Research Article

JAPAN'S COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH THE DECOLONIAL LENS: EXPLORING COLONIAL MENTALITY AND PATHWAYS TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

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This article critically examines the development of community psychology (CP) in Japan through decolonial and social justice lenses. Drawing on nine months of collaborative dialogue among six scholars across generations, disciplines, and training contexts, it examines how colonial legacies, epistemic dependence, and disciplinary silences have shaped the field. Historically, Japanese CP emerged at the intersection of post-Swampscott imports and domestic professionalization; diffusion primarily occurred through mental health and school counseling channels. These routes enabled growth while also tilting agendas toward clinical neutrality, leaving Japan's internal colonial contexts comparatively underarticulated in mainstream discourse. Employing collaborative autoethnography, the paper presents three reflections that illuminate tensions between importation and localization, institutional neutrality and advocacy, and global frameworks and local practice. Across these narratives, silence emerges as a disciplinary infrastructure that normalizes epistemic coloniality while obscuring issues of structural violence and inequality. The paper argues that decolonial CP in Japan necessitates epistemic disobedience, co-production with marginalized communities, and hybrid "third-space" frameworks that resist both the replication of Western paradigms and the insular rejection of global dialogue. Future directions include fostering reflexive dialogue, attending to structural violence in research and practice, developing decolonial curricula, and building solidarities across Asia and beyond.

***Keywords**: Japan, decoloniality, coloniality of knowledge, social justice, epistemic disobedience, collaborative autoethnography, decolonial community psychology*

1. Beyond the "Unsayable" in Japanese Community Psychology

This paper begins with our shared reticence regarding decoloniality in Japanese community psychology, not with a theoretical claim, and then employs decolonial lenses to illuminate that

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reticence. The paper emerged from collaborative, multi-authored reflection conducted through online discussion sessions over a nine-month period. Through this process, we recognize the cultural and professional tensions that shape what is “unsayable” within the field of psychology, especially community psychology (CP) in Japan. Instead of presenting a unified narrative on the issues of decolonization and social justice, we aim to make visible the silences, contradictions, and epistemic discomforts that have shaped our thinking in this field, which tends to remain obscure in society and among professionals.

Hence, the paper is grounded in a decolonial orientation that draws from critiques of epistemic coloniality (Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000). Concepts such as “coloniality of knowledge” and “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo, 2009) provide a lens through which to interrogate how imported psychological frameworks from the U.S. or the West have been institutionalized in Japan, often without sufficient critical reflection. In the context of Japanese community psychology, this persistence can be observed not only in what is said, but in what remains “unsayable.”

To engage seriously with decoloniality in Japan, several conundrums—historical, epistemological, and methodological contexts— must be understood. Japan's geopolitical position as both colonizer and subordinate in the past, its clinical psychology’s training culture of "neutrality," (cf. Sato, Mizoguchi, Arakawa, Hidaka, Takasuna, & Nishikawa, 2016) and its emphasis on harmony and consensus contribute to a context where power, identity, and positionality remain underexamined. These tensions complicate the application of decolonial frameworks to the current scene of community psychology in Japan, but they also make such an inquiry even more urgent.

This paper aims to: (a) to provide a historical overview of the issues involved in the development of CP in Japan, tracing its institutional, conceptual, and cultural trajectories relevant to the decolonization framework; (b) to share the “unsayable” thoughts and opinions about personal reflections from three individuals who spent the past several years to more than three decades as community psychologists; and (c) to provide critical observations and reflections on the issues surrounding decoloniality in Japanese CP and beyond.

2. Community Psychology in Japan: Colonial Legacies and Epistemic Dependence

Community psychology emphasizes understanding individuals within their social contexts and advocating for systemic change to promote well-being (Moritsugu, Vera, & Wong, 2019). While, it formally gained momentum in the United States following the Swampscott Conference in 1965, its ideas spread internationally within a few years. In Japan, the field made its debut at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the *Japanese Psychological Association* at the University of Tokyo in 1969, where a symposium titled “*Issues in Community Psychology*” was organized (Ando, 1998). This symposium, occurring just four years after Swampscott catalyzed the development of numerous training programs in community mental health and community psychology in the U.S., marked a similarly critical moment for Japanese community psychology.

Initially, however, community-oriented discussions in Japan were fragmented and primarily focused on specific areas such as regional or community mental health and school counseling, without a unified field of "community psychology" being clearly conceptualized. The event spurred further interest, leading to the first *Community Psychology Symposium* in 1975, a retreat-style gathering that continued until the *Japanese Society for Community Psychology* (JSCP) was formally established in 1998. While these gatherings fostered collegial exchange, they took place amid a vibrant ecology of grassroots activism and mutual aid in postwar Japan. Yet disciplinary templates were borrowed mainly from Euro-American psychology, so these indigenous practices were not consistently theorized or recognized as "community psychology" within the academy—a pattern that speaks to what Quijano (2000) calls the coloniality of knowledge.

2.1. Colonial Flows of Knowledge and Translation

During its formative years, community psychology in Japan gradually expanded its reach. Early discussions on regional mental health theory and school counseling teamwork, particularly within the Japanese Society of Regional Psychiatry founded in 1967, set the stage for subsequent developments. Translations of seminal works published in the United States, such as Murrell's *Community Psychology and Social System* (translated by Ando, 1977) and Korchin's *Modern Clinical Psychology* (translated by Murase, 1980), introduced frameworks that were profoundly shaped by U.S. institutional and cultural contexts.

While these translations enriched the development of Japanese community psychology, they also reinforced what Mignolo (2009) calls geo-politics of knowledge: the tendency to import Euro-American theories as universal truths. Similarly, in Psychology, Okazaki, David, and Abelmann (2008) and other indigenous scholars have warned that reliance on imported models risks marginalizing local cultural practices and reinforcing colonial hierarchies. The first original Japanese CP textbook, Yamamoto's *Community Psychology: Theory and Practice of Regional Clinical Work* (1986), was a milestone, yet even it bore the imprint of Western-derived subject or content categories. Following Mignolo, the task for Japanese community psychology would be not merely adaptation but "epistemic disobedience"—delinking from colonial epistemologies and building knowledge rooted in Japan's own histories and lived experiences.

2.2. Institutionalization and Internal Coloniality

According to Ando (1998), JSCP emerged from recognition that informal retreat-style symposia, often held at *onsen* (hot spring) resort areas, were insufficient to build the field's legitimacy. While extended *onsen* retreats fostered deep dialogue, they proved insufficient for building enduring, citable knowledge and broad participation; the move toward journals and formal societies thus reflected both the mainstream Japanese academic legitimacy (reflecting Western norms) and domestic and practical needs for rigor, accessibility, and stable institutional presence.

Hisata (2017) also observed that further recognition or non-recognition of community psychology in Japan appears to have been influenced by the establishment of the *Certified Clinical Psychologist System* in 1988, which listed community support merely as one of its three pillars in clinical psychology. As the number of certified psychologists increased in school settings in the

subsequent years, collaboration with teachers and the broader community became essential. Yet this professionalization also aligned the field with North American or Western traditional models of counseling and clinical practice, and risked further obscuring alternative grassroots practices.

Moreover, Japan's own internal colonial contexts–particularly the minority experiences (e.g. Okinawans, Ainu, *Burakumins* and Zainichi *Koreans*)–were rarely addressed in mainstream psychology, or community psychology (Kurita, 2025; Weiner, 2009). This absence does not necessarily imply that Japanese community psychologists intentionally reproduced harm or erased local knowledge. Rather, it reflects how dominant epistemic frameworks—imported from Euro-American traditions—have limited the scope of justice-oriented inquiry. By prioritizing mental health and counseling paradigms, early community psychology in Japan often overlooked systemic issues rooted in historical and structural inequalities, such as those experienced by Okinawan, Ainu, Braku, and Zainichi Korean communities. This silence reflects a deeper coloniality: even as the field advocated systemic change, it often failed to interrogate the structural inequalities embedded in Japan's history of empire and marginalization.

2.3. Social Justice in Community Psychology in Japan: Another Dimension

As noted above, while the history of Japanese psychology reveals deep entanglements with colonial knowledge flows, it also illustrates an ongoing struggle to link psychological research and practice with questions of social justice especially in community psychology. Globally, community psychology has aspired to address issues of equity, empowerment, and resistance to oppressive systems (Jason et al., 2019; Moritsugu et al., 2019; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Yet, as several critical scholars have noted, these ideals have not always been translated into practice. Dutta (2018) argues that empowerment and participation discourses can reproduce colonial hierarchies under the guise of inclusion, while Makkawi (2015) critiques the field's silence and complicity in contexts of ongoing colonial violence. Thus, community psychology's global identity remains contested: its association with justice is as much aspirational as it is realized.

First, the heavy reliance on traditional U.S.-based models often frames community psychology primarily in terms of mental health or school-based counseling, leaving systemic issues such as discrimination, economic inequality, and political marginalization comparatively underexplored. For example, early Japanese community psychology rarely addressed the lived experiences of Okinawans facing disproportionate military burden, Ainu communities seeking cultural recognition, and *Zainichi Koreans* confronting structural exclusion. This absence reveals how coloniality constrains the scope of justice-oriented psychology in Japan: by universalizing traditional Euro-American models, it sidelines local histories of oppression.

Second, the professionalization of clinical psychologists through the *Certified Clinical Psychologist System* in 1988 legitimized community psychology within mainstream psychology while narrowing its agenda and actual practices to clinical settings or inside the therapy room. Although the inclusion of "community support" as one of its practice pillars created new opportunities for school–community collaboration, it reinforced a professionalized, individual-centered approach that often avoided more contentious struggles over power and inequality. This process of Japanese CP resonates with the issues pointed out by Drake et al. (2022). As Mignolo (2009) reminds us, coloniality is not only about knowledge but also about institutions: how professional structures reproduce existing hierarchies, even when advocating for inclusion.

Nevertheless, there are emerging efforts within Japan to foreground social justice more explicitly. Some scholars and practitioners have linked community psychology with movements for human rights, peace education, and anti-discrimination activism. Hisata (2017) emphasizes the importance of "life together" (proposed by Yamamoto 1986, p. 43) as an ethical foundation for Japanese community psychology, which resonates with broader struggles for an inclusive society. More recently, Japanese community psychologists have begun collaborating with educators and social activists to address issues such as *hikikomori* (social withdrawal), the impact of large-scale disasters and the rights of marginalized ethnic and sexual minority groups (Bando, 2023; Iida, 2020; Muramoto, 2015).

These developments are consistent with the global trends in community psychology that highlight liberation, equity, and decolonization (Martín-Baró, 1996; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Moritsugu et al., 2019). Yet in Japan, the pursuit of social justice requires confronting not only imported epistemologies but also domestic histories of colonialism and exclusion. Decolonial community psychology in Japan must therefore commit to amplifying marginalized voices, contesting systemic injustices, and articulating justice not as an imported ideal but as grounded in Japan's own struggles for dignity, peace, and coexistence.

Section 4 presents three autoethnographic reflections emerged from the process described in Section 3, exploring how the authors encountered community psychology and experienced coloniality/decoloniality in and through their work.

3. Method

3.1 Approach and rationale

We adopted collaborative autoethnography (CAE) to inquire into what tends to remain "unsayable" within Japanese community psychology (CP). Following Drake, Jeffrey, and Duckett (2022), CAE treats scholars' situated experiences and dialogues as legitimate sites of knowledge production, particularly when fields that espouse justice risk reproducing colonial epistemic frames. Rather than seeking a unified account, we aimed to surface and hold open tensions, hesitations, and contradictions as analytic resources.

3.2 Participants and setting

The author team consists of six co-authors with diverse training trajectories (clinical, community, and social psychology; trained in Japan and/or the U.S.; senior and early-career scholars). A graduate-student member primarily facilitated the meetings (moderation, timekeeping, and agenda shepherding), with occasional support from other members; this choice provided space for emergent perspectives while tempering seniority effects.

This project originated from meetings convened specifically conveyed for this writing opportunity. We held eight online roundtable discussions between November 2024 and July 2025, each 90–120 minutes. We kept shared bilingual (Japanese/English) notes and preparatory memos for each session. Recordings were limited in practice; no verbatim transcripts were produced.

Consequently, our corpus primarily comprises collaboratively authored notes, individual reflective memos, and short follow-up documents.

3.3 Analytic process

Given the exploratory and reflective purpose of the project, we did not employ a formal coding scheme. Instead, after each meeting we reviewed shared notes and individual memos to consolidate provisional themes. Themes were iteratively revised across sessions. Building on this process, three co-authors developed reflective and critical autoethnographic essays that elaborate distinct vantage points; the remaining authors acted as critical friends, offering comments that preserved heterogeneity. Detailed meeting dates, attendance, and the evolving theme list are provided in Appendix B to support transparency.

4. Personal Reflections on Decoloniality and Social Justice in Japanese Community Psychology

4.1 Maneuvering through the Silences: Reflections on Community Psychology and Unspoken Legacies of Colonialism in Japan (Miho Takahashi, The University of Tokyo)

Hovering Over Community Psychology

My path to community psychology was not straight. My academic life began in sociology, fueled by a curiosity about how people live together, shape their environments, and are shaped by them. After graduating, I spent five years in an industry, and it was there—in the rhythms of office life, in the quiet struggles of colleagues—that I saw the limits of my knowledge. People's challenges were never just personal; they were bound up in histories, relationships, and systems. I turned to clinical psychology for answers. However, what I truly sought at that time was not clinical psychology per se, but rather community psychology.

That broader interest began to take shape during my master's program at Keio University, where I studied under Professor Kazuo Yamamoto, one of the pioneers who introduced community psychology to Japan. In 1998, while I was still a student, the Japanese Society of Community Psychology (JSCP) was founded. I was not among the central members leading its establishment; instead, I held the position of graduate student observing from the sidelines. Yet the energy of that moment—its sense of possibility—remained with me like an ember quietly burning.

Revisiting the Roots: Community Psychology Education in Clinical Psychology

Years later, I currently serve as the president of the JSCP and teach clinical psychology at the University of Tokyo. When I began teaching community psychology to graduate students, that ember flared. Preparing my lectures, I returned to Yamamoto's Community Psychology: Theory and Practice of Community in Clinical Work (Yamamoto, 1986). His writing carried both rigor and urgency—the determination to "import" ideas from the United States while reshaping them for Japanese practice. Ideas, I realized, are not meant to be transplanted whole; they must be re-rooted in local soil, adapted, and sometimes reshaped entirely.

In seeking to understand how the field had evolved since Yamamoto's time, I consulted both senior colleagues who had lived through its history and numerous Japanese textbooks documenting the development of community psychology in Japan. This review included how the field has been taught domestically (Takahashi, 2017), offering insight into how overseas theories were gradually integrated through years of practice and tested against the contours of Japanese cultural contexts.

In 2023, I read Community Psychology (Moritsugu et al., 2019) with my students to explore the current state of the field looks in the United States today. Our discussions were telling because the terms central to the U.S. context—"social justice," "social change"—did not always resonate here. This was not indifference but evidence that the discipline speaks in different registers depending on where it takes root. It led me to conclude that it is necessary to reinterpret community psychology within the context of Japanese society. It also made me wonder: had our silence about decolonization shaped how these concepts were received in Japan? Had we been more explicit about psychology's historical positioning, might these ideas have seemed less foreign?

Seeing the Silences

Revisiting Yamamoto's work also made me aware of something I had long overlooked: in my early education, the language of "coloniality" or "decoloniality" was almost absent. Although I believe that many Japanese psychologists of the generations after Yamamoto were, in their own ways, striving toward forms of local adaptation through their research and practice. Yet these efforts often remained at the level of individual projects or local initiatives. They were not consistently articulated, nor did they crystallize into a shared recognition at the organizational or societal level.

I first encountered the term "decolonization" in international settings, where scholars openly discussing the legacies of colonialism in research and practice, questioning whose knowledges and how local perspectives could be reclaimed. By contrast, in Japan, we discussed "local adaptation," rarely mentioning the historical forces that had made such adaptation necessary. That silence was not neutral. Observing this process from within, I became aware that a distinctive approach to community psychology is practiced in Japan. Rather than being caught up in internal debates over coloniality, practitioners seem to carry out their work harmoniously and in coexisting, allowing change to emerge gradually within the field rather than imposing it from the outside.

Context and Process

That realization deepened my sense that the very principle that community psychology teaches: context matters. Community psychology is about understanding the forces—visible and invisible—that shape people's lives. The field itself is no exception. Decolonization, in this sense, is not a single act or the adoption of a fashionable term. It is a sustained, sometimes uncomfortable process of examining whose knowledge we privilege, whose experiences we center, and how we might reconstruct the discipline, so it truly belongs to the communities it serves.

As Fryer & Laing (2008) state, "it is clear that there are diverse community psychologies and that different community psychologies, like other social phenomena, are products of the time, place, and conditions of their construction (p. 8)." Japanese community psychology can also be considered to have been constructed within its own regional and historical context. However, unfortunately, apart from the publication of academic journals, there was no organizational momentum for a comprehensive discussion and synthesis of their own practices and research on each other. As an inevitable aspect of community, since the founding of the JSCP, there may have been a latent struggle against a kind of internal silent colonization. However, we, community psychologists, can perceive the phenomena within our own community. While keenly aware of the difficulty, we are beginning to collaborate on the painful endeavor of overcoming it through dialogue.

Conclusion

If my path has taught me anything, it is that disciplines—like people—must continually renegotiate their identities. For Japanese community psychology, this means holding both the history we inherited and the voices we have yet to hear, not as rivals but as sources of renewal. My personal journey has not only shaped my perspective on community psychology but also influenced my approach to my current role as president of the JSCP. From this position, I see our role as creating spaces where these different strands—past legacies and emerging perspectives—can meet and generate something new.

Decolonization, ultimately, is less about rejecting the past than about deciding which parts to carry forward and which to transform. Yet in the Japanese context, this work is not only about making such selections; it is also a creative task of using imported concepts to generate a new form of community psychology within our own context. Based on the results of these discussions, we are currently planning a book to present what Japanese community psychology is, in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the society's establishment in 2028. This is a task that embodies the idea that "Deterritorialization is always bound up with correlative processes of reterritorialization, which does not mean returning to the original territory, but rather how reterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations" (Patton, 2010, p. 73).I hope that our work will remain open to this ongoing process—rooted in our own soil, yet in conversation with the broader world.

4.2 Japanese Community Psychology Between Colonization and Decolonization: (Michihiko Bando, Atomi University)

Looking back, I see my career as a series of encounters with "walls"—moments when existing systems of knowledge both offered me a path and imposed limits. Community psychology has been central to this journey: it provided me with a professional home, but also compelled me to acknowledge how psychology in Japan, as a whole, remains a colonized discipline, often silent where it should speak.

From Drift to Belonging

As a student, I studied law and political science in college, but I found no clear future in those fields for me there. After graduation, I wandered, working part-time and backpacking through

Asia. In India, I was struck by the vitality of community life, so unlike the individualistic ambiance of Japan. This experience planted the seed that psychology could be something more than individual treatment. Returning home, I trained in clinical psychology. The profession finally gave me stability, but the field's emphasis on neutrality as a psychotherapist—never speaking of oneself—soon felt constraining. Through my research and practice with self-help groups and *hikikomori* communities, I began to recognize the limitations of this model. Over the years, I discovered that speaking as a "neighbor," not a detached expert, could itself be a form of healing. While this sometimes causes emotional turmoil, it confirmed the importance of sincerely engaging with individuals "as one of their own." At the same time, it made me conscious of horizontal relationships, distinct from the one-sided power dynamic of giver-receiver. Community psychology opened this doorway for me.

The Silence in Japanese Psychology

Yet something deeper troubled me. In both clinical and community psychology in Japan, geopolitical issues were rarely spoken of. Inequality, protest, or conflict—the everyday struggles that shape communities worldwide—were kept outside the discipline. It was as if our discipline in Japan floated in a safe, lukewarm bath, untouched by the sharper realities of society. I realized this silence was no accident for me or the field. Community psychology in Japan was introduced even a few years after its inception in the United States, but in the process, it was stripped of its socio-political edge. It became another professional tool, not critical practice. I did not see this as simple "backwardness," but as a sign of within or internal colonization—knowledge transplanted without full recognition of the cultural and social context and with limited exchange across differently evolving knowledge systems.

Learning to Decolonize

When I attended conferences overseas (the U.S.) in 2025 for the first time in my academic life, I saw a different face of community psychology. There, people spoke directly about war, protest, and environmental crisis. The contrast made clear to me how constrained our own field had become in Japan. Decolonization, for me, does not mean replacing one system with another. It means holding onto the discomfort, the sense that something is missing or unsayable. Some colleagues in Japanese CP pursue change from within through harmonious, coexisting practice rather than overt confrontation; this inside-out work can gradually reshape our field in ways that reflect local contexts and values. At the same time, I have come to believe that seeking a new stable "home" in an alternative knowledge system risks re-colonization by other means; the task is to sustain the unease that keeps us accountable to lived experience rather than to any orthodoxy.

In Closing

Community psychology has changed my life. It gave me a sense of belonging with CP as a clinical psychologist and taught me to engage with communities, not just individuals. It also left me with the recognition that the CP field in Japan is still colonized, still hesitant to speak about the political issues that shape people's lives. However, considering our practices and research accumulated in Japan, as well as our culture, "speaking more frankly" may not be the only

desirable answer. Furthermore, criticizing the values we acquired as a result of "colonization" is not always right. This reflecting process accompanied underlying fluctuations in perception and was arduous and challenging task for me. My current tentative conclusion is that decolonizing community psychology is not about finding the final answer, but it is to continue questioning, to notice what is left unsaid, and to resist settling down too comfortably into given frameworks. That, I believe, is the real work of liberation for me and CP in Japan.

4.3 Bridging the Divide: A Displaced Community Psychologist's Reflections on Decolonial Tensions and Globalization in Japan (Toshiaki Sasao, International Christian University)

Returning to Japan after years of academic and professional training in the United States, I carried in my toolkit the language of empowerment, liberation, social justice, and participatory action research—hallmarks of community psychology in its most progressive, decolonial form. Yet, as I began my work in Japanese contexts—whether in purely academic liberal arts settings, other educational institutions, aging communities, church settings, or post-disaster mental health settings—I encountered a disorienting friction. The concepts that had once inspired me felt alien or even intrusive.

The U.S. Lens: Learning Liberation in the Belly of Empire

My training in the United States (70s, 80s and 90s) immersed me in frameworks that foregrounded social justice, power analysis, and systemic change. From Freirean pedagogy to the writings of Martín-Baró, I was taught, as a community psychologist-in-training, that psychology must unmask and resist oppression. However, I began to notice how even progressive frameworks bore the fingerprints of Eurocentric assumptions (Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000). Community psychology itself was not immune. Drake et al. (2022) critique how even radical approaches risk becoming co-opted by the very academic structures they seek to transform. These tensions shaped my early training but became visceral since then when I encountered them directly on the ground.

Confronting Injustice in the U.S.: The Los Angeles Riots, 1992

My confrontation with these tensions did not begin in Japan—it began in Los Angeles. As a fledging community psychologist during the 1992 LA Riots, I witnessed firsthand how racialized trauma, structural injustice, and community disempowerment can erupt into collective fury. Walking through neighborhoods still smoldering, talking with fearful Korean shopkeepers and hearing the outrage of Black community organizers, I began to question whether the theories I had learned were equipped to handle such layered injustice. I also witnessed how quickly minority communities were pitted against each other, and how little space academia made for those voices. The lessons of 1992 still ring in my ears: justice without solidarity collapses into retribution, and psychology that is not grounded in history is worse than irrelevant—it is complicit.

Coming Home to Japan: A Return and a Reckoning

Back in Japan, I found myself a displaced outsider at home—armed with foreign vocabulary and expectations. "Empowerment," "resilience," and "agency" sounded discordant amidst the

understated relationality of Japanese social life. Yet as Ushiyama (2025) notes, this is precisely the "third space" where hybrid theories can emerge—not by importing Western models wholesale, but by reworking them through local idioms. Still, my status as a returnee from the U.S. conferred authority. I found that what I said in English—or translated into academic Japanese—was often taken more too seriously than what community elders or activists told in dialect. This is the colonized mind in action (Drake et al., 2022)—one that prioritizes external validation over local wisdom.

A Distant Catastrophe That Struck Close to Home

Just as I began reestablishing my life and scholarship in Japan in the late 90s, another global rupture jolted my sense of moral clarity—the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Although I was physically far from the Twin Towers that morning, emotionally, I was anything but distant. Watching the footage from Tokyo, I felt a sense of unraveling in the very fabric of justice I had long struggled to define. 9/11 was not merely a geopolitical event; it was a spiritual blow. The raw grief and anger it provoked in the U.S. quickly curdled into protective jingoism and retribution, revealing how fragile our commitments to justice, solidarity, and human rights can be. As someone trained in the U.S., I felt implicated. As someone living in Japan, I felt disoriented. The shockwaves crossed the Pacific and shook my belief in the universality of moral progress. Justice, I realized, is not only culturally constructed—it is painfully conditional. My response to 9/11 wasn't just academic; it was existential. I found myself grieving not only the lives lost, but the ideals eroded.

Decoloniality in a Postcolonial Japan: Complex Contradictions

Japan's role as both colonizer and subordinated complicates any simplistic decolonial lens. It avoided direct Western colonization (except the post-war U.S. occupation), yet actively colonized others. As Lazarus (2023) notes in the South African context, power and identity are always entangled—especially in post-imperial societies grappling with complicity and marginality. Decolonization here means more than rejecting the West—it means surfacing repressed epistemologies, including indigenous Japanese knowledge, Okinawan solidarity practices, the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Confucian ethics of interdependence. It also requires honesty about Japan's history of subjugation and expansion (cf. Hatch, 2023).

Globalization: Neither Friend Nor Foe

Globalization delivers both tools and toxins. It allows access to liberatory theory, but also imposes neoliberal metrics and standardization. Trickett (2009) and Connell (2020) both warn of this doublebind: internationalization often means Westernization in disguise. What is needed is not wholesale rejection but what Mignolo (2009) calls "epistemic disobedience"—the refusal to be told who we are, how we should think, or whose knowledge counts.

Toward a 'Glocal Praxis'

Ushiyama's (2025) concept of Third Space offers hope. Rather than dichotomizing East and West, it invites hybridity, contamination, and critical adaptation. Nakane Chie's theory of vertical

society, though at times essentialist, reminds us that local knowledge can inform structural critique. To move forward, I propose the following:

- Start with situated knowledge.
- Translate concepts with cultural humility.
- Resist academic colonization from within and without.
- Build regional solidarities across Asia and the Global South.
- Reclaim community psychology as a space of epistemic justice.

Conclusion

To practice community psychology in Japan as a U.S.- or Western-trained scholar is to walk a tightrope. But in that discomfort lies the possibility of something generative—a new praxis that does not erase the local in favor of the global, nor replicate the colonial logic it claims to critique. In remembering 1992 in Los Angeles and confronting 21st-century contradictions in Tokyo, I continue to ask: Who defines community? Who gets to name justice? And where do we go when we start listening—not just across cultures, but across power?

5. Synthesizing Three Reflections for Japanese Community Psychology: Toward a Decolonial Community Psychology

Community psychology in Japan has developed within a complex web of colonial legacies, epistemic dependencies, and internal silences. From its introduction in the late 1960s following the Swampscott Conference in the United States (Ando, 1998), the field has struggled to define its distinct identity in a context where imported frameworks dominate and local voices are often unheard or marginalized. This paper is an attempt to situate this struggle within the broader discourse of decolonization, drawing on Quijano's *coloniality of power* (2000), Mignolo's call for *epistemic disobedience* (2009), and recent critiques of how even progressive psychology risks reproducing colonial logics (Drake et al., 2022) .

This section builds upon that foundation by exploring three personal reflections that arose from collective reflection—by Takahashi, Bando, and Sasao —each of whom grappled with the intersections of coloniality, social justice, and professional practice. By contrasting their journeys, identifying cross-cutting themes, and outlining future directions, we aim to chart a path for how Japanese community psychology might position itself more squarely within Japanese academia and the global field.

5.1 Comparative Synthesis: Convergences

Although their professional journeys differ, all three reflections converge around three interlocking insights:
(i) the long-standing silence surrounding colonial histories within Japanese psychology,
(ii) the uneasy tension between imported and localized frameworks, and
(iii) the productive role of discomfort as a decolonial discipline.

Each author identifies how the field's formative silence has shaped its identity. Takahashi observes that coloniality and decoloniality were absent from her training, replaced by gentler terms like "local adaptation." Bando describes how the imported frameworks of community psychology lost their socio-political sharpness when adapted to Japan's context of professional neutrality. Sasao notes that Western or North American credentials often carry unearned authority, revealing a deeper colonized valuation of foreign validation. Together, these reflections expose how silence—toward history, politics, and power—has been a constitutive rather than accidental element of Japanese community psychology.

At the same time, all three seek ways to engage global knowledge without reproducing its hierarchical structures. Takahashi proposes a reinterpretation that re-roots theory in Japan's cultural traditions and in the lived experience of marginalized groups. Bando emphasizes the importance of sustaining feelings of unease as a form of critical vigilance against disciplinary domestication. Sasao articulates a hybrid "third-space" that neither rejects nor replicates Western models but reframes them through trans-Asian and Global South solidarities. Across these perspectives is a shared assumption that transformation does not begin with comfort or consensus, but from sustained engagement with contradiction. This orientation aligns with Malherbe and Dlamini's (2020) notion of an "ethic of discomfort." Rather than smoothing over tensions in the name of neutrality, it asks us to unlearn disciplinary comforts and remain with conflict to build solidarity and enable collective change.

5.2 Comparative Synthesis: Divergences

Where they diverge, the differences reveal the plural routes through which decolonization may proceed.

Positionality distinguishes their standpoints. Takahashi, an institutional leader, writes from within organizational structures, balancing reform and tradition. Bando speaks as a practitioner-scholar who daily confronts the limits of neutrality and the subtle pressures of conformity. Sasao writes as a returnee from abroad—an insider-outsider whose cross-cultural lens exposes Japan's dual role as both colonizer and colonized. Each position opens distinct leverage points: policy and education for the first, praxis and ethics for the second, transnational dialogue for the third.

Temporal focus also varies. Takahashi roots her argument in the historical formation of Japanese psychology and its potential re-territorialization. Bando emphasizes the discomfort of the ongoing present—the unfinished work of questioning one's own complicity. Sasao situates his analysis amid global ruptures such as the LA riots or 9/11, using them as mirrors to examine Japan's evolving consciousness. These temporal layers—past, present, and global event—together form a more comprehensive chronology of decolonial struggle.

Finally, **imagined futures** differ. For Takahashi, renewal depends on reinterpreting Western frameworks within Japan's moral and intellectual soil. For Bando, it means maintaining critical discomfort as a daily praxis against normalization. For Sasao, it involves building cross-border solidarities that transcend academic nationalism. Rather than contradictions, these tensions represent complementary orientations—organizational, experiential, and global—that, in concert, chart a more plural and self-aware path forward for community psychology in Japan.

5.3 Emerging Themes

Taken together, the reflections cohere into three emerging themes that illuminate why Japanese community psychology struggles to speak in explicitly decolonial terms and how it might do so otherwise.

Epistemic Coloniality and Silence.

The absence of explicit engagement with colonial histories has shaped Japanese CP into a discipline hesitant to speak about power. This echoes Drake et al.'s (2022) warning that even justice-oriented fields can reproduce colonized minds. In Japanese CP, silence is not merely a gap to be filled but an infrastructure that narrows the scope of questions that can be asked and whose knowledge is authorized.

Hybridization and the Challenge of Localization

The reflections "localization" alone is insufficient when imported concepts are adapted without interrogating the colonial logics that once animated them. Without critical attention to coloniality, adaptation risks becoming domestication. The challenge is to create hybrid frameworks that neither reject nor replicate Western models but reinterpret them through local histories and struggles.

The Politics of Positionality

Each reflection reveals how personal trajectories—whether as leader, insider, or returnee—shape one's positionality. The search for positionality is not only individual but collective: a question of how Japanese CP situates itself within academia and the world.

Summary

The personal reflections of Takahashi, Bando, and Sasao offer invaluable insight into the dilemmas of Japanese community psychology: its silences, its importation of foreign frameworks, and its struggles with positionality. Together, they reveal a field caught between colonial entanglements and the promise of decolonial futures. The search for positionality in Japanese academia and the world will depend on whether community psychology can confront its silences, reimagine its identity, and commit to social justice not as an imported slogan but as a locally grounded, globally connected practice. By institutionalizing decolonial education, engaging marginalized voices, and forging solidarities across Asia, Japanese community psychology can move toward becoming not a derivative of Western models but a producer of knowledge and praxis that speaks to Japan's histories and contributes to global liberation.

6. Future Directions

Drawing on these reflections and themes, several future directions can be proposed for Japanese community psychology:

Create Spaces for Reflexive Dialogue

Within JSCP and academic conferences, establish structured forums where silences and discomforts can be named, examined, and learned from—modeled on collaborative autoethnography (e.g., Drake et al., 2022). Cross-generational dialogue should be intentionally curated so that pioneers' experiences meet the globalized perspectives of emerging scholars and practitioners.

6.1 Reimagine Professional Identity

We need to encourage psychologists to see themselves not only as experts but also as "neighbors" and "co-learners," as Bando suggests. Also, we should promote diverse professional pathways in which community psychology is not limited to clinical fields but is recognized as a discipline dedicated to justice. Develop community-based participatory research models that prioritize local knowledge over academic authority.

6.2 Attend to Structural Violence: Co-Producing with Marginalized Communities as Central Partners

Our reflections point to an uncomfortable issue: in Japan, debates have often centered on whether "social justice" aligns culturally, while the deeper issue—structural violence— remains marginal. Psychology and community psychology have sidelined this analysis. To meaningfully address justice, we must re-center structural violence in our conferences, curricula, ethics, and everyday practice, making it a collective priority rather than a niche concern.

This re-centering means from extractive research to co-production with systemically marginalized communities—such as Okinawans, Ainus, *Burakumins, Zainichi Koreans*, and/or LGBTQ+ groups. These communities should guide research questions, interpret findings, and shape knowledge use. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) must ensure shared governance, fair compensation, co-authorship, and data stewardship aligned with local priorities. In doing so, justice becomes less as a contested slogan and more as an institutional commitment to naming and transforming structural harm.

6.3 Support Decolonial Literacy in CP Education

Because the analysis identifies "epistemic coloniality and silence" as a core constraint, curricula and training must explicitly address the colonial histories of psychology, Japan's dual position as colonizer and colonized, and contemporary decolonial frameworks. Programs should move beyond "local adaptation" as translation to interrogate power in knowledge transfer—who defines valid evidence, whose voices circulate, and how such hierarchies can be reworked in classrooms, practica, and supervision.

6.4 Build Asian Networks

Japanese CP should cultivate scholarly and practice networks across Asia, drawing from shared histories of colonialism and uneven modernization. Joint projects with colleagues in Asia—along with multilingual publication and reciprocal exchanges—can help construct pluriversal

perspectives that neither replicate nor reject Western models but reinterpret them through local struggles.

By starting with Asia-centered reciprocity, Japanese community psychology can clarify its standpoint, build durable ties on concrete issues, and only then consider broader constellations of solidarity.

7. Final Words

This paper has argued that addressing the silence within the Japanese Society of Community Psychology (JSCP) or, more generally Japan's community psychology, constitutes not only an internal reckoning but also a substantive contribution to global community psychology. While grounded in Japan's particular history of being both colonizer and colonized, these reflections underscore a broader imperative: community psychology must interrogate what has been left unsaid, recognize how silence functions as a disciplinary infrastructure, and reconstruct its identity through dialogical and justice-oriented practice.

We want to mention that Johan Galtung's (1990) theorization of cultural violence provides a valuable lens. Cultural violence refers to those aspects of culture—norms, symbols, and ideologies—that render structural and direct violence acceptable or invisible. In the Japanese context, the longstanding silence around colonial histories in psychology exemplifies precisely such cultural violence: it has normalized epistemic dependence on Western models while obscuring Japan's own internal colonial hierarchies, including the marginalization of those in Japan who lack the voice, e.g., Okinawans, Ainus, *Burakumins*, *Zainichi Koreans*, LGBTQ+, etc. Silence, therefore, must be analyzed not simply as absence, but as a cultural mechanism that legitimizes exclusion and inequality.

At the same time, Galtung (1990) reminds us that culture also contains the potential for peace. Cultural peace refers to traditions and practices that legitimize cooperation, dignity, and coexistence. Japan's heritage of mutual aid, relational interdependence, and community resilience offers such cultural resources. The task for Japanese community psychology is thus twofold: to identify and disrupt the cultural violence embedded in disciplinary silences, and to mobilize cultural peace in ways that support justice and inclusivity in society.

This dual task requires what Mignolo (2009) terms epistemic disobedience: the refusal to accept Western epistemologies as normative and the active re-rooting of knowledge in local histories and lived experience. Likewise, Quijano's (2000) notion of the coloniality of power highlights how disciplinary structures in Japan have been modeled on Euro-American psychology, let alone Japanese community psychology, reinforcing dependence and reproducing hierarchies. Taken together, these insights indicate that the silence of Japanese CP is not neutral but structured by epistemic coloniality.

Yet, as Ushiyama (2025) argues, the space between local and global need not be one of paralysis. It may instead constitute a third space in which hybrid frameworks emerge, neither rejecting nor replicating Western paradigms but recombining them through situated knowledge. Japanese CP is well-positioned to embody this approach by moving beyond the binaries of colonization and decolonization. Remaining trapped in those categories risks reifying the very dichotomies we aim to dismantle. The challenge, therefore, is not only critique but

reconstruction: to institutionalize reflexivity, co-production with marginalized communities, and regionally grounded forms of praxis.

In this way, the Japanese experience demonstrates a universal lesson. Community psychology is not only a scientific discipline but also a cultural practice. It can reproduce cultural violence by legitimizing silence and hierarchy, or it can enact cultural peace by sustaining dialogue, embracing vulnerability, and fostering solidarity (Galtung, 1990). By practicing epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), confronting the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), and cultivating third-space hybridity (Ushiyama, 2025), Japanese community psychology can shift from being a derivative follower of Western paradigms to becoming a producer of knowledge and praxis—contributing to a pluriversal psychology that advances justice and peace.

Disclaimer

A disclaimer should be noted that any of the views or opinions represented here are those of the authors, but not of the organizations we belong to.

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APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY

deterritorialization (Patton, 2010)**:** In critical theory (notably in the work of Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari), deterritorialization refers to the process by which existing "territories" (in the broad sense of cultural, social, spatial, and psychological orders) are disrupted, destabilized, or re-configured. The territory here is metaphorical as well as literal—norms, identities, practices are "deterritorialized." For community psychology, this can mean that people, communities, or cultural practices break out of previous "territorial" conditions (e.g., traditions, geographies, identities) and are re-arranged or new forms emerge.

epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009): The act of refusal to accept dominant knowledge systems, methods, and authorities. Instead, it centers alternative ways of knowing and marginalized epistemologies. It challenges epistemic hierarchies, opens space for situated knowledges, and links intellectual critique to political emancipation and decolonial praxis.

hikikomori（ひきこもり）(Dong et al., 2022; Kato et al., 2020): The Japanese term *hikikomori* refers to prolonged social withdrawal involving significant functional impairment or distress, often among youth and others who isolate themselves at home for six months or longer. From a community psychology perspective, *hikikomori* highlights issues of social inclusion, mental health, structural pressures within education and labor systems, stigma, and how communities can address isolation through processes of reconnection and reintegration.

Japan's minorities (Ainu, Zainichi Korean, Burakumin, and Okinawan) (Weiner, 2009)

Ainu (アイヌ**)**: Indigenous people of northern Japan (Hokkaidō, formerly Ezo), with distinct language and culture. Historically marginalized and assimilated under Japanese state policies.

Zainichi Korean (在日韓国・朝鮮人**)**: Ethnic Koreans (and their descendants) who reside in Japan, many arriving or whose families settled in Japan during the colonial period (1910-45) or thereafter. They have a distinct status and have faced discrimination in Japan.

Burakumin (部落民／被差別部落民**)**: Historically discriminated social group in Japan, descendants of outcaste occupations (e.g., butchers, leather workers) within the feudal era's class system. Though legally emancipated, social stigma persists.

Okinawan (沖縄／琉球民族**)**: The Ryukyuan people of Okinawa and surrounding islands, with distinct history (Ryukyu Kingdom), language, culture. Though part of Japan, they are often considered a minority in cultural and political terms, especially given post-war US occupation and military bases.

pluriversal (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018): The adjective "pluriversal" (or noun "pluriverse") refers to the world as conceived under pluralism—that is, multiple worlds, multiple ways of knowing, rather than a single universal. Furthermore, pluriversality emphasizes diverse ontologies, epistemologies, and ways of being, thereby challenging Western universalist models.

reterritorialization (Patton, 2010): The complementary process to deterritorialization. After or during deterritorialization, reterritorialization denotes the re-establishment of a "territory" (metaphorically or literally)—a new set of norms, social orders, identities, and spaces are re-constructed.

APPENDIX B
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SESSIONS

Table S1. Overview of the Eight Online Roundtable Sessions (Date, Participants, and Topics)

Session *N*	Date	Participants *N*	Topics discussed
1	Nov 14, 2024	5	• Mapping issues of coloniality in Japan • The complexity of Japan's positionality • The clinical-psychology-centered orientation of CP in Japan • Reviewing the history of CP in Japan • Blind importation of ideas from the U.S.; critiques of the psychological disciplines have receded in Japan
2	Feb 24, 2025	5	• Has Japan—where CP has not taken root—been colonized? • Is coloniality the core problem, or is something else at work? • In overseas debates, which aspects of coloniality are made problematized?
3	Mar 11, 2025	6	• Is Japanese CP colonized? What do we want to disengage from? • The difficulty to translate coloniality to the Japanese context • U.S. CP imported non-critically amid local developments • Insufficient reflection on—and unawareness of—Japan's colonial rule (as oppressor) • Bringing the unsaid to the fore
4	Mar 20, 2025	6	• How to engage with compunction (sense of guilt) and privileged status • The history of importing CP into Japan • U.S. imports were accepted as unambiguously good and desirable; Japanese CP may have been overly compliant; ongoing inability to conclude where Japan's distinctive CP values lie • The authority of U.S. research and researchers • Tensions regarding our own positionality • Discussing hard-to-discuss matters is valuable in itself while recognizing its limits
5	Apr 6, 2025	5	• Open debate about (de)coloniality has been difficult within Japan • Need to grasp Japan's history and present situation; where does Japanese CP's distinctiveness lie? • Opacity positionality among Japanese research and researchers; a tendency toward "therapist neutrality"; features of Japan's clinically-driven CP • Reluctance and silence around positionality in Japanese academic societies; a continuing trend for avoiding debates on positionality
6	May 16, 2025	5	• Self-reflection on what was learned as a scholar in the U.S. • Reflections on compiling the Japanese CP handbook; it was largely a reproduction of the U.S. handbook (APA version) • What differentiates importing "good" ideas from coloniality? What other conditions intensified coloniality? • Value-neutrality and value-exclusion in Japanese CP/psychology; avoiding the political and leaving the sayable unsaid—this is itself coloniality • Overlooking the background values embedded in imports
7	July 14, 2025	4	・Study session: While reading Drake et al. (2021), we examined our own manuscript
8	July 24, 2025	4	・Study session: While reading Mignolo (2009), we examined our own manuscript