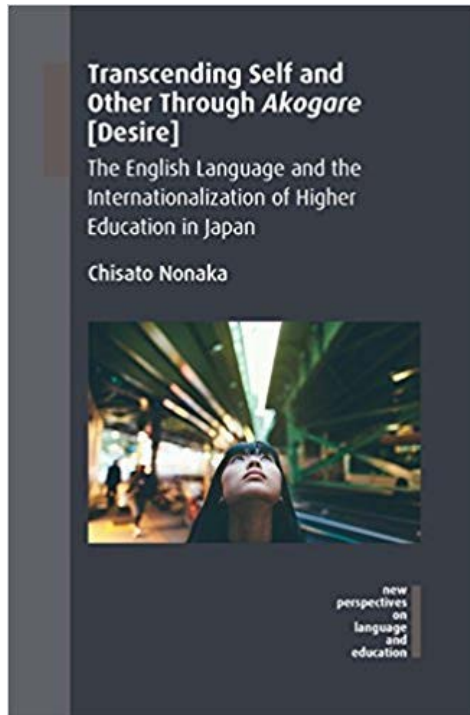


## Book Review



### **Transcending Self and Other Through Akogare [Desire]**

Chisato Nonaka. Multilingual Matters.  
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Recent development in TESOL research includes recognition of learners' social identity but the construct of *desire* has not received much attention. A better understanding of desire in language learning can capitalize the roles of TESOL professionals in designing non-coercive curriculum, and in supporting learners and teachers more effectively (Motha & Lin, 2014). Nonaka's book *Transcending Self and Other Through Akogare [Desire]* investigates the desire, or *akogare*, of English language learners in relation to the issues and emerging phenomenon brought by decades of internationalization (*kokusaika*) in Japanese higher education (JHE). The stakeholders' perspectives on their experiences as learners and/or teachers of English are used as the central analytical tool in this narrative inquiry study. Although the interplay between internationalization policy and English language pedagogy in JHE has been extensively studied (Rose & MacKinley, 2018), learners' affective component has been largely neglected. Therefore, Nonaka's book adds new insights to the current knowledge in the disciplines of both TESOL and JHE.

Guided by participants' personal stories, Nonaka illustrates the concept of *akogare* by carefully disentangling the threads of interview data, while identifying emerging issues and multifarious realities in current JHE. As she examines the stories through the themes of gender, changing acceptance of Japaneseness and JHE today, Nonaka summarizes *akogare* as being "the complex and liberating space where individuals may negotiate or even transcend their ethnic, national, racial, gender or linguistic identities" (p. 135).

Among the issues highlighted in this book, the inequality in fund distributions can most markedly exemplify the critical situation. Although JHE has gone through a series of internationalization initiatives since the 1980s, a large sum of *kokusaika* fund has been allocated only to a limited number of elite universities, while the less prestigious, smaller universities have consistently been excluded from such opportunities. This is because the fund is usually given to universities that are already active in the nationwide *kokusaika*, which can demonstrate their ongoing rigor and effectiveness in internationalization, while the smaller universities are unable to show their aptness for the fund. On the other hand, despite the global internationalization movement in higher education and the Japanese government's effort in keeping up with this trend, the vast majority (95%) of university students in Japan are either indifferent or do not have the language skills to take part in this shift. In identifying such misalignment between availability of the *kokusaika* fund, educational divide and the lack of interest from students, Nonaka calls for a more cost-effective and accessible *kokusaika* campaign.

In contrast to the thorough analysis of personal narratives and current issues, the pedagogical implications for JHE do not seem to be dealt with as concretely. For example, Nonaka suggests rapport building with the native English-speaking teachers, so that students who are less interested in *kokusaika* will have the chance to experience the 'new space.' In fact, this suggestion may give rise to another problem, where an 'us versus them' or 'Japanese versus non-Japanese' dichotomy becomes more prominent. This seems to go against the current acceptance of non-native TESOL professionals, because Nonaka assumes that the native English teachers are capable of creating the 'new space' for the JHE students, implying that non-native English teachers are not. This also contradicts with her critical rhetoric for the Japanese / non-Japanese dichotomy, which has been reiterated throughout her previous chapters.

It was rather surprising that the use of technology was not mentioned as a way forward in creating the 'new space.' Given the limited availability of funds and resources, as mentioned earlier, reliance on the native English-speaking teachers as a resource for the 'new space' may not be feasible for many institutions. As such, the worldwide globalization trend can be leveraged by collaborating with overseas institutions via the Internet and interacting with students and teachers in foreign countries, so that the 'new space' is accessible to a wider JHE community on a regular basis. Surely the recent development in this field will provide many choices for this initiative.

Although the context of this book is limited to JHE, the underlying concept of English language learners' *akogare* and the surrounding issues may be applicable to learners in other contexts. Apart from researchers in TESOL and JHE, newly appointed faculty members and students from various backgrounds in JHE may particularly find this volume informative and thought-provoking, as they immerse themselves into the unfamiliar academic context of JHE. The pedagogical suggestions in this book may not be substantial enough to fully resolve the flaws of the current *kokusaika* project, nonetheless, findings from this study can certainly alert decision-makers to use a more tactful approach when launching the much-needed future redesign. All in all, the book is

a timely addition to the literature, serving as a navigational beacon for the ideal *kokusaika* in JHE.

### About the reviewer

Akiko Chiba Mereu is an Assistant Lecturer in the Centre for Applied English Studies at the University of Hong Kong where she teaches academic literacy courses. A native of Japan, born in New York and raised in three continents, Akiko has a passion for teaching English language. Her areas of research interest include intercultural pragmatics, ELF communication, ELT for young learners and teacher development.

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