

ASIA AS METHOD IN KOREAN HIGHER EDUCATION: TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract: This paper adapts Kuan-Hsing Chen’s Asia as Method to the Korean context to examine its potential for advancing social and epistemic justice in higher education. Drawing on two decades of teaching and research within English-medium instruction (EMI) in Korea, I employ a narrative autoethnographic approach to explore how decolonial thinking informs theory, pedagogy, and institutional practice. Through critical reflection, I analyze how long-term migration and academic engagement have reshaped my ontological and epistemological orientations, fostering decolonial moves in education. The findings reveal that sustained engagement in Korean EMI contexts can catalyze profound shifts in knowledge and practice, challenging Western epistemic dominance. By enacting Asia as Method within a Korean academic setting, this study offers a practical framework for international scholars to engage local intellectual traditions and reimagine EMI as a site of epistemic plurality, social justice, and transformative educational practice across Asia.

Keywords: Asia as method, Korea, autoethnography, English-medium instruction, comparative education

Introduction

In recent years, teaching and learning through English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education (HE) has significantly gained traction, as evidenced by the increasing production of scholarly papers and books globally (Airey, 2020; Curle et al., 2024; Yao et al., 2021), including within this journal (Garner, 2024; Phan et al., 2013; Tay, 2025). In Korea specifically, though EMI represents only a small portion of the HE ecosystem, its influences spread across the country due to increasing numbers of domestic and international students learning in second languages as a result of globalization and trends in educational mobility (Wit et al., 2022). This is a phenomenon that is further intensified due to the decreasing birthrate in Korea that has initiated universities to restructure HE in order to attract a wider net of students (Choi, 2022). Yet, certain areas are still underexamined in the literature, such as how subject instructors understand and practice EMI (Airey, 2011; Yuan et al., 2020); how EMI could be reconceptualized from non-Western and non-Anglo-phonetic scholarly lenses (Chen, 2010; Nandy, 1998; Takayama et al., 2018); the need to expand EMI beyond its state-centric orientations (Milligan & Tikly, 2016; Robertson, 2012); and EMI’s wider importance for mainstream HE (i.e., taught in the first language; Chang & Kester, 2025; Kester et al., 2020).

In response to these lacunae in the field, in this paper, I present autoethnographic reflections on my experiences within international English-taught HE in South Korean universities over the past two decades, drawing on Kuan-Hsing Chen’s (2010) concept of Asia as Method. As an international disciplinary educator – not a language instructor – I explore the boundaries and potentials of teaching disciplinary knowledge in English-taught academia in Korea, where the dominant societal language is Korean. I aim to answer the following research questions: How have my theoretical and pedagogical practices been informed by migration and long-term work in Korea? What sorts of ontological and epistemological transformations have I experienced? How have these transformations, particularly in relation to crossing languages and cultures, initiated decolonial moves in regard to my educational

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pedagogy, policy and practice? Here, decolonial moves refer to efforts to delink from coloniality – that is, to move away from modes of thinking, being, and managing resources and people in and through HE that reproduce relations of domination (Mignolo, 2011). Such moves may include implementing inclusive admissions practices; promoting the equitable distribution of resources; diversifying reading lists to foreground local scholarship; engaging local intellectual traditions; conducting multilingual literature reviews; employing contextually relevant theoretical lenses (such as Asia as Method in the case of this paper); and fostering shared representation and decision-making within educational spaces (Kester et al., 2021; Mackinlay & Barney, 2014).

As an overview, the structure of this article begins with a review of existing literature on EMI in HE and its specific contextualization to Korea, followed by detail of the autoethnographic methodology. I then discuss the theoretical framework of Asia as Method that informs my analysis. Finally, I share key insights from my professional experience in Korea since 2007, and discuss these before concluding. Overall, the paper provides new insights into EMI, addressing key questions on how disciplinary instructors understand and practice EMI, and exploring the potentiality of employing Asia as Method in the Korean educational landscape (and beyond) to re-conceptualize EMI from non-Western and non-state-centric perspectives (Shahjahan, 2025).

Yet, before proceeding, I must first provide a brief background on my positionality within Korean academia to enhance the reader's understanding of the background from which my commentary emerges. I am a US academic (from rural Kentucky) currently engaged in teaching and researching at the interchange of global education, conflict, peace, and development studies in various international contexts, particularly in conflict-affected areas. My career in HE spans East Asia – Japan, Korea, and Taiwan – as well as other global locations such as Somaliland, the UK, and the US, with a predominant focus on South Korean HE since 2007. I have additionally worked in a range of educational contexts with research and development teams in Afghanistan, Costa Rica, Croatia, and Pakistan. To be sure, my ability to navigate across and between cultures is pivotal to my work within EMI programs. I share this background as it helps inform my practical thinking on EMI, having taught and researched in a number of international English-medium settings over the past 20 years. I turn now to the literature.

EMI as English Teaching in Disguise?

EMI is commonly defined as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Dearden, 2015, p. 2). In practice, EMI is often implemented in contexts where English operates as a taken-for-granted academic lingua franca (Jenkins, 2018). Despite this seemingly clear definition, substantial ambiguity remains regarding the scope and nature of EMI. It is frequently conflated with related fields such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), content-based learning, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), all of which prioritize language development rather than disciplinary knowledge per se (Richards & Pun, 2021). In addition, debates about language, pedagogy, and learning extend beyond English-focused fields to include disciplines such as Comparative Education (Milligan & Tikly, 2016) and International Studies (Kolb, 2009), further complicating how EMI is conceptualized and researched.

Even within Applied Linguistics, EMI is often intermixed with English teaching. Pecorari and Malmström (2018), Wingate (2022), and Galloway et al. (2020) treat EMI as a context where English is not an explicit curricular goal but is nonetheless expected to be acquired. As such, EMI paradoxically recenters English by naming the medium of instruction as the defining feature, even while claiming language is not the focus. This raises the question of whether disciplinary instructors should consider their teaching as EMI at all. More nuanced distinctions are offered by Macaro and Aizawa (2024), who highlight overlaps and differences between EMI, EAP, and ESP, underscoring the need for clearer boundaries. This lack of consensus is also mirrored in South Korean scholarship (Ahn et al., 2024; Given & Prinsloo, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). Such ambiguity fuels ongoing debate over whether EMI

constitutes a genuine mode of disciplinary education or merely another form of English language instruction (Yao et al., 2021). This tension may explain why many university faculty members regard EMI as peripheral to substantive subject teaching (Airey, 2020; Huang, 2019).

In South Korea, although no centralized governmental mandate enforces EMI in higher education, major initiatives such as Brain Korea 21 (BK21) and the Creative Korea University Specialization Project (CK-1) have strongly promoted its adoption (Bolton et al., 2023). Demographic pressures – often termed “the demographic cliff” (Choi, 2022) – further incentivize universities to adopt EMI to attract international students, enhance employability, and maintain competitiveness in a global knowledge economy (Lee, 2021). Korean scholarship has examined EMI largely in terms of educational outcomes, student satisfaction (J. S. Kim, 2022; Park et al., 2022), and the growing demand for faculty capable of teaching in English (Lee & Lee, 2018).

More recently, Korean scholarship has critically interrogated the intersections of neoliberal policy, epistemic injustice, and coloniality in EMI. Park (2017) critiques EMI’s neoliberal underpinnings, highlighting ideological tensions and anxieties among students and faculty, as well as its role in reinforcing linguistic hierarchies. Choi and Kim (2020) question EMI’s instrumental rationale of global competitiveness, critiquing ethnonationalistic motivations tied to outperforming other nations; and Kim (2024) critiques the Western-centric curricula embedded in EMI, while Kester et al. (2020) and Kester and Chang (2022) analyze its colonial dimensions. Other scholars have begun reevaluating their own theoretical and pedagogical assumptions about EMI in Korea and abroad (H. J. Kim, 2020; Saeji, 2018; Sherman, 2023). This paper contributes to this emerging critical literature by reflecting on experiences within Korean HE through the regionally situated framework of Asia as Method (Chen, 2010).

Toward Asia as Method in Korea

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has advanced theoretical critiques of Western-centric HE, with particular attention to the ways HE has been historically entangled with colonial projects and their enduring epistemic legacies (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Swartz & Kallaway, 2018; Takayama et al., 2018). These critiques highlight how international academic mobility, cross-border knowledge circulation, and dominant languages of instruction – most notably English – have often functioned as conduits through which Western norms, values, and epistemologies are reproduced in global HE spaces. Responding to these critiques, scholars working in and from Asia call for educators and researchers to move beyond Western-centric lenses (Chen, 2010; Zhang et al., 2015). They caution against the uncritical circulation and localization of Western concepts across Asian HE systems, particularly when such concepts are mobilized by scholars or domestic political elites to consolidate institutional and epistemic power (Kenway, 2015).

At the same time, these scholars emphasize that HE is not shaped by a simple East-West divide; rather, it is constituted through uneven relations of mobility, translation, and cultural-linguistic negotiation that produce inequalities within both Western and non-Western contexts (Biraimah et al., 2024). Simultaneously, this body of work also resists wholesale rejection of Western knowledge, instead advocating for critical engagement that recognizes both its situatedness and its potential for dialogue (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2014; Hayhoe, 2001; Ryan & Louie, 2007). As such, a shared concern among these scholars is how HE might be reimagined through relational and contextually grounded perspectives from Asia that unsettle essentialist East-West binaries (Kim, 2024; Y. Lee, 2019). Here, Kuan-Hsing Chen’s (2010) concept of Asia as Method offers a framework for rethinking HE in (and beyond) East Asia – through a context-specific lens – by foregrounding inter-referencing, translation, and the ethical negotiation of difference across sites of academic mobility (Fang & Wang, 2024; Rhee, 2013; Takayama, 2016). Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), for example, states:

To confront the long-lasting impact of ‘leaving Asia for America’ (tuōyǎ rùměi) since the end of the Second World War in East Asia in general, and Taiwan in particular, [I] put forward ‘Asia as

Method' as a critical proposition to transform the existing knowledge structure and at the same time to transform ourselves. The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. (p. 212)

From a critical perspective, some scholars caution that Asia as Method risks being read as culturally essentialist, positioning Asia as a homogeneous entity in opposition to the West (Cheong, 2017; Y.-Y. Lee, 2020; Park, 2015). Such dichotomous interpretations would obscure the significant differences and complex historical trajectories among Asian societies and cultures, and dismiss the agency with which Asian students and scholars make educational choices (Han et al., 2024; J. Lee, 2023; Y. Lee, 2019). However, as Chen emphasizes, Asia as Method does not entail a unified or static conception of Asia. Rather, it calls for inter-referencing among diverse Asian knowledge traditions as a means of decentering Western epistemic dominance and learning from Asia (Kester et al., 2023; Kim & Jung, 2025; Zhang & Chan, 2023). This approach is grounded in an explicit recognition of Asia's historical, cultural, political, and epistemic diversity (Lin, 2012). Moreover, Asia is neither fixed nor timeless but continually evolving. Embracing Asia as Method, therefore, does not involve romanticizing a static or traditional past; instead, it entails engaging with Asia's dynamic present and its shifting epistemic and ontological positions within it.

Having myself relocated from the "West" to Asia two decades ago – first to Japan and later to Korea and Taiwan – Chen's (2010) call to think through Asia as Method has catalyzed three interrelated transformations in how I understand and engage with EMI and international HE (as discussed elsewhere; see Kester, 2023a). First, it redirects scholarly attention away from the West and toward Asia, not merely as a site of empirical inquiry, but as an ontological and epistemic location from which theory can be generated. In the context of EMI, this shift challenges the assumption that Western institutions, languages, and academic norms serve as universal reference points. Second, Asia as Method provides a framework for engaging alternative modes of knowing, being, and relating – modes that are often marginalized within globally mobile academic spaces structured by English and Western epistemologies (Kester, 2023b). Third, it directly contests the geopolitical hierarchies of knowledge production that privilege Western scholarship and academic bodies, instead foregrounding Asian-produced knowledge and worldviews as a means of addressing historical and ongoing injustices rooted in colonial legacies (Shani, 2022).

My own position is situated at the shifting borders between what are often labeled "West" and "East," shaped by long-term academic mobility and immersion in the histories, politics, cultures, and affective relations that constitute East Asia. In this regard, Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of *borderlands* is instructive. She describes borderlands as spaces where "two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch" (preface). While Anzaldúa powerfully theorizes this condition through the US-Mexico border – "an open wound where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (p. 3) – the concept resonates strongly with experiences of cultural, linguistic, and epistemic negotiation in EMI and international HE in Korea. Borderlands, in this sense, capture the lived realities of internationally mobile academics and students who inhabit in-between spaces shaped by multiple languages, identities, and institutional expectations. Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) articulates a parallel sensibility from across East Asian contexts, emphasizing relationality, inter-referencing, and the decentering of Western epistemic authority (see Khoo & Lin, 2023, from a Chinese cultural perspective; and Yoshimizu, 2023, from a Japanese diasporic context). To be sure, engaging with diverse others – through Asia as Method – prompts a reevaluation of one's identity through new epistemological frameworks. Ultimately, drawing on Asia as Method (Chen, 2010), this approach treats Korean HE not as a derivative extension of Western models, but as a generative site from which alternative imaginaries of EMI – grounded in cultural and linguistic negotiation – can emerge. I turn now to describe the methodology.

Methodology

In this paper, I adopt a methodology of autoethnography, informed by the conceptual lens of Asia as Method (as discussed above), to interrogate my experiences within Korean English-taught HE. Autoethnography has appeared in contemporary education scholarship as a method through which to examine practice in relation to broader social, cultural, and political contexts, while remaining attentive to questions of power, positionality, and knowledge production. The method has been used widely in the fields of education, anthropology, applied linguistics, and business (Grant, 2019; Thomas et al., 2023).

The method of autoethnography allows for close engagement with moments of professional transformation and dissonance arising from everyday academic work, not as personal narrative for its own sake, but as a site for theorizing EMI practice (Chang, 2008; Choi, 2016). Bochner and Ellis (2016) define autoethnography as a research method that recounts and methodically interrogates personal experience to understand the intersections of the personal and cultural. Further drawing on reflective traditions in comparative and international education (Brissett, 2020; Xu & Poole, 2024), I use my experiences as an internationally mobile educator to generate insights that speak beyond the individual case and contribute to wider debates on pedagogy, internationalization, and epistemic justice. Through this process, I critically examine how EMI and international HE in Korea is shaped by intersecting forces of language, culture, policy, and institutional expectation, and how these dynamics can be reinterpreted through the relational and decentering perspective offered by Asia as Method.

The study unfolded in three phases. First, I engaged with the research questions derived from the literature and reflected on them in relation to my professional experiences in Korean HE. This involved multiple rounds of structured reflective writing conducted over a six-month period. Second, I revisited these reflections through iterative rereading and dialogic engagement with colleagues, allowing alternative interpretations, tensions, and counter-examples to emerge (see Chang & Kester, 2025). Finally, I re-examined these reflections through the lens of Asia as Method to generate new insights into EMI as practiced in the Korean context. This approach is necessarily interpretive; however, the trustworthiness of the reflections is strengthened by systematically interweaving them with relevant literature and theory, thereby situating the analysis within broader scholarly debates. In doing so, the study enacts what Chen (2010) terms “critical syncretism,” a “cultural strategy of identification” (p. 99) through which solidarity and connection across cultural contexts – together with critical researcher reflexivity – help mitigate the limitations of any single epistemological orientation (Park, 2015; Sparkes, 2020). This approach also further disrupts the “exploitative power hierarchies endemic to colonial research traditions” (Tarisayi, 2023, p. 59).

Through this process, the reflections challenge three dominant tendencies in the literature on EMI: (1) the persistence of state-centric and Western-referential orientations, (2) the privileging of English and Anglo-centric academic norms, and (3) the disproportionate dominance of applied linguistics perspectives, which has left pedagogical viewpoints from other disciplines underexplored (Airey, 2011; Curle et al., 2024), a gap this paper seeks to address. By foregrounding critical reflection from a transnational perspective situated within Korea, this study offers new insights into the complexities of EMI as a negotiated, relational, and contextually grounded practice shaped by both global and local forces.

Reflections on EMI in Korea

In this section, I examine my experience as an international faculty member in Korean EMI programs over the past two decades. Specifically, I highlight the following areas: 1) some reflections on migration and education, 2) EMI in different cultural settings, and 3) Korean EMI as a mediating space between East and West. Theoretical and pedagogical reflections are interwoven throughout.

To be sure, my reflections here are alternative perspectives on EMI. As a content instructor working within the domain of EMI, which is typically populated by language scholars, I am one of the few non-language educators writing about the topic. It is well acknowledged in the literature that disciplinary faculty do not research or seriously engage with EMI, seeing it as undermining their disciplinary identities (e.g., Airey, 2020; Curle et al., 2024; Jon et al., 2020; Kim & Suh, 2024). Moreover, as an international faculty member, I offer different perspectives than domestic faculty. Hence, the reflections herein are unique, and as I will show in the following sections, they hold implications for the growing field of English-taught HE in Korea and across East Asia.

Reflections on Migration and Education

After graduating from university in the US, unlike most college graduates, I chose to explore employment overseas. While the most common path for many rural Americans – especially those from more economically deprived regions of the country, like myself – is to gain overseas experience by joining the US military, I instead opted for international education. Initially, I did not intend to pursue teaching as a full-time career; it was simply a means to an end, a way to travel the world and expand horizons of cultural understanding. However, several significant developments unfolded during my initial years in East Asia. First, in Japan, where I taught for two years in the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program between 2004 and 2006, I discovered a genuine joy for teaching through the connections made with students. I also began to realize at this time that economic opportunities in East Asia – as someone from an American working-class background – were much more promising for me (and others like me) compared to the US. This socioeconomic factor is also present in the extant literature (see, e.g., Collins, 2014; Lan, 2011). Together with travels and studies in Europe and Latin America, the *educational* aspects of this migratory journey are deeply intertwined with issues of economics, culture, politics, and the subjective becoming of an international educator through experience in East Asian contexts.

In the early years of my engagement with East Asia, I was intrigued by the fascination of East Asian societies with the US, such as in films screened in theaters, billboard advertisements, travel blogs, radio playlists, and HE enrollment statistics, all of which are reflective of deep geopolitical alliances and entangled histories (Choi & Nieminen, 2012; Nandy, 1998). This is reinforced in education when students aspire to pursue postgraduate education in the US, and in Korean academic circles, US norms are upheld as the global standard (Kwak et al., 2024). This widespread admiration for the US, and the West more generally, within Korean circles, has understandably been instrumental during my tenure in Korea, providing me with employment and research opportunities. Here, I am critically aware of the currency that my nationality, race/ethnicity, and gender afford me within this context, as has been well-documented in other literature (Lan, 2011; Moosavi, 2022; Song & Kim, 2024). Turning to education, my students and I theoretically and empirically examine how cross-cultural experiences may provide a critical distance on issues such as culture, politics, and economics, as well as how HE may play a key role in social justice or injustice, peace or conflict, mitigating or reinforcing social, cultural and institutional inequalities. This brings me to the second area.

EMI Across Settings

Students in the EMI programs within which I have worked in the contexts of Korea, the UK, and Somaliland reflect different profiles. The students where I currently teach are mostly Korean (about 70%) with approximately 30% international degree-seeking students. They come from a variety of undergraduate disciplines, including Education, English, International Development, and Global Studies, among others. Moreover, a significant number of the students are concurrently working during their studies; they work at other Korean universities, in NGOs, and in government agencies, while still many others are on leave from primary and secondary schools. Linguistically, most speak Korean as their first language, although some speak Chinese, French, or Spanish, and a few are

English L1 speakers. Many of the international students also have Korean ancestry; some of these students speak Korean, some do not.

Though most of the students speak English as an additional language, their English level is advanced. Seldom do English-language capacities prevent advanced subject learning in the program. This makes the EMI program at my institution distinct from EMI programs in other Korean universities, particularly due to the differing socioeconomic backgrounds of students and the material resources of the institution. This challenges the state-based containers that are often used to discuss EMI (e.g., “EMI in China”, “EMI in Japan”, or “EMI in Thailand”; see Park, 2019). I have also taught in EMI programs at four other Korean universities – in cities outside Seoul – and in postgraduate EMI programs in Somaliland and the UK. Similar types of divisions occur in these programs, though with differing effects depending on the origins of international students (Kester, 2021; Kester et al., 2020). Namely, what is especially evident in these programs is that students’ success in EMI settings is often greatly influenced by their socioeconomic background and prior multilingual educational experiences (Louis et al., 2024).

Pedagogically, students in my EMI program expect all courses to be taught in English, the designated language of instruction. Because of this, my classes often attract students from other departments, mainly international students who arrive expecting their majors to offer more English-medium courses than they actually do. Many then seek out departments with English-taught options, enrolling in my courses even when these fall outside their field of study (a trend noted elsewhere, e.g., Doiz et al., 2011; Rakhshandehroo & Ivanova, 2020). Their presence enriches the cultural, linguistic, and interdisciplinary diversity of the classroom, which is a distinctive strength of EMI (Chang & Kester, 2025). Yet not everyone views this diversity positively; some faculty and students see it as a challenge, uncertain how to meet the needs of both domestic and international learners (Jon, 2012; J. Kim, 2020). To be sure, EMI brings with it many challenges. Statistics across my current university show that approximately 10% of courses are fully English-taught, 48% of courses in the institution employ the use of English textbooks, and 58% of PhD dissertations university-wide are written in English (Lee, 2025; see also Bolton et al., 2023), raising questions about context relevancy and linguistic accessibility. Thus, EMI across institutional contexts presents varying constraints and possibilities.

EMI as a Mediating Space Between East and West

To be sure, I prioritize disciplinary learning and the development of cross-cultural competencies as a disciplinary instructor. I believe that language issues in the classroom should be acknowledged and addressed, but not to the point of distracting from subject learning. My primary teaching responsibilities encompass postgraduate courses on Comparative Education and International Development, Peace and Conflict, Qualitative Research, and running a Lab of 15 MA/PhD students. Though learning predominantly occurs in English, my students and I also frequently alternate between Korean and other languages, such as Chinese; and I encourage students to conduct their research multilingually where possible to enhance the diversity of perspectives covered. This is acknowledged as good practice in EMI (Chang, 2018; J. S. Kim, 2022; Zheng et al., 2024), as the inclusion of students’ linguistic backgrounds significantly enhances their learning experience and the overall engagement in courses.

Crossing between East and West also involves crossing disciplinary boundaries – linking education, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and TESOL/applied linguistics. As indicated throughout, EMI has hitherto been shaped by language scholars (Curle et al., 2024), but this dominance narrows the field, often reducing courses to language practice rather than disciplinary learning (Airey, 2020; Drljača Margić & Vodopija-Krstanović, 2017; Lee, 2025). Such framing can devalue courses, casting faculty as deficient – linguistically in the case of Korean professors or disciplinarily weak for international staff. Complicating matters, some professors advertise EMI

courses in English yet teach in Korean, excluding non-Korean speakers and raising ethical concerns (Kim & Tatar, 2017). This critique does not demand courses be taught entirely in English, but rather underscores how privileging language alone risks de-professionalizing disciplinary knowledge. Many faculty also resist the EMI label, neglecting students' linguistic needs – needs that, if engaged, could support deeper disciplinary learning (Airey, 2020).

From the lens of Asia as Method, such linguistic and cultural resources could provide a rich source for the investigation of local and regionally-situated knowledge offering counterpoints to Anglo- and linguistic-centric perspectives, a move that is not just a step toward context relevancy but an intentional disruption of the assumed superiority of Western, English-based, scientific, and rational forms of knowledge (Tarisayi, 2023). Korean EMI instead could be a space to explore the various possibilities of knowing and being differently (Chen, 2010; Kester, 2023b). I turn next to discuss the implications of these reflections.

Reframing EMI through Asia as Method

I now come back to discuss the research questions posed in the paper, building on my reflections above: How have my theoretical and pedagogical practices been informed by migration and long-term work in Korea? What sorts of ontological and epistemological transformations have I experienced? How have these transformations, particularly in relation to crossing languages and cultures, initiated decolonial moves in regard to my educational pedagogy, policy and practice? I further diffract these reflections through the lens of Asia as Method, threading in relevant literature to highlight parallels and divergences with current perspectives on EMI. The Asia as Method framework initiates three shifts beyond Western-centricity, challenging strict disciplinary knowledge and practice, and contesting Anglo-centric HE. I present each of these points here.

The move toward Asia as Method in EMI means shifting away from the West (and indeed beyond the state) as the referent point (Kester, 2023a; Kloet et al., 2020). Comparisons with the East and lessons learned from states and cultures in the region should be further embraced in a move toward global understanding and diverse practices of education (Jackson, 2026; Jackson et al, 2026). But this move away from the normative West causes much disorientation (Takayama, 2011). Here, the environment where I teach, as I explained before, is shaped by a convergence of languages and their speakers – both educators and learners. This environment represents a potential opportunity to think and teach differently within HE, situated at the crossroads of cultures. According to Chen (2010), using East Asian cultures and languages as the reference point “transform(s) the existing knowledge structure and... ourselves” (p. 212). In this case, shifting the lens toward Korea and East Asia disrupts the usual centering of Western knowledge practices and raises further questions about disciplinary and scholarly boundaries (Alatas, 2000; Chen, 2010).

Such geographic, scholarly, and disciplinary confines often work against faculty and students who operate in “non-Western”, “interdisciplinary”, or “liberal arts” spaces within contemporary Korean HE. Thus, the move toward Asia as Method is in many ways a move toward interculturality and interdisciplinarity. Yet, this is a challenge, as resources (in my current institution, for example) are often not significantly provided for interdisciplinary programs, and students are anxious about career prospects post-graduation due to an interdisciplinary program's weak (disciplinary) identity. This is even more pronounced with a foreign language dimension to the program. The power of EMI, though, lies in its inherent global, interdisciplinary, multicultural and multilingual character (Robinson-Pant, 2005). To fully realize these affordances, EMI must deliberately cross cultural, linguistic, and epistemic boundaries (Zheng & Qiu, 2023) – moving beyond Western/state-centric approaches, disciplinary silos, and Anglo-centric education.

The implications for (de/re)constructing curriculum and pedagogy toward inclusivity are clear (De Costa et al., 2024). Curriculum should extend beyond Western, Korean, or single-state/disciplinary perspectives by engaging research from the East, West, South, and across languages and disciplines. As Sivasundaram (2010) notes, reading domestic/Indigenous and global literatures in parallel reveals

cultural, intellectual, and affective convergences and divergences. Classroom pedagogies should likewise facilitate cross-cultural and multi-epistemic engagement (Kim, 2024). From the standpoint of a subject (rather than language) instructor, even small shifts – through curriculum, pedagogy, and policy – that foreground linguistic and cultural differences can reshape content knowledge, empower students and faculty, and challenge entrenched colonial logics of knowledge (Chen, 2010; Freire, 1970). In this sense, EMI, approached through Asia as Method, offers an under-examined epistemic and multicultural space, not merely a linguistic one. This interdisciplinary value remains largely overlooked in EMI scholarship, which is still dominated by language-focused approaches. Overall, there remains a need to deepen understanding of how content professors conceptualize and enact EMI from within (and beyond) their disciplines, both to support content professors in addressing the language dimensions of their teaching and to prompt language scholars to engage more seriously with the disciplinary aspects of EMI.

Conclusion

Drawing on my nearly twenty-year tenure in Korea and involvement in international academia, in this paper I have reflected on my accidental participation in the specialized and growing field of EMI in HE, particularly in the fields of comparative international education and peace studies. Despite not directly teaching English, I operate within an environment that requires a nuanced understanding of students' proficiency in the language. In this paper, I have argued that language sensitivity, while not the focus of the instruction, is nonetheless critical to excellent HE subject teaching (Airey, 2011). This is not just for language classes but more broadly for disciplinary education; examining this field through Asia as Method reveals important implications for the practice of EMI in Korea. In the end, the paper has posited that teaching from the periphery – beyond English core countries and beyond traditional disciplinary learning – initiates three key shifts: 1) a move from the Western gaze toward Eastern viewpoints, 2) toward alternative knowledge possibilities drawing on Korean and interdisciplinary cultural resources, and 3) theorizing the world from an East Asian perspective. All in all, Asia as Method has been a useful avenue from which to rethink theoretical, pedagogical, and research assumptions to move beyond Western-centric learning.

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