships in which I am situated. While remaining mindful of this "complicity," I examine a case from my own practice.

In the Japanese-speaking world, the texts of Spivak that I specialize in—particularly "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—have been widely read and referenced by researchers across diverse disciplines. When I entered the Graduate School at the University of Osaka, faculty members and graduate students were holding a book club on "Can the Subaltern Speak?", which I joined partway through[12]. This reading group provided me with an opportunity to revisit Spivak's text from new perspectives and to meet researchers from different fields.

It was through researchers I met at this reading group that I first encountered a qualitative research method called autoethnography[13]. One person I met there later became an editor of an introductory book on autoethnography published in Japanese and gave me the opportunity to write an entry on "Postcolonial Studies" (Takayanagi, 2025b) for that volume (Tsuchimoto et al., 2025)[14]. This experience also provided me with an opportunity to meet researchers seeking to introduce autoethnography into academia in the Japanese-speaking world and to learn more about this method. Contributing to the introductory book was a valuable experience for me: it enabled me to survey the achievements of postcolonial studies and Indigenous studies that utilize autoethnography in the English-speaking world and to explore the possibilities this research method has opened up within these fields.

In writing an entry on "Postcolonial Studies," I set three objectives: (1) to organize the essential points of postcolonial studies based on prior research; (2) to introduce to Japanese-language readers the achievements of postcolonial studies and Indigenous studies that utilize autoethnography in the English-speaking world; and (3) to demonstrate the relevance of these research achievements for addressing postcolonial issues in the Japanese context. Because postcolonial studies has not yet been fully institutionalized as an academic field in the Japanese-speaking world, I aimed not simply to introduce research achievements from the English-speaking world, but to render them accessible by situating them within the Japanese context.

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[12] The following are the achievements of this book club (Higaki, 2023; Katsura & Higaki, 2022; Miyamae et al., 2022).

[13] Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that examines the researcher's own lived experience in relation to broader cultural, social, and political contexts (Adams et al., 2014).

[14] Before the publication of this book, the only introductory book on autoethnography available in the Japanese language was the Japanese translation of an English book, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Adams et al., 2014). Regarding the research trend of autoethnography in Japan, see Tajima & Nakatsubo (2024).

In tackling these tasks, I felt compelled to constantly reexamine my position because as a Japanese positioned on the side of the imperialist/colonizer, writing with reference to *The Autoethnography of Silence* (Ishihara, 2020) and *Okinawa and Sociology of Sexuality* (Tamashiro, 2022)—both of which made critical interventions in postcolonial studies in the Japanese context—always carried the risk of "ideologically consuming"(Ishihara & Murakami, 2024, pp.309-333) them.

Furthermore, I repeatedly considered to whom this text is addressed. Its readers can be Japanese, Ainu, or Okinawan people. They can be Koreans in Japan, foreign nationals, or people of mixed heritage. They may occupy marginalized positions not only in terms of ethnicity or race, but also gender, sexuality, class, or other factors. Writing the entry entitled "Postcolonial Studies" while envisioning such diverse readers was a challenging process, and it was itself a "self-reflective interrogation".

4. Cross-Boundaries Approach

The cases show that my academic and social practices unfold as movements that traverse three types of boundaries: (1) disciplinary boundary, (2) national and regional boundary, and (3) boundary among social divisions. The following focuses on these boundaries and conceptualizes the cross-boundaries approach as a methodological framework.

4-1. Crossing the Disciplinary Boundary

The first boundary is that of academic disciplines. Postcolonial studies developed from the humanities, including literature, history, and anthropology. Today, this field has expanded into social sciences (Go, 2016; Tamashiro, 2022). Thus, postcolonial studies have evolved as an interdisciplinary project that cannot be confined to any single academic discipline. So long as imperialism and colonialism oppress the colonized in various aspects of everyday life, it is impossible to grasp the full picture of the problem from the perspective of a single academic discipline. Therefore, it is essential not only to advance the decolonization of research practices within each discipline but also to undertake the challenges of postcolonial studies proposed by Doyle and Nomura from multiple angles.

At this point, it is crucial to create opportunities for researchers from different fields to collaborate. While I have already examined a case of a book club, another case is the collaborative research project I am currently working on: "The Construction and Inheritance

of Memory Regarding the Japanese Military 'Comfort Women': An Analysis of Testimonies from Okinawan and Korean Survivors of the Battle of Okinawa." This project investigates efforts to preserve the memories of the former "comfort women" who were subjected to systematic sexual violence by the Japanese military during World War II in Okinawa, while focusing on the dual colonialism Japan exercised over the Korean Peninsula and Okinawa[15]. This project has not only provided me with an opportunity to reexamine Japanese modern history in relation to Okinawa and the Korean Peninsula, but also to learn about the accumulation of Okinawan studies and sociological methodology. In this way, collaborative research can serve as an opportunity to expand one's "zone of interest" and learn from researchers in different fields. Such learning, brought back to their respective fields by each participant even after the research project concludes, will likely become a catalyst for further research in postcolonial studies.

4-2. Crossing National and Regional Boundary

The second boundary is that of nations and regions. Postcolonial studies developed primarily in the United States (Cusset, 2008, pp.138-145). Since the 1990s, the leading thinkers of postcolonialism, such as Said and Spivak, have been gradually introduced to Japan, providing resources for research challenging Japanese colonialism (e.g. Nomura, 2012; 2019; Ishihara, 2020; Tamashiro, 2022)[16].

Thus, introducing research achievements from other countries and regions can provide an important foundation for conducting postcolonial studies. When I contributed an entry on "Postcolonial Studies" to the introductory book, I aimed not merely to introduce the achievements of postcolonial studies from the English-speaking world but also to demonstrate their relevance for addressing postcolonial issues in the Japanese context. Because discussions developed in different countries and regions cannot be directly applied to Japan, they must be reorganized in light of its specific historical and social context. Such a process of reorganization, in turn, can serve as an important opportunity to further develop postcolonial studies.

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[15] Regarding the Japanese military "comfort women" and the system of military comfort stations, see Yoshimi (2002). Yunshin Hong (2020) particularly investigates the comfort stations set and operated by the Japanese military in Okinawa.

[16] Apart from the trend of postcolonialism, many studies address the issues of Japanese imperialism and colonialism (e.g., Kim & Nakano, 2008; Kim& Onozawa, 2020). *Postcolonialism* (Kang, 2001) and *The Debate over 'Historical Recognition'* (Takahashi, 2002) present numerous issues that should be addressed in the Japanese context.

When engaging in postcolonial studies, the practice of unlearning is crucial[17]. Fieldwork conducted across various countries and regions, and involvement in activism have all served as experiences that encouraged unlearning for me. Through these experiences, I became aware of my narrow horizon and expanded my "zone of interest." Particularly, for me, who has addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, participating in a study tour to learn about the Japanese military "comfort women" issue became a turning point. It made me realize that I had set priorities for the issues I face and chosen to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, avoiding confronting the Japanese history of colonialism (Takayanagi, 2025c). In my case, it was only after "cultivating a sensitivity to violence" (Ishihara, 2025, March, p.90) through my experience in Palestine/Israel that I could finally acknowledge the violence of colonialism exercised by the Japanese state to which I belong[18].

For me, unlearning is a process of training my imagination, trying to deepen my understanding of the irreversible impact colonialism has had on human life and the immeasurable pain it has caused. In this process, "colonialism" ceased to be "merely a word" (Oksa, 2024, p.39) and emerged as a concept that refers to situations deeply entrenched in our society and that control our lives. Spivak argues that having multiple home bases allows us to train "the imagination to enter other people's worlds" (Spivak, 2006, pp.21-22). For me, traveling to Palestine/Israel, South Korea, Okinawa, and Hokkaido provided opportunities to cultivate a sensitivity to violence and train my imagination. Furthermore, solidarity movements with Palestine and former "comfort women" remain important learning opportunities. The experiences of traveling across national and regional boundaries eventually led me to look at divisions within Japanese society, and the solidarity movements in Japan became an opportunity to acknowledge social divisions, which I will consider next.

4-3 Crossing Boundary among Social Divisions

The third boundary is that among social divisions based on various factors, including race, gender, sexuality, and class. Bond-Theriault (2024) states, "privilege allows one to escape the tedious task of constantly thinking about and analyzing how one's identities are shown up in various spaces" (pp.17-18). However, this does not negate that the realities of the privileged

[17] In a different place, I reframed unlearning as a practice of undoing institutionalized and entrenched knowledge and learning from others (Ryota, in-press b)

[18] We should not assign "priorities" to certain issues, as I once did; otherwise, we will be trapped by a double standard. Looking at both the local and global dimensions of colonialism and imperialism can help us better understand their complex intertwinement. It would bring us a chance to be aware of our own double standards, thereby overcoming them. (cf. Takahashi, 2002, pp. 136–147)

are intersectional. Therefore, in order to recognize one's own privilege, it is important to engage in a "self-reflective interrogation" of one's behavior as a researcher or intellectual in situations where multiple power relations intersect. As Bond-Theriault (2024) points out, a proper power analysis is only possible by placing oneself in an intersectional position.

In this respect, "intersectionality" is an important concept for crossing social divisions and conducting academic and social practices. According to Collins and Bilge (2020), intersectionality "investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life" (p.2). It is an analytic tool that "views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age - among others - as interrelated and mutually shaping one another". As this definition suggests, power relations of race, gender, class, etc., cannot be considered in isolation. Focusing on any one factor obscures the inequalities created by others (Takayanagi, 2025b).

Reexamining who is included in "we" can test our imagination[19]. While "we" always includes diverse people, there are also those who are excluded. Since October 7th, as I have participated in solidarity movements with Palestine, I have come to realize that people from diverse backgrounds are involved in these movements. While participating in the movements across Japan, I have met people who express solidarity with Palestine from a queer perspective, as well as people concerned about the ongoing issue of Japanese colonialism. Even after these encounters, there are likely many people I have failed to meet. However, paying attention to intersectionality at least allows us to recognize the diversity within "we," and this awareness can also serve as an opportunity to broaden our horizons to other issues in society. In my case, interactions with people I met through events organized by Maqluba and the Kansai Queer Film Festival led me to begin participating in events in the sexual and gender minority community, which gave me a chance to reflect on my own gender and sexuality.

Paying attention to intersectionality can also help us recognize the existence of those who are not included in the "we." Addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enabled me to expand my "zone of interest" to include the issues of colonialism in Japanese society. Thinking about the issue of settler colonialism exercised by Israel made me aware of my own position as an imperialist or colonizer in the Japanese context[20]. It allowed me to understand what Collins

[19] Judith Butler (2009) says that "one way of posing the question of who 'we' are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (p.38). At this point, see also Butler (2023, 19 October).

[20] It was only relatively recently that I began to seriously consider the issue of the right to self-determination of indigenous Ainu and Okinawan peoples, as well as the issue of Japanese military "comfort women"(Takayanagi,

and Bilge (2020) mean when they say, “power relations of race, class, gender, for example, are not discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but rather built on each other and work together” (p.2). Thus, engagement in activism with intersectionality in mind allows us to acknowledge that “the ‘we’ does not, and cannot, recognize itself” and “it is riven from the start, interrupted by alterity” (Butler, 2009, p.14). In this sense, “the obligations ‘we’ have are precisely those that disrupt any established notion of the ‘we’.”

The experience of working across national and regional boundaries, situating oneself in an intersectional position, provides an opportunity to develop sensitivity to violence and train one’s imagination. Learning from others in fieldwork and activism can deepen understanding of the complex power relations that create social divisions[21]. Bringing the social movement sensibilities and experiences that intersect with race, gender, class, etc., into the academic world may create chances to transform its institutions (Collins & Birge, 2020, pp.87-97).

Conclusion: Toward the Cross-Boundaries Approach to the Legacy of Imperialism

Colonialism is not a past event. Rather, it is an issue that persists to this day. This essay reframed postcolonial studies as the result of an interplay between research activity and social practice and proposed a methodological framework to tackle the undying colonialism. The case study of my academic and social practices as a Japanese researcher demonstrated that the movement toward decolonization is unfolding, crossing disciplinary boundaries as well as national and regional boundaries, and that an intersectional perspective is essential when addressing postcolonial issues.

The cross-boundaries approach presented in this essay allows researchers to reexamine their position and deepen their understanding of the complex power relations. This approach can be conceptualized as a practice that traverses three types of boundaries: disciplinary boundary, national and regional boundary, and boundary among social divisions. Imperialist enterprise has expanded globally, dominating colonies and controlling the lives of indigenous people, thereby solidifying asymmetrical relationships between imperialists and indigenous peoples, or between the colonizer and the colonized. Given that it continues to affect various aspects of everyday life, relying solely on a single disciplinary perspective is insufficient to undertake the tasks of postcolonial studies proposed by Doyle and Nomura. Rather, researchers from different

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2025c).

[21] Involving ourselves in social movements and learning from others is important; however, in doing so, we must also remain fully aware of the risk of “ideologically consuming” minorities. Ishihara (2023, January) makes thought-provoking points when it comes to such practical efforts.

fields must utilize their respective specialties to trace complex power relations of race, gender, class, and other factors, crossing national and regional boundaries.

This essay is also an attempt to demonstrate how researchers living in a contemporary society built on the history of imperialism can problematize their own privilege and complicity. The "continuous labor of self-reflective interrogation" that goes inside and outside the academic world constitutes an important moment for decolonization. By crossing national and regional boundaries, as well as boundaries among social divisions, one can grab a chance to reconstruct relationships with others. Thus, the cross-boundaries approach would reframe postcolonial studies as a project continuously generated through the interplay between academic research and social practice.

The significance of this approach lies not in the act of crossing boundaries itself, but rather in the process of reexamining the researcher's own positioning in the course of crossing boundaries and reconfiguring research questions through (failed) encounters with others. This marks the starting point for confronting the legacy of imperialism.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by JST SPRING (Grant Number JPMJSP2138). It also benefited from activities funded by the Independent Practice Activity Grant of the Cross-Boundary Innovation Program, the outcomes of which contributed to the present study. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all the individuals I encountered through these activities, whose insights and exchanges greatly enriched this research.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The initial draft of this manuscript was written in Japanese. In the process of translating the manuscript into English, the translation-support tool DeepL was used; however, the generated translations were substantially revised and expanded by the author. In addition, suggestions generated by ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, were consulted during the proofreading process. The final decisions regarding wording, content, and interpretation were made solely by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the manuscript.

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