

Supervision and Culture: Post-colonial Explorations

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< Abstract >

The purpose of this article is to explore the dynamic interplays of power and identity within intercultural supervision in Australia and within Japanese supervision. This article presents the findings from two studies of intercultural supervision experiences of culturally diverse supervisors and students in the Humanities, Social Sciences and the Sciences at an Australian university. Drawing upon several post-colonial metaphors, this paper investigates how supervisors' pedagogical practices and students' learning approaches are impacted upon by working in an intercultural supervision space. This article will also outline some preliminary observations from a small pilot study of supervision in the Humanities and Social Sciences and in the Sciences at a Japanese university. Finally, this article will explore some of the potential implications for supervision pedagogies of examining the role of culture using a post-colonial lens.

1. Introduction

This article reports on two qualitative investigations of the dynamic interplays of culture and identity that take place in intercultural supervision in Australia. Specifically it uses post-colonial theory to present an analysis of supervisors' and students' accounts of intercultural supervision in Australia. This article also begins to explore how culture

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and identity play out in Japanese supervision, drawing on a recent small, pilot study. This article builds upon earlier work that I have been exploring (Manathunga 2007a, 2009, under review).

First of all, this article outlines the different discourses that are present in the existing English-language literature on supervision and argues for the need for more post-colonial explorations of supervision. It then outlines a number of useful post-colonial metaphors that I have applied to these qualitative data on intercultural supervision. I provide details about the methodology and data analysis approaches used in two studies of Australian intercultural supervision and provide one example of assimilation, unhomeliness and transculturation from these data. I then outline a recent small study of Japanese supervision and provide a series of preliminary observations. Finally, I explore what implications these studies might have for our understandings of the ways in which culture and identity play out in supervision pedagogy in Australian intercultural settings and in Japan.

2. A Critical Literature Review

Supervision pedagogy has been increasingly investigated in the English-language literature in many countries since the mid-1990s. There is also a large body of literature on research education and supervision in many other languages, but as I only speak English, this article provides a brief analysis of the English-language literature. I would like to focus on three key theoretical paradigms that have been used in this literature.

The most dominant discourse on supervision can be described as an *administrative or liberal discourse*, which includes both positivist & interpretativist research. This discourse emphasises supervisors' and students' roles and responsibilities and depicts supervision as a form of project management. In terms of investigating the role of culture in supervision, this literature suggests that expectations of students and supervisors should be made explicit. This literature also recommends a number of effective intercultural communication strategies (eg. Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt 1999). There are some authors writing within this

theoretical paradigm that portray cultural diversity as a deficit or problem (eg. Ballard & Clanchy 1997).

A number of authors also investigate supervision from a *critical theoretical paradigm*. These explorations focus on empowering students and regard power as oppressive and as exerted only by supervisors. They also seek to challenge dominant liberal discourses about research paradigms that do not adequately address the issues of women, ethnic minorities, working class and Indigenous people. Generally, when investigating supervision and culture, they prefer to explore the intersections of culture with social class and gender.

Finally, a growing number of researchers have used *postmodernist theoretical paradigms* to interrogate supervisory discourses. These theorists regard power as both oppressive and productive and think of power as circulating in complex ways between supervisors and students rather than only as exerted by supervisors and institutions. They investigate the impact of disciplinarity and governmentality on supervision pedagogy (Manathunga 2007b) and regard supervision as ‘chaotic’ (Grant 2003: 189) and rewarding. These theorists go beyond simple dichotomies (ie. good or bad supervision) and adopt a both/and rather than either/or logic (Green & Lee 1995, Grant 2003, Johnson et al. 2000). Research using this discourse tends to focus on culture (and gender) as embodied inscriptions (in other words, as a series of bodily practices and identity constructions) and investigates how supervisors and students account for their experiences of culture and supervision (Grant 2010).

3. Post-colonial Theory and Supervision

3.1 Why Post-colonial Theory?

I have argued (Manathunga 2007a, 2009) that postmodernist discourses do not take sufficient account of the impact of colonisation on the ways in which culture operates in supervision. Although people assume that the era of colonisation is over, many authors and activists from ethnic minority and Indigenous groups argue that neo-colonisation continues to impact on their daily lives (even though it now assumes different guises). Scholars

from the Global South/East continue to encounter colonial stereotypes about their cultures when they study in the Global North/West.

This is why post-colonial theory is helpful in [re]thinking the role of culture within supervision. Post-colonial theory offers more nuanced understandings of culture and identity as never fixed, but as fluid, fragmented and multiply constructed (Hall 1996). It also encourages us to think about the impact of both linear and layered time on supervision. It encourages us to think about what it might mean to supervise research students at this particular moment in history and at this particular time in the lives of supervisors and students. It also challenges us to think about how echoes, fragments and unconscious emergences of the past leak into the present in perplexing ways.

Post-colonial theory also reminds us about the importance of place in supervision. It challenges universalist or Eurocentric interpretations of research where place is an abstract or invisible category or where theories developed in the West/North are assumed to apply to all places and cultures. Post-colonial notions of place include both physical space - where in the world are we located when we supervise or study? - and metaphorical space - where do we imagine ourselves to be located in relation to our discipline, to the global flow of people and ideas. A number of other scholars have also used post-colonial theory to investigate aspects of supervision and culture (Grant 2010, Kenway & Bullen 2003, Venables et al. 2001).

3.2 Useful Post-colonial Metaphors or Tropes

In this paper, I draw upon three post-colonial metaphors that I have found particularly powerful in seeking to understand how culture operates within supervision. These include assimilation, unhomeliness and transculturation (Manathunga 2007a). Assimilation is ‘a unidimensional, one-way process by which outsiders relinquished their own culture in favour of that of the dominant society’ (Penguin Dictionary of Sociology: 18). In supervision, this is where students from Eastern/Southern/Indigenous cultures are required to discard their own values and cultural knowledge and adopt Western/Northern ways of thinking.

The second post-colonial metaphor that is useful is ambivalence or what Bhabha (1994) called 'unhomeliness'. Unhomeness is 'the cultural alienation, sense of uncertainty and discomfort that people experience as they adjust to new cultural practices' (Manathunga 2007: 98). In supervision, this is most problematic for students as they begin to build bridges between their existing cultural ways of knowing and being and those used in the West/North. However, as my earlier research shows (Manathunga 2007a), supervisors can also experience unhomeness as they seek to reach out to their culturally diverse students and, in so doing, may need to adopt supervisory styles that they are not entirely comfortable with in order to more effectively support their students journeys across and between two or more ways of knowing.

Finally, transculturation is also a useful trope to enhance our understandings of intercultural supervision pedagogies. Transculturation is when 'subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant ... culture' (Pratt 1992: 6). Through transculturation new cultural possibilities and new ways of knowing and being can be opened up for both students and supervisors. In supervision, transculturation is where 'culturally diverse students may carefully select those parts of Western knowledge that they find useful and seek to blend them with their own knowledge and ways of thinking' (Manathunga 2007: 97-8). In this process, supervisors can also learn from students. In particular, if they chose, students from diverse cultures may open up new literatures and ways of thinking for supervisors to engage with. In this way, the supervisor becomes the learner and engages with their own 'cross-cultural ignorance' (Singh 2009: 185).

4. An Australian Study of Intercultural Supervision: Context and Methodology

This article draws upon two studies of intercultural supervision in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences at an Australian research-intensive university. I conducted a pilot study in the Humanities and Social Sciences in 2007 (Manathunga 2007a) and then a larger study was

carried out in the Sciences as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences in 2009 and 2010, with the assistance of research assistants Dr Maryam (Shirin) Jamarani and Dr Suzanne Morris (Manathunga, under review). In total across both studies, 22 supervisors, who were Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, English, and Australian, and 25 students, who were Vietnamese, Malaysian, Mexican, Bangladeshi, Italian, German, Chinese, Iranian, Indonesian, and Thai were interviewed. Standard ethical clearance was obtained from participating university and interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. A thematic analysis was carried out on these data, using the post-colonial metaphors of assimilation, unhomeliness and transculturation. This article contains an analysis of data from the Humanities and Social Sciences and Engineering from the pilot and second studies.

5. Culture and Identity in Australian Intercultural Supervision

These studies produced a number of significant findings about the role of culture and identity in Australian intercultural supervision, which I have reported in previous publications (eg. Manathunga 2007a). In particular, I have focused my analysis on the post-colonial tropes or metaphors of assimilation, unhomeliness and transculturation. In this article, I will report on only one example of each of these metaphors from these data in order to remain within the expected word limit.

The examples of assimilation and unhomeliness come from the second study of Australian intercultural supervision and are both located in the Engineering discipline. This analysis is reported on in one manuscript that is currently under review and has therefore not yet been widely disseminated (Manathunga, under review). The example of transculturation included in this article is from the first pilot study of Australian intercultural supervision, which was published in 2007 (Manathunga 2007a). The reason I have incorporated it in this article is because it illustrates the intercultural experiences of a Japanese supervisor (and former student) working in Australia. It is, therefore, especially relevant for this Japanese academic journal.

5.1 Moments of Assimilation

One particularly interesting example of assimilation was present in the data from the second, later study of Australian intercultural supervision. In this case, it involved an Australian female supervisor and a German female student (see Manathunga, under review for more detail). The supervisor described in her interview some of the difficulties she had experienced in giving her German student feedback on her draft writing. She indicated that she had had

a problem in the fact that she convoluted everything. She wrote things three or four times. And it took me a little while to realize what she was doing and then for us to have that conversation and for her to get very cross with me and say not that ... [this] is the way we do it in Germany and that is the way that papers are published (Australian supervisor, interview 2009: 28).

However, the German student described this experience very differently. She interpreted this feedback as suggesting that

Now I do understand that first of all I have to repeat myself many times before they [the supervisors] really understand what I mean, and I have to try to come from certain different corners, and I have to develop the area much more. I can't assume that they have the same background (German student, interview 2009: 13).

While it is possible to analyze this example in a number of ways (Manathunga, under review), I think the main point I would like to make in this article is that it could be viewed as a form of assimilation to an Anglo-American style of writing that dominates English-language publishing in many disciplines, particularly in Engineering and the Sciences. While in English-language publications, this writing should be brief and focused, other research has shown that German styles of writing permit more repetition and divergence (Clyne 1987). The student's reaction (as recalled by her supervisor) suggests that she interpreted her supervisor's

feedback as a criticism of her writing style, which she had learnt as a researcher in Germany. However, the student's memory of this situation was completely different from her supervisor's interpretation of this incident. The student seems to suggest that she found this kind of repetition necessary in order to explain her point of view to her supervisors.

5.2 Moments of Unhomeliness

There was an intriguing example of unhomeliness in the data from the second, later study of Australian intercultural supervision. This example illustrates the fact that that cultural difference is a complex interplay between culture and personal histories and experiences (see Manathunga, under review for more detail). A Chinese male supervisor outlines an unhomey moment in his supervision, indicating that:

I had one case it was a Chinese student actually, that's interesting, I'm Chinese myself and he discussed with me about a number of ideas and I've probably rejected those ideas too quickly and he never complained and they always said yes, yes, yes ...Then ...I was inviting him to come over to my office we have a meeting and I did not receive a reply from him. Then I thought something was wrong. Then I emailed him again ...and he replied ...can we communicate by email I don't want to have meetings with you ...I thought oh, this is serious ... I invited him to have a coffee elsewhere, not in the office. Office is too serious sometimes. So we had a coffee ...and I talked with him to see what was wrong ... I learned ...he felt that I had rejected his ideas too often and probably too quick ... Well two things there, I think in my case one is I've been living in the Western world for a long time. You know, I went out from China ...already nearly 20 years ...The other thing is ... even when I was a student [in China] ...I was independent. I had my strong opinions and when I had opinions which were different from those from my supervisors I would debate (Chinese supervisor, Interview 2009: 15-7).

Clearly, this supervision incident demonstrates how culture interacts

with different personalities, personal histories and professional experiences in supervision. It appears that the supervisor assumed that, because his student was from the same culture as him, he would understand the positive intentions behind his feedback on the student's ideas. However, he had clearly forgotten the extent to which his experiences in the West had changed his supervisory approach over the years and how his personality had always been quite assertive and confident. His student was unprepared for the extent to which his supervisor would critique his ideas, not realizing that the supervisor was waiting for him to defend his own ideas and argue back. For this Chinese student, such explicit disagreement with his supervisor felt impolite and disrespectful.

5.2 Moments of Transculturation

There was also an interesting example of transculturation in the data from the first, pilot study of Australian intercultural supervision. This involved a Japanese female supervisor (and former student) who had conducted research in Australia for more than 20 years since her doctoral studies (see Manathunga 2007a for more detail). This supervisor spoke about the challenges she faced as a doctoral student in reconciling her Japanese values about collectivity, reciprocity and holistic connections between her mind, body and spirit with Western approaches to research that focus principally on the individual and the mind. It was only when she came across largely Western postmodernist theories about identity and subjectivity that challenged this previous Western focus that she was able to creatively blend these theories with her own Japanese values to produce her original contribution to knowledge.

6 . A Small Study of Japanese Supervision: Context and Methodology

In this article, I would also like to outline some very preliminary observations from a small pilot study of masters and doctoral supervision in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences at a Japanese research intensive university that I conducted in 2011 with the assistance of Dr

Yoshiko Saitoh. This study received ethical clearance from The University of Queensland and was also implemented in line with the requirements of ethical research in Japanese universities. This study involved interviewing 7 Japanese supervisors in English (4 in Sciences; 3 in Humanities/Social Sciences) and 6 Japanese students in a combination of English and Japanese (3 in Sciences; 3 in Humanities/Social Sciences).

Rather than a focus on intercultural supervision, the purpose of this study was to begin to explore contemporary Japanese graduate student supervision. There is very little research in English on Japanese supervision. In many Western countries, stereotypes about 'Asian' approaches to graduate supervision remain prevalent as do Western approaches to supervising Asian international students.

The second layer of data collection involved recording supervision meetings in Japanese (for transcription and translation into English) and collecting the post-meeting emailed reflections of 1 supervisor in the Humanities and 1 in the Sciences and 3 students (1 in the Humanities; 2 in the Sciences). Finally, a number of observations were conducted. I recorded field notes and reflections about the data collection and observed 3 Science Masters students presenting their oral defence of their theses and Yoshiko observed two supervision meetings in the Sciences.

At this stage, no formal analysis has been completed of these data but I have identified one potential example of transculturation and briefly reflected upon some possible similarities and differences between supervision in Australia and Japan. Of course, it is important to acknowledge not only the very early stage of this interpretation but also the inevitable limitations of conducting research across cultures where the principal researcher does not have expert knowledge of the culture and very little knowledge of the language. So, it is very much from the position of Outsider that I describe these preliminary thoughts.

7. Preliminary Observations

7.1 Transculturation?

Firstly, there was one example in these data which appears to suggest

that transculturation has been part of one Japanese supervisor's approach to supervision. This Science supervisor had done his Masters in Japan and his Doctorate in the US. Indeed, a number of supervisors we interviewed had completed some of their studies or postdoctoral fellowships in Western countries. He described the different kinds of supervision pedagogies he had experienced in these two countries:

In Japan at that time - or still - the master's education or supervising, is first conducts in so called seminar. That's the kind of the small lectures consisting of just two or three or five or six people plus the faculty members ... Already, we read the papers in advance and then they make almost a lecture to the audience. It's not a kind of discussion. However, in the United States they rather like to make a discussion which is means just as you said; you can raise some problem, to which even the professors didn't know the answer. However, we are discussing or talk about some method or think about some examples or sometimes counter examples and so on. Also this is one to one discussion. So it never happens in Japan, at least to me (Interview 2011: 3-4).

He then explained how he uses a combination of these approaches as a supervisor:

I would say I've taken the intermediate style between the United States and the older Japanese style. My experience is then in our style, that has advantages since we study with our classmate which means we can be taught the same subject with our friend and that's very good to study [Science]. However, if you really take the American style, then each student has a different subject which means the students never talk to each other on the same subject. Since if you give the same subject to both of them, there may be some conflict. Maybe that's a reason why. So I make some small notes in our style especially in the beginning in the master's course for students. Also in the later maybe the doctor course or second year master's student, I started to make some private discussions like the American style (Interview 2011: 12).

Therefore, this Science supervisor has sought to create a hybrid, transcultural approach to supervision pedagogy that harnessed the advantages of the Japanese and American styles of supervision that he experienced. Further analysis may reveal whether there are also experiences of unhomeliness and assimilation in these data.

7.2 Similarities and Differences in Australian and Japanese Supervision

At this very preliminary stage and with the positioning of an Outsider, I would say that I was mostly struck by the similarities between supervision in Australia and Japan, despite the different systems of graduate education in the two countries. Although it is only a very small study, the Japanese supervisors that we interviewed appeared to have very diverse supervision styles, which were influenced to varying extents by their own experiences of supervision both in Japan and abroad. Interestingly, the majority of the supervisors we interviewed indicated how they had modelled aspects of their supervisory approaches on those used by their own supervisors. There were also a few supervisors who claimed to have adopted an opposite style of supervision or who indicated that their own supervisor was not really a role model for their supervision.

The Japanese supervisors in this study also emphasised the need to tailor their supervision approaches to suit each individual student. These characteristics of supervision are also reported in some of the literature on supervision in Australia and many other Western countries (eg. Grant 2003, Manathunga 2005, Venables et al. 2001). So too, it became clear that disciplinary discourses, rituals, practices and artefacts had a huge influence on the range of Japanese supervision pedagogies represented in these data and the overall positioning of supervisors and students in relation to the research and to each other. This is also the case in research about Australian and Western supervision more generally (eg. Grant 2003, Johnson et al. 2000).

The only significant difference that I could observe at this preliminary stage and as an Outsider, was a tendency of all of the students we interviewed to be very respectful of their supervisor, who they often

referred to as 'sensei', which translates as guru or master in English and is commonly used for teachers and academics. This appears to be in line with Confusion traditions of according teachers a great deal of respect and reverence. In Australia and many Western contexts, teachers at any level do not necessarily occupy a special position in society. There is also a tendency in many Western cultures for supervisors to expect their research students to debate and question their supervisory advice. It is also common for research students in many (though not all) Western countries to refer to supervisors by their first name rather than their title or family name. Further analysis may reveal other key differences.

8. Conclusions and Implications for Supervision Pedagogies

Therefore, I believe that these three studies demonstrate that the impact of culture in supervision and on research is complex. It is clear, in different ways in the Australian and Japanese studies, that cultural diversity both complicates and enriches supervision. In the Australian studies, the focus is very much on a diversity of cultures in a post-colonial context of invasion/settlement. In the Japanese study, where all the participants were Japanese, the issue of the Westernization of knowledge and the dominance of the English language in publishing in many disciplines highlights a different kind of post-colonial experience. In a sense, although as one member of the audience pointed out in the seminar upon which this paper is based Japan did colonise parts of Asia (particularly Korea), Japan is not a post-colonial country in the way that Australia is. Although it experienced post-war occupation by the US, it has not been 'invaded' by other countries. However, since the Meiji Restoration from 1868, Japan has embarked upon a deliberate policy of Westernization. In a sense then, Japanese society has engaged in cultural borrowing and transculturation for nearly a century and a half.

This cultural history, combined with the number of Japanese professors who received part of their research training or postdoctoral experience in Western countries and the increasing influence of the English language in many academic disciplines, has ensured that transculturation may have

become a feature of Japanese research and, in turn, supervision. Further analysis will interrogate the data in the Japanese study to see if it also contains evidence of moments of assimilation and unhomeliness. So too, as I emphasised in an article on research as an intercultural contact zone (Manathunga 2009), when students engage in research studies they are also becoming fully-credentialed members of disciplinary or academic cultures and so they are also likely to experience moments of assimilation and unhomeliness as they adjust to a disciplinary way of thinking and being.

I think all of these studies and the post-colonial theoretical lens applied to them also demonstrate that contextual factors such as linear and layered time, the impact of colonisation or Westernization, and the impact of physical and metaphorical space and location matter in supervision. As explored in the seminar discussion, history, varying and complex positionings in relation to colonisation or Westernization, culture or ethnicity, class and gender are already inscribed on the bodies of supervisors and students as they begin interacting in supervision. They cannot leave these features of themselves outside the pedagogical space of supervision. So too, I was particularly struck in the Japanese study by the impact of disciplinary rituals, practices, artefacts and physical office and/or lab space upon the shape and features of supervision. In providing generic guidelines and strategies, liberal discourses on supervision never account for this type of metaphorical and physical space and difference.

Finally, I think trying to understand more about the inherent tensions, challenges and complexities in supervision as well as the moments of intense pleasure and reward is important and reassuring for supervisors and students. So many of the supervisors and students that I have worked with over the last decade in many cultural contexts like Australia, the UK, Vietnam, Fiji, Oman, Malaysia and Japan find that their experiences of supervision are not simple, rational forms of project management. Rather they have experienced supervision as a highly complex, challenging but very rewarding form of pedagogy in ways that remain absent from liberal accounts in the literature and university guidelines. This is why I think post-colonial theory can offer us some very productive intellectual concepts and frameworks through which to understand more about graduate

supervision.

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研究指導と文化

－ポストコロニアル的探究－

キャサリン・マナトゥンガ

<要 旨>

本論文の目的は、オーストラリアの大学における異文化間の研究指導および日本の大学における研究指導において、教員が持つ権力と学生側の主体性の間におこる相互作用がどのように変化するかを探求することである。まず、オーストラリアの大学の人文科学、社会科学、自然科学において、文化的な多様な背景をもつ指導教員と学生が経験した異文化的な研究指導の二つの事例から得られた知見を明らかにする。いくつかのポストコロニアル的な隠喩を用いながら、本稿では指導教員の教育実践と学生の学習方法が、異文化的環境のもとで実施される研究指導からいかに大きな影響を受けているかを考察する。また、日本の大学の人文科学、社会科学、自然科学分野における研究指導に関する試行調査の結果をもとに、いくつかの予備的考察を行う。最後に、研究指導の方法論についてポストコロニアル的な眼を通して映る文化の役割を考察することにより、その可能性について探求したい。

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