

From “Education *for* Sustainable Development” to “Education *as* Sustainable Development”: Lessons from Five Alternative Universities in Asia

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the face of unprecedented forms and scale of societal challenges and environmental crises, the opinion that the concept of sustainable development (hereby “SD”) should be integral to education has become nearly unanimous across the globe. Among all educational stages, higher education (hereby “HE”) bears greater expectations for its contribution to SD, as it is traditionally entrusted with at least two additional responsibilities of *research* and *service to teaching* – which is to develop society’s epistemic and infrastructural public goods – and in practice produces most of the leading professionals that develop, lead and manage society’s institutions¹.

The typical ideal scenarios of education for SD (hereby “EfSD”) in higher education institutions (hereby “HEIs”), for example, may include encouraging sustainability-aware interdisciplinary curriculum and research; implementing green architecture and renewable energy with accountability measures of environmental footprints; introducing inclusive protocols to ensure equality among people of different gender and race, and people with disabilities or special needs; and raising

1. Sibbel, Anne. 2009. Pathways towards Sustainability through Higher Education. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 10(1): 68–82; Clugston, Richard M., and Wynn Calder. 1999. Critical Dimensions of Sustainability in Higher Education. In *Sustainability and University Life*, ed. Walter Leal Filho. Peter Lang, 31–46.

awareness of power dynamics involved in research². Unfortunately, the sweeping crises in HE across the globe, such as resource cuts, oversupply of academic talent, and increasing debt and inequality,³ are often treated as priority, thus greatly reducing the time, resource, and effort that a HEI can allocate for EfSD. Even if these common factors deterring SD in HE such as lack of time, funding, and interest⁴ are resolved, given that conventional HE curriculum is “developed to provide students with an increasingly narrow understanding of courses, professions and jobs, with a focus on specific knowledge and skills”⁵, most HEIs only focus on “developing new specialist courses on SD ... which are improving the sustainability literacy and capabilities of those interested in pursuing careers in this area” while others are “still being schooled into social assumptions and practices which serve to exploit people and planet”⁶, not to mention that even in specialised SD courses, there is little to no support for pedagogies appropriate for EfSD⁷.

2. Fien, John. 2002. Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education: Issues and Opportunities for Research. *Higher Education Policy* 15(2): 143–52; Tilbury, Daniella. 2011. Higher Education for Sustainability: A Global Overview of Commitment and Progress. In *Higher Education's Commitment to Sustainability: From Understanding to Action*, ed. GUNI. Barcelona: Palgrave, 18–28.

3. For example, see: Scott, Peter. 2018. *The Crisis of the University*. Routledge.

4. Which is similar to the factors deterring most innovations and reforms. See: Velazquez, Luis, Nora Munguia, and Margarita Sanchez. 2005. Deterring Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions: An Appraisal of the Factors Which Influence Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 6(4): 383–91.

5. Leal Filho, Walter, Chris Shiel, and Arminda Paço. 2016. Implementing and Operationalising Integrative Approaches to Sustainability in Higher Education: The Role of Project-Oriented Learning. *Journal of cleaner Production* 133: 126–35.

6. Tilbury. 2011. *HE for Sustainability*.

7. Christie, Belinda A., Kelly K. Miller, Raylene Cooke, and John G. White. 2013. Environmental Sustainability in Higher Education: How Do Academics Teach? *Environmental Education Research* 19(3): 385–414.

The fundamental limitations of conventional HE models⁸ and unsatisfactory "ideal scenarios" of EfSD⁹ prompted groups of academics, educators, and practitioners across the globe to initiate alternative forms of HEIs that are commonly called "alternative universities" (hereby "AUs")¹⁰. Their stories attracted research interest in Taiwan, as Taiwan legislated the "Regulations Governing Permissions and Quality Assurance for School-based Experimental Education at Tertiary Level" (hereby "Experimental Higher Education Act") in 2017¹¹ to extend the accreditation eligibility for alternative or home schools and initiatives (formally called "experimental education" in Taiwan) previously limited to primary and secondary education stages. Preliminary research found many of the AU models radical yet promising in addressing several structural problems common in conventional HEIs and in fulfilling the aspirations of EfSD¹²; further inspired some of the designs of ongoing

8. For example, see: Yang, Adler. November 2020. How Might Higher Education Serve as the Soil for Robust and Resilient Societies? 2020 Taiwan International Education Summit. Taipei, Taiwan.

9. A shared problem among many in AU communities is the problem with the concept of "sustainability/SD" itself, as it was developed in alignment with the interest of the establishment and implies "sustaining the unjust status quo" (Marcuse 1998), or at least is only the "neutral point of not doing more damage" (Wahl 2016). A commonly used substitute for sustainability/SD in the literature is "regeneration/regenerative". However, since the debate between the concept of "sustainability/SD" and "regeneration" is not the focus of this paper, "sustainability/SD" will still be used mainly, with occasions where "regeneration" is used to honour the AUs' values. For more, see: Marcuse, Peter. 1998. Sustainability Is Not Enough. Environment and Urbanization 10(2): 103–12; Wahl, Daniel Christian. 2016. Designing Regenerative Cultures. Illustrated edition. Axminster, England: Triarchy Press Ltd.

10. While no comprehensive index of all AUs around the world is available, many AUs committed to actualising regenerative, just and peaceful futures have joined the Ecoiversities Alliance, and thus can be found on its website: <https://ecoversities.org/>.

11. The official articles in Chinese can be accessed at the Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China (<https://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=H0030062>) and a non-official English translation can be accessed at HigherEdRevolution.org. ([https://higheredrevolution.org/index.php/%E5%B0%88%E7%A7%91%E4%BB%A5%E4%B8%8A%E5%AD%B8%E6%A0%A1%E5%9E%8B%E6%85%8B%E5%AF%A6%E9%A9%97%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E8%A8%B1%E5%8F%AF%E8%88%87%E8%A8%AD%E6%A0%A1%E5%8F%8A%E6%95%99%E5%AD%B8%E5%93%81%E8%B3%AA%E4%BF%9D%E8%AD%89%E8%BE%A6%E6%B3%95_%5C_Regulations_Governing_Permissions_and_Quality_Assurance_for_School-based_Experimental_Education_at_Tertiary_Level_\(Taiwan\)/en](https://higheredrevolution.org/index.php/%E5%B0%88%E7%A7%91%E4%BB%A5%E4%B8%8A%E5%AD%B8%E6%A0%A1%E5%9E%8B%E6%85%8B%E5%AF%A6%E9%A9%97%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E8%A8%B1%E5%8F%AF%E8%88%87%E8%A8%AD%E6%A0%A1%E5%8F%8A%E6%95%99%E5%AD%B8%E5%93%81%E8%B3%AA%E4%BF%9D%E8%AD%89%E8%BE%A6%E6%B3%95_%5C_Regulations_Governing_Permissions_and_Quality_Assurance_for_School-based_Experimental_Education_at_Tertiary_Level_(Taiwan)/en)).

12. For example, see: 薛曉華 et al. 2022. 夢想高教新視界：實驗大學的國際視野 [Envisioning Dream Universities: Experimental Universities Around the World]. Center for Teacher Education, National Tsing Hua University. ISBN: 9789860643480.

preparations and applications for new experimental HEIs¹³; and even sparked the advocacy to make unaccredited AUs in other countries eligible for offshore Taiwan accreditation¹⁴.

To explore how EfSD might be done differently at HEIs, this paper presents five case studies of AUs in Japan, Korea, and India based on qualitative data from interviews, visits, and participant observations conducted between 2017 and 2022, and a review of existing information such as webpages, official documents and media coverage from their first availability up to August 2022. Given that a thorough evaluation of the AUs' success or impact is impossible due to the lack of sufficient data and the self-funded nature of the studies conducted, we instead focus on analysing, interpreting, and evaluating the AUs' approach or strategies for EfSD, which will be called *change theories* or *models* interchangeably, and finally, consolidate key insights for the betterment of EfSD in HE systems.

13. Such as the Experimental University for Holistic Ecology and Design for Sustainability (Unofficial translation. See its survey at: <https://tsha.org.tw/news/%E5%A6%82%E6%9E%9C%E6%9C%89%E4%B8%80%E6%89%80%E5%A4%A7%E5%AD%B8%EF%BC%8C%E4%BB%A5%E7%A2%B3%E4%B8%AD%E5%92%8C%E7%94%9F%E6%85%8B%E6%B0%B8%E7%BA%8C%E7%82%BA%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%EF%BC%8C%E6%95%99%E5%B0%8E/>) and XU (See a related Op-Ed at: <https://opinion.cw.com.tw/blog/profile/352/article/11017>).

14. The idea to offer offshore Taiwan accreditation to foreign AUs was first openly raised at the Reimagining Experimental Higher Education Unconference in Taipei, January 2020 (<https://www.accupass.com/event/1912301458092010164160>), with representatives of the Ministry of Education, multiple educational nonprofits, and foreign AUs attending the event. It was further discussed at the 2020 Quality Education Forum, and its preliminary pathway is written in a preliminary suggestion document for future amendments of the Experimental Higher Education Act. See: 陳盈瑩. 17 January 2020. 台青年邀日、韓實驗大學分享，盼推動台灣成實驗教育之島。親子天下 翻轉教育. (<https://flipedu.parenting.com.tw/article/005621>); Yang, Adler. June 2020. 大學裡搞實驗教育，行不行？論「部分班級實驗教育條例」實現 高等教育學(習)者民主共治、共學的可能性 [Is it possible to run an Experimental Education Program in a Higher Ed Institution? Exploring futures of higher ed with the Partial Institutional Experimental Education Act]. 2020 Quality Learning Forum. (<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11498.34240>); International Research and Action Alliance for Experimental Higher Education. 2020. 2020年第一版實驗高教修法方向與路徑 [Pathways for Future Revisions of the Experimental Higher Education Act. Ver.1, 2020.]. (https://www.academia.edu/45572633/2020%E5%B9%B4%E7%AC%AC%E4%B8%80%E7%89%88%E5%AF%A6%E9%A9%97%E9%AB%98%E6%95%99%E4%BF%AE%E6%B3%95%E6%96%B9%E5%90%91%E8%88%87%E8%B7%AF%E5%BE%91_Pathways_for_Future_Revisions_of_the_Experimental_Higher_Education_Act_Ver_1_2020_).

II. RECLAIMING AUTHENTIC RELATIONAL SELVES: TEKISEN DEMOCRATIC UNIVERSITY (TDU), TOKYO, JAPAN

Tekisen Democratic University (暁穿大学, formerly called Shure University, hereby "TDU")¹⁵, Japan's first democratic university, was co-founded in Tokyo in 1999 by Japan's leading educational sociologist Kageki Asakura (朝倉景樹)¹⁶ and a group of free school graduates and *futoko*¹⁷. It calls itself democratic for at least three reasons: First, all dimensions of university leadership, management, and governance are openly and cooperatively run by faculty, staff, and students, with mutual respect at its core. Second, there are no compulsory programmes and students self-determine their learning paths in a deliberative and reflexive manner, including determining what and how they want to learn, and when they will graduate. Third, the university considers itself as a continuum of the democratic education and free school movement, in which most schools follow similar principles as those above. The movement can be at least traced back to the founding of Summerhill School in the UK in 1921 and TDU has been playing a leading role in the International Democratic Education Community (IDEC) since its founding.

15. Official website: <https://tdu.academy/>; Official Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/TDUtokyo>; Official Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/tduniversity>.

16. Kageki Asakura (朝倉景樹) is the author and co-author of several important works on the sociology of education in Japan, such as 登校拒否のエスノグラフィー [An Ethnography of Futokos] (1995) and 教育のエスノグラフィー [Ethnographies on Education] (1997), and is lauded as the leading figure on *futoko* and alternative education issues in Japan. He also speaks internationally and advises education innovation and policymaking in several countries, such as Korea and Russia. See: "朝倉景樹." 2022. Wikipedia. (<https://ja.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%E6%9C%9D%E5%80%89%E6%99%AF%E6%A8%B9&oldid=87596605>). Retrieved 20 August 2022; Democratic Education and Working Institute Japan. n.d. (<https://kagekia.org/>).

17. *Futoko* (不登校) is a Japanese term that refers to the school-aged children who are absent from or do not attend government-accredited schools for whatever reason and for a substantial time. It was formerly mistranslated as *school-phobics* or *school-refusals*, both of which denote negative psycho-social characteristics that do not apply to all of these school-aged children. While it is more often written as *futoko* in English directly, it is sometimes translated as School-Non-Attendants or SNA in short.

Figure 1: TDU members co-hosting a press conference with other civic organisations for Mobilising Support to Ukraine Under War as featured by the NHK¹⁸.



The university's commitment to democracy is, of course, an end in itself. But at the same time, it is also a tender attempt to intervene with the root causes of Japan's systemic social sustainability challenges.

It has been long argued that while the school or mass education system claims to equip the next generation with knowledge and skills for their future success, under the capitalist system, however, this is done by funnelling and moulding them to become the components that will eventually fit and make up the capitalist social machinery. In individualistic societies such as the *developed* Western countries, such moulding may seem more obscure as it neatly marries with individualistic goals, and may also be compensated with the *liberty* that arises from a culture that is more indifferent to people's private lives and spaces, which may serve as a release "vent"

18. TDU is a leading institute in the global democratic education movement and is also active in international humanitarian activities. Source: TDU - 栗穿大学 (てきせんだいがく) . 4 May 2022. (<https://www.facebook.com/TDUtokyo/photos/515600033606239>).

and thus reduce individuals' disruptive or revolutionary impulses. In a collectivist¹⁹ society, however, the concept of *private life/space* is rather alien as a human is seen as a relational being in nature and in no circumstances are they really free from their *responsibilities* to whom/whatever they are in relation to²⁰. The moulding of individuals, coupled with the lack of space for relief, doesn't only accumulate one's stress and exhaustion easily, but also leaves very little room for the healthy development of one's self-concept and self-actualisation. While no cases are identical, literature shows that contemporary psycho-social ailments prevalent in Japanese society – whether it's the rural villagers who migrated to join the urban workforce yet were unable to gain a new urban identity nor reclaim their old rural identities, or the struggles of the depressed, *hikikomori*²¹, bullies, suicided, and even random killers – are largely attributable to such a collectivist culture wedded to capitalistic alienation²². In TDU's way of putting it, as the conventional school system and job market do not entail the function of supporting the development of people's

19. While "conformist" is sometimes used, we consider it inaccurate as the cultural norm is not to "conform" (in which the target one conforms to is also ambiguous) but to take the "collective" as a high priority in one's considerations; thus, this may seemingly manifest as behaviours "conforming" to the collective or authority more often. By looking into the culturally favoured narratives or non-conformity in East Asian history and literature, we can also see that it centres on the consideration for something bigger than oneself, which supports our choice of word.

20. *Responsibility*, instead of *accountability* or *liability*, is used in this context, as people inevitably have to *respond* to one another in relational settings ("no-response" is, in fact, a kind of response) yet are not necessarily *accountable* or *liable* to them. Exemplifying the Japanese inherently relational concept of human (人間, which literally translates as "among people"), spheres considered private in individualistic societies, such as family, friendships, and even one's own thoughts and feelings, are all relational to the Japanese psyche, as these are all things or objects that one inevitably interacts with.

21. *Hikikomori* (ひきこもり), sometimes called "modern-day hermits" or "shut-ins", refers to the people who practise extreme social isolation or withdrawal through self-confinement or reclusion. With it strikingly taking up 1.2 per cent of Japan's population, some propose to classify it as a new kind of psychiatric disorder (e.g., Teo and Gaw 2016), yet others reject this view with evidence that mental illness does not precede hikikomori behaviour, and argue that it is instead an alarming symptom of Japan's systemic social ailment. See: Teo, Alan Robert, and Albert C. Gaw. 2010. Hikikomori, A Japanese Culture-Bound Syndrome of Social Withdrawal? A Proposal for DSM-V. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease* 198(6): 444–49; McLeod, Hamish J., Maki Rooksby, and Tadaaki Furuhashi. Hikikomori: Understanding the People Who Choose to Live in Extreme Isolation. *The Conversation*. (<http://theconversation.com/hikikomori-understanding-the-people-who-choose-to-live-in-extreme-isolation-148482>); nippon.com. Japan's "Hikikomori" Population Could Top 10 Million. 2019. (<https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/c05008/japan-s-hikikomori-population-could-top-10-million.html>).

22. For example, see: 見田宗介. 2008. まなごしの地獄 - 尽きなく生きることの社会学. 河出書房新社. ISBN 978-4-30-924458-7; 野下智之 et al. 2013. 無差別殺傷事犯に関する研究. 法務総合研究所研究部報告 50. 法務省. (<https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/10225886>); 碓井真史. 2008. 誰でもいいから殺したかった! Tokyo: ベストセラーズ.

authentic selves and authentic relationships, instead reducing them to prescribed functional components entangled with all-encompassing webs of responsibilities, it becomes “suffocating to live” to many²³.

Figure 2: Self-designed/organised learning programmes to support the disaster relief efforts during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami²⁴.



Despite the fact that free school graduates in Japan, as in most places in the world, do not exhibit inferior knowledge and skills upon entering HE or employment²⁵, and the fact that they also have access to colleges under the “diploma equivalency” policy²⁶, TDU considers the prescriptive nature of HE programmes and their neglect of the relational dimension of one’s development a perpetuating mechanism of the aforementioned psycho-social ailments.

23. Translated from “生きづらい” in Japanese.

24. This is one of TDU students’ long-lasting self-designed and organised programmes, which has continued for more than ten years. Source: TDU - 零穿大学（てきせんだいがく）. 12 August 2021. (<https://www.facebook.com/TDUtokyo/photos/344335097399401>).

25. For example, see: Akin, Wilford M. 1942. *The Story Of The Eight-Year Study With Conclusions And Recommendations*. Volume I. Harper & Brothers. (<http://archive.org/details/storyoftheeighty009637mbp>). 10 January 2021; Riley, Gina, and Peter Gray. 2015. *Grown Unschoolers’ Experiences with Higher Education and Employment: Report II on a Survey of 75 Unschooling Adults*. *Other Education* 4(2): 33–53.

26. See: Article 150, item (vii) of the Enforcement Regulation. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (<https://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/highered/title02/detail02/1373912.html>).

Figure 3: A TDU student presents her self-ology research on her relationship with her “dark tendency to avoid”²⁷.



Addressing such a fundamental flaw in the design of the existing HE model, TDU takes a completely different approach: It completely disentangles education (which is non-prescriptive and centres on the individual's healthy development and its constructive cohesion with society) from professional certification (which is prescriptive, so as to fulfil each profession's functional requirements). It does not seek accreditation from the government, and thus does not award government-recognised credentials. Instead of assigning students to and shaping students based on the prescriptions of professional credentials, TDU focuses on facilitating students' reflexive and deliberate exploration and development of their “authentic relational selves”, which starts with equally respecting oneself and others and

27. *Self-ology* is a field of research developed at TDU by Kageki Asakura and others. It is inspired by Japan's unique “当事者研究 (Tojisha Kenkyu, sometimes translated as ‘research by/ of/for the concerned parties’ or ‘concerned party research’)” approach, and typically focuses on studying one's personal issues/challenges/difficulties to enable self-clarity, self-emancipation, and self-actualisation, by utilising a inclusively wide range of research methods. For more, see: Ishihara, Kohji. 2015. Learning from Tojisha Kenkyu: Mental Health “Patients” Studying Their Difficulties with Their Peers. In *Disability Research Today*, Routledge, 43-58; 松島恵介. 2020. 鬱病に罹患した生態心理学者による一人称的当事者研究の試みと、鬱病治癒方略の提案のためのヒント: ギブソン, 木村敏, 大森荘蔵, 三木成夫, タレルを参照点として. *認知科学* 27(2): 110-22; みつ子檜葉 and 陽介柳瀬. 2020. 当事者研究から考える校内授業研究のあり方. *広島大学大学院人間社会科学研究科紀要*. 教育学研究 1: 105-14. Photo Source: TDU - 雫穿大学 (てきせんだいがく) . 11 November 2020. (<https://www.facebook.com/TDUtokyo/photos/151624193337160>).

naturally extending this respect to the society and the environment²⁸. TDU offers seven typologies of relations as frames of reference for every student to explore with, including their relational selves in the context of gender, family, others, work, society, money, and time²⁹.

Figure 4: TDU's Public Research Seminar on Self-ology with prominent Japanese philosopher Satori Saishu (second from the left)³⁰.



TDU facilitates such relational exploration and development with two pillars in mind (Figure 5): One is to support students in facing, unravelling, resolving, and subliming their life issues, for example, identifying one's own "enabling" and

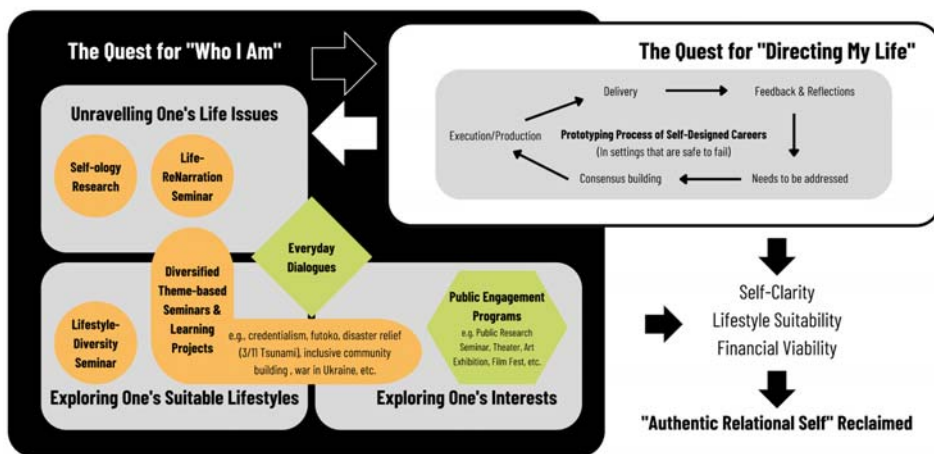
28. From the very beginning of TDU, environmental issues have been dear to many TDU students. For example, their students' practice of the traditional Japanese "*Mottainai*" culture, which adds the fourth "R" of "respect" to the well-known mantra of "reduce, reuse, recycle" and is championed by the Nobel Prize-winning Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai (Crossley-Baxter, 2020), was studied in research by the Korean alternative education institution Mindlre (만들레 학교). The green projects that the students voluntarily initiate also include but are not limited to building a solar-powered car, implementing green interior design, practising sustainable urban and campus farming, and jointly making the decision for the campus to subscribe to a green electricity supplier. See: Crossley-Baxter, Lily. 2020. Japan's Ancient Way to Save the Planet, March 2020. (<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20200308-japans-ancient-way-to-save-the-planet>.)

29. NPO法人TDU・零穿大学 (Translated by Yang, Adler 2019). 比起「適應社會」，我們更希望你「設計人生」——「沒有預設目標，只協助你開創適合自己的人生」的日本零穿民主大學小檔案. Taipei: Awakening Cooperative Lab.

30. For more about Saishu Satori (最首悟), see: Saishu Satori on WorldCat (<https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n85032539/>) or Wikipedia (<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%9C%80%E9%A6%96%E6%82%9F>). Photo Source: TDU - 零穿大学 (てきせんだいがく). 7 November 2020. (<https://www.facebook.com/TDUtokyo/photos/150353583464221>).

"disabling" conditions by studying their experiences of entrapment and self-denial, thus gaining key insights for "designing a more enabling lifestyle." The other is to broaden students' awareness of the diversity of possible lifestyles and to provide a safe space for students to prototype their own until a viable lifestyle is ready to set off. The co-creation of curriculum among students and faculty based on the two pillars above exemplifies a nonlinear and nonbinary vision of HE and employment: The university is no longer a prerequisite stage that is completed before and separated from employment. Instead, it can be a safe haven for anyone to calibrate and recalibrate for healthy lifestyles that always account for healthy cohesion with all kinds of relations they are situated in, which students can always return to between jobs or even during employment. Such a fundamental redesign of the university, we discover, doesn't only address the psycho-social ailments that arise from strong inhibitive or suppressive cultures in collective societies, but may also cultivate responsible yet authentic relationalities in individualistic societies to reduce the self-centredness and disposition to neglect externalities prevalent in their members³¹.

Figure 5: TDU's Change Model towards Reclaiming One's Authentic Relational Self³².



31. For example, Sibbel (2009) argues, given that the "inadequacies of the individualistic, consumer centric approach" is among the major barriers to achieving sustainability, "[h]igher education must develop the capacity in graduates to prioritise actions after balancing all the social, environmental and economic costs and benefits. ... [T]he curriculum should include experiences which lead to a greater awareness of social and moral responsibilities. In particular, greater self-awareness of personal value systems and a willingness to revise them is required to prepare graduates for work towards sustainability." See: Sibble. 2009. Pathways towards Sustainability.

32. Reproduced, translated and modified by Adler Yang from: NPO法人TDU・零穿大学. Translated 2019. 比起「適應社會」, 我們更希望你「設計人生」.

III. DEMOCRATISING KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION BY EMBRACING TACIT KNOWLEDGE: KNOWLEDGE CIRCULATION COOPERATIVE UNIVERSITY (KCCU), SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

If TDU brings a tender and healing atmosphere, the three following Korean AUs may appear more radical by living up to their aims to create “alternative societies” to the mainstream capitalist system³³.

The metropolitan-based Knowledge Circulation Cooperative University (지식순환협동조합대안대학, hereby “KCCU”)³⁴, co-founded by prominent Korean scholars such as Kim Se-gyun, professor emeritus of political science at Seoul National University, critical theorist Nae-Hui Kang and others in 2013 in Seoul³⁵, attempts to achieve this by not only practising *alternative education* but also by fostering an *alternative academic community* in which knowledge production is *democratised*³⁶. Under this banner and the “Red-Green-Purple Paradigm (which denotes cooperativism, environmentalism, and feminism respectively³⁷)”, not only has KCCU attracted students ranging in age from 16 to 70, from those with no formal

33. This may reflect the difference in the shared subjective experiences of social crises in the two countries, in which the experience of the former may be similar to that of a “boiling frog” in a long economic stagnation since the 1990s, while the experience of the latter was more like an acute earthquake in the 1997 Asia financial crisis. See: Yang, Adler. 2022. 韓國代案高教：回應帝國與資本主義支配的重構主義嘗試 (Alternative Higher Education in Korea: Reconstructionist Attempts to Address the Domination of Imperialism and Capitalism). In 薛曉華 (ed) 夢想高教新視界：實驗大學的國際視野. Hsinchu: 國立清華大學師資培育中心 Center for Teacher Education, National Tsing Hua University.

34. Official homepage: <https://www.freeuniv.net/>; Official Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/kunion2013/>; Official YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/kcunion2013/>.

35. Nae-Hui Kang (강내희) was a professor of English literature at Chung-Ang University and now serves as the president of KCCU and editor-in-chief of the academic journal *Culture/Science* (문화/과학). See: Ahn, Seon-hee. 10 October 2013. Alternative Education Comes to the University Level. The Hankyoreh. (https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/606529.html); Nae-Hui Kang on Worldcat identities (<https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-nr98039990/>).

36. 강내희. 25 June 2017. 지식생산의 민주화. 한겨레 신문. (<https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/800161.html>).

37. The original terms that the “Red-Green-Purple Paradigm” denotes are “노동”, “생태”, and “페미니즘” in Korean. While the last term comes from the transliteration of feminism, and is thereby directly translatable, the former two are literally translated as “labour” and “ecology” respectively. In the author’s English and Japanese communications with KCCU faculty and students (since the authors are not literate in Korean), the “Red” paradigm has been translated as “socialism”, “communism”, and “Marxism” interchangeably. To prevent it from being misread due to their authoritarian or cultish connotations in English, the authors use “cooperativism” to translate the Red paradigm as we found this value at the core of KCCU, and is likely the dimension of socialism/communism/Marxism that they actually focus on.

educational experience to those with doctoral degrees, but it has also attracted academics unhappy with becoming "essay-producing machines" and accomplices of the exacerbating vicious competition in the academic "market", in which academics are trapped in the "Red Queen Effect" and have to keep rushing to publish just to "stay in the same place"³⁸. For example, Jeong Ryu (유정), a cognitive scientist who taught at Yonsei University, Seoul National University and Konkuk University for more than a decade before joining KCCU, decided to join KCCU because she found the mainstream academia overly specialised and fragmented, which makes it difficult for one to work outside of one's silos, thus making it easy to fall prey to the increasingly impenetrable "localism" of one's own field of study³⁹.

Figure 6: One of the founding meetings of KCCU held by professors who sought to change the academia⁴⁰.



According to KCCU's diagnosis, the conventional *competitive model* of education and research perpetuates the following vicious cycle (Figure 7): While all people possess unique tacit knowledge through personal experiences, such as confusion, feelings, intuition, and somatic memory, the competitive model often ignores such tacit knowledge and solely demands their acquisition of the established body of explicit knowledge, and subsequently reinforces such acquisition through competitive processes such as examinations, funding applications, and publications. This model, which mainly concerns "one's acquisition of tacit knowledge and their contribution to new developments upon it", greatly deprives students and academics of the space to base their learning and research upon their tacit knowledge, thereby

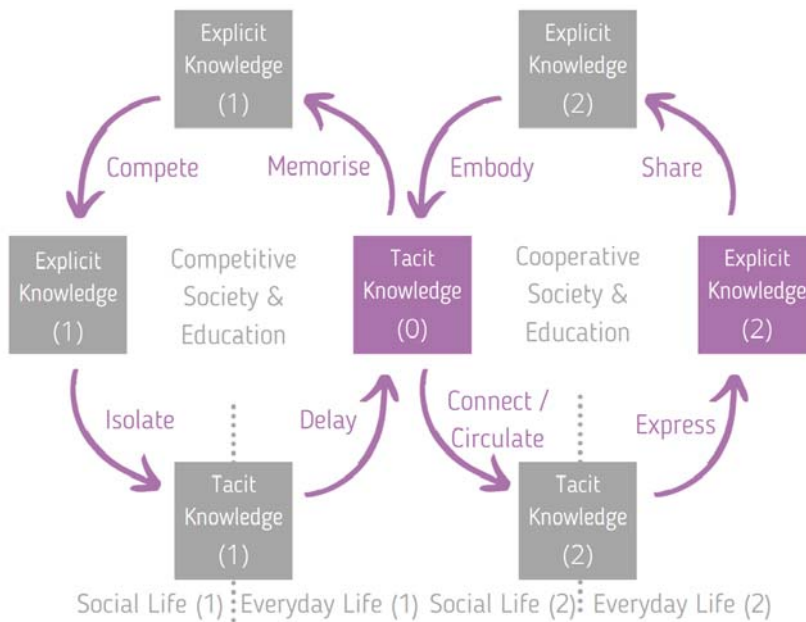
38. 姜正錫(강정석). 16 January 2020. 以民主實踐，突破新自由主義重圍——簡介「首爾知識循環協同組合代案大學」。Presented at Reimagining Experimental Higher Education UnConference, Taipei. International Action and Research Alliance for Experimental Higher Education.

39. Ryu, Jeong. 22 November 2022. Creating a Resilient Community with Robust Members. In Yang, Adler (Chair), *Universities as the Soil for Resilient and Robust Societies* [Symposium]. 2020 Taiwan International Education Summit, Taipei. (https://youtu.be/lzHw5m_RSzs).

40. Source: 姜正錫. 16 January 2020. 以民主實踐，突破新自由主義重圍.

condemning their tacit knowledge to disconnection and alienation. Consequently, as the competitive model hardly ever seeks to connect explicit knowledge acquired externally with the learner or researcher at a personal level, not only is one's unique invaluable tacit knowledge often wasted and lost, hence not contributing to the collectively shared body of knowledge, moreover, such a process also alienates one's learning or research from their personal meaning in life. As a result, academic life becomes meaningless to many students and researchers, and the knowledge produced in such a process also becomes hardly meaningful to anyone – as it wasn't the intent to begin with.

Figure 7: KCCU's Change Model for Democratising Knowledge Production⁴¹.



To reverse this vicious cycle, KCCU attempts to democratise and circulate knowledge through what they call a *cooperative model* of education and research: This model facilitates the interconnection and exchange of tacit knowledge among the academic community members by caring for and empathising with each other's tacit knowledge, such as life difficulties or perplexities, as the starting point for learning and research. To express, illustrate, and explain one's tacit knowledge with one another, one naturally has to explore ways to present it explicitly. As each

41. Translated by the authors from: 姜正錫, 16 January 2020. 以民主實踐, 突破新自由主義重圍.

individual's tacit knowledge is gradually rendered visible through expression, such exchanges between community members enable the preliminarily manifested knowledge to become more extensive and profound, and to eventually link to the established body of explicit knowledge. Finally, as the whole learning and research process begins with one's tacit knowledge, the explicit knowledge that eventually emerges through this cooperative model will again naturally bring about new tacit knowledge, thus initiating a new learning/research cycle that continues to strengthen meaningfulness in knowledge production. For example, Ryu organised the Cognitive Science Research Seminar at KCCU with students and scholars from various backgrounds, such as education, linguistics, brain science, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and artificial intelligence, to explore and develop their cognitive science-related tacit knowledge together, and even organised events to engage the public in this cooperative model⁴².

Figure 8: Knowledge circulation among peers is crucial in KCCU's education system⁴³.



42. Ryu. 2022. Creating a Resilient Community.

43. 姜正錫. 16 January 2020. 以民主實踐，突破新自由主義重圍.

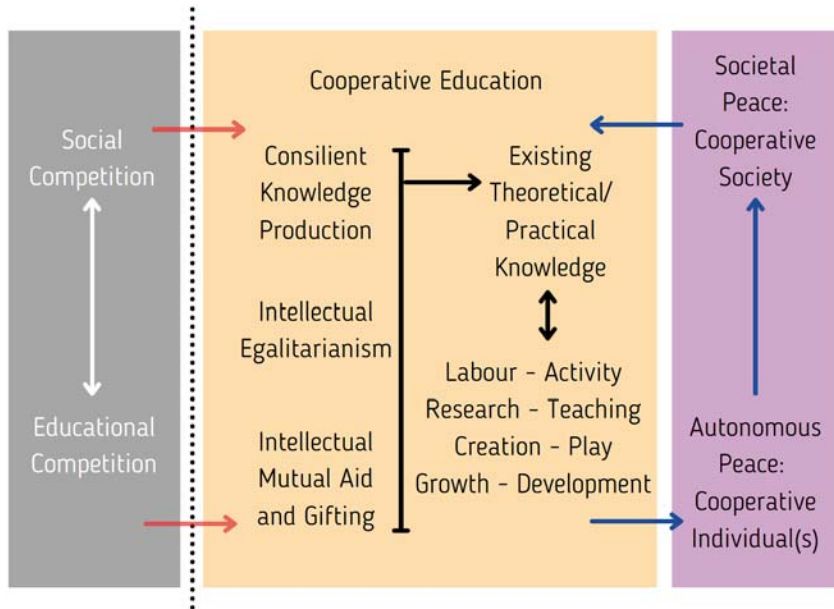
Ryu considers KCCU's cooperative model a concrete avenue to emancipate academic research, as it provides an intellectual environment to all without sacrificing the personal dimension, and it especially allows "the young people who want to make sense of and change what's wrong with *Hell Korea*⁴⁴, yet either don't have the money or exam marks to attend graduate school – and are unlikely able to do so even if they do attend – a place to take part in social change as they do study/research cooperatively.⁴⁵" Instead of developing one's research based on gaps in the literature after years of cramming for it, students, regardless of background, bring their authentic concerns to the community, go through the aforementioned cooperative learning/research process, and crystallise their findings and breakthroughs by publishing them in suitable academic journals or media outlets.

In this way, not only is learning no longer rigid and knowledge is no longer "dead", as Ryu puts it, just as importantly, this model ensures that research does not take place behind closed doors but instead becomes more interdisciplinary and integrative through the interplay of multiple perspectives and the spontaneous transcendence of various localisms. Through this cooperative model that transforms *competition* into *cooperation* and *alienation* into *association*, KCCU continues its endeavour to foster a peaceful alternative to the development of individuals and societies (Figure 9).

44. *Hell Korea* is an internet meme popularised since 2015, and means that Korea is a hellish, hopeless society. See: Hell Joseon. 2022. Wikipedia. (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hell_Joseon&oldid=1095142240). Accessed 22 August 2022.

45. Ryu. 2022. Creating a Resilient Community.

Figure 9: KCCU's Change Theory for Peace through Cooperative Education⁴⁶.



IV. BRINGING METROPOLITAN YOUTH TO REVITALISE THE RURAL THROUGH “PLATFORM 9 ¾”: BUSAN ON PEUM TO (BOPT), BUSAN AND YANGSAN, KOREA

While the change theories and models developed by the previous two AUs address the challenges of social sustainability directly and environmental sustainability indirectly, Busan On Peum To (부산온배움터, formerly called Green University, now literally translated as Busan Academy for Holistic Learning, hereby “BOPT”)⁴⁷ is one of the AUs that embody environmental regeneration in their theories and practices.

46. Translated by the authors from: Ryu. 2022. Creating a Resilient Community.

47. Official website: https://m.cafe.daum.net/busanecoschool/_rec; Official Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/577554615632691/>.

Figure 10: Chae (first from the left) and students attending the Youth Social Activists Course at BOPT's Busan Campus to pilot their UBI Programme⁴⁸.



By studying the modern and contemporary history of Korea, literature scholar Saeng-Pyeong Chae (채상병) became aware of the philosophical roots of the historical and ongoing tragedies under imperialism, colonialism, and neoliberalism, which he believes lie in modern civilisation's exploitative and controlling obsession with science, technology, money, and material goods. To resolve humanity's alienation from nature and its intensifying self-destruction, he holds similar beliefs as the intellectuals and practitioners of the degrowth, localisation, and swaraj movements: First, humans will never end their self-destruction as long as the exploitative, controlling, and growth-oriented rationale hasn't changed. Second, as long as people are dependent on powerful institutions, domination will never end; thus, civil society should seek solutions for civilisation's predicament within themselves instead of from big institutions⁴⁹.

48. During the course, students decided that they are going to prototype a peer-supported Universal Basic Income system to study the opportunities, challenges and potential outcomes of its implementation. Photo taken by Adler Yang at BOPT's Busan Campus, 18 December 2019.

49. Yang. 2022. Alternative Higher Education in Korea.

Figure 11: The “Peaceful Coliving” symbol on BOPT’s pamphlet⁵⁰.



To create a hub for driving social change toward social and environmental regeneration, Chae founded BOPT in metropolitan Busan and its adjacent rural town Yangsan in 2003. The university doesn’t only upend the conventional model in terms of practice but also in its philosophy: Instead of the prevalent premises of seeking truth, cultivating problem-solvers, or preparing professionals in the Western HE tradition/practice, BOPT is founded upon the philosophical soil of Korea’s neo-Confucianism tradition called *Tonghak* (동학, literally translated as Eastern Learning), in which the goal of one’s education is to seek harmony with nature and to sanctify and revive one’s unpolishedness and authenticity. Consequently, the university replaced the traditional university departmental system with four main learning themes, “humanities,” “clothing, food and housing,” “health and wellness” and “energy and technology,” which include programmes such as ecological humanities, traditional dressmaking, wilderness survival, traditional fermented food and drink, ecological architecture, holistic wellness, parenting, energy self-reliance and appropriate technology. In other words, the education is centred on the spirit and competence of *mutual aid* and *self-sufficiency* in an attempt to empower people to live regeneratively, reduce their dependence on the neoliberal order, and thus gradually dismantle the root causes of human self-destruction.

50. The “Peaceful Co-living Symbol” (생명평화무늬) was originally created by Korean Buddhist monk Do-peob (도법) and has become a common element in the culture of Korea’s environmental movement. Photo taken by Adler Yang at BOPT’s Busan Campus, 18 December 2019.

Figure 12: A sharehouse run by a BOPT member, which also serves as one of BOPT's learning sites in Yangsan⁵¹.



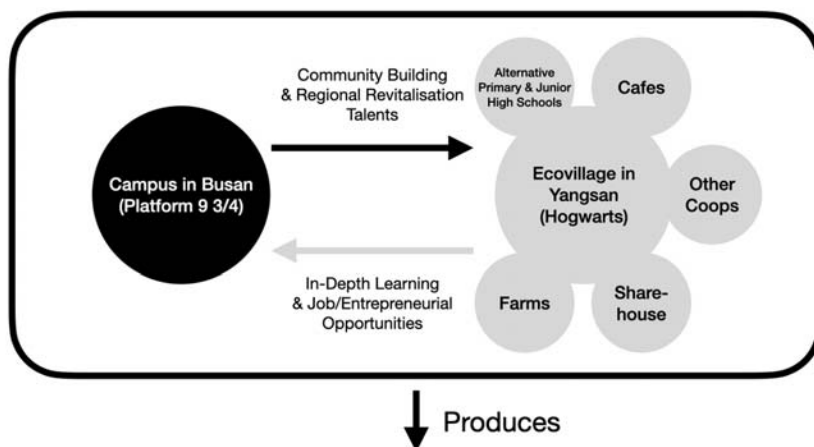
BOPT's attempt to change the social landscape of neoliberal consumerism through education is not only reflected in its curriculum but is also supported by an *ecosystem* (Figure 13). While BOPT has a small campus with only a handful of classrooms in an old industrial neighbourhood in metropolitan Busan, similar to "Platform 9¾" in the Harry Potter series, the Busan campus is actually just the entrance to the BOPT world, which is scattered in the rural town of Yangsan (양산시) in Gyeongsangnam Province (경상남도), an hour away from Busan by bus. By having an "entrance" in the metropolitan area, BOPT's programmes bring the youth from the feverishly competitive and expensive Busan to the hollowising⁵² but tranquil Yangsan to learn and work with local cooperatives, including but not limited to local free schools, cafes, stores, or farms, to transform Yangsan into an ecovillage.

51. Photo taken by Adler Yang in Yangsan, 19 December 2019.

52. *Hollowisation* is a term mainly circulated in East Asian academia which describes the process of all kinds of decline of a community or region. For example, see: Cho, Young-Jae, Duhan Kim, and Eun-Jung Cho. 2015. A Study on the Relation between the Hollowization and the Phenomenon of Decreasing and Aging Population in Rural Villages-Focused on Geumsan-Gun. *Journal of Korean Society of Rural Planning* 21(4): 85-94; Seki, Mitsuhiro. 1997. *Kudoka o Koete: Gijutsu to Chiiki No Saikochiku* (Beyond Hollowization: Reconstruction of Technology and Local Economy). Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha; Song, J., and H. Jung. 2012. Globalization and Hollowization Effects; *Global Strategies of Japanese Automobile Industries*. The *Korean Journal of Japanese Studies* 35: 157-83; Wen-yong, Feng, Zheng Qing-rong, L. I. Xiu-ying, and L. I. U. Lin-fang. 2007. Trends and Summary on the Study of Rural Settlement Hollowization in China. 《信阳师范学院学报 (哲学社会科学版)》 27(1): 70-73.

From the town of Yangsan's perspective, BOPT brings in community-building and regional revitalisation talents that are in short supply, thus playing a crucial role in addressing its hollowisation; to BOPT and its students, Yangsan is a field that not only enables in-depth learnings that integrate theory and practice, but may even create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities alongside their cooperative learning and work with the locals.

Figure 13: BOPT's Ecosystem and its Change Model⁵³.



Talents & a Prototype For Alternative (Peaceful and Regenerative) Societies

Through this learning ecosystem, Chae and his colleagues and students at BOPT are creating a prototype for an alternative society step by step. Even if the students eventually leave this ecosystem and return to the mainstream, Chae believes they are already equipped with the mindset, knowledge and competence to become *ecological changemakers* capable of living in harmony with nature and reviving their authenticity wherever they go.

53. Produced by Adler Yang and largely based on: Chae, Sang-pyeong. Interview. Conducted by Yang, Adler. 18 December 2019.

V. LIVING AS LEARNING, BEING AS CHANGEMAKING: SAMIL HAKLIM, HONGCHEON, KOREA

Similar to BOPT, Samil Haklim (삼일학림, literally translated as Three-as-One Learning Forest⁵⁴, hereby “SH”) is located in an ecovillage called Life and Peace village (생명평화마을), where its members live and learn symbiotically with the village. It was founded by an intentional Christian community, Bargn Nuri (밝은누리, or “bright world”)⁵⁵, formed by college students in 1991. As members got married and gave birth, they committed themselves to developing a rural-urban cooperative community so that they could have an alternative to capitalism ingrained in every aspect of mainstream society. In this community, their pursuit of “life and peace” values are embedded in their everyday lifestyle, from food, clothing, shelter, marriage, pregnancy and birth, to parenting and education.

Figure 14: A panoramic view of the Sang Saeng Ecovillage⁵⁶.



To realise the ideals of self-sufficiency and regenerative living, the Bargn Nuri Community jointly purchased land in 2010 in the rural county Hongcheon (홍천군) in Gangwon Province (강원도), located hours east of Seoul by driving, and built the Life and Peace Ecovillage based on a combination of South Korean traditional and

54. Their Korean name 삼 (“Sam” = three) 일 (“il” = one) 학 (“Hak” = learning) 림 (“lim” = forest) is very nuanced as it harmoniously marries traditional Christian and Eastern philosophy. While “three-as-one” denotes “trinity”, it also refers to the Eastern worldview that the sky/heaven, earth, and human are one. On the other hand, “learning forest” refers to a place where all kinds of people come together to learn, and its term and concept can be traced back to both the Eastern Asia and Christianity traditions of practising educational/intellectual/spiritual activities in harmony with nature.

55. Official website: <http://en.welife.org/>.

56. Photo taken by Adler Yang at Sang Saeng Ecovillage, 21 December 2019.

modern ecological architecture⁵⁷. The building process was open to all members to participate and is part of the SH curriculum. The physical space of the ecovillage isn't just a place where some of the Bargn Nuri members live, but is also the physical campus of Samil Haklim and Saengdong Jong (생동중학교, Bargn Nuri's junior high school division) – exemplifying its philosophy that living and learning are inseparable.

Figure 15: SH's students cleaning up the Main Hall with villagers after dinner⁵⁸.



Similar to BOPT, SH is one of Bargn Nuri's educational branches that are committed to the whole community's vision. In the spirit of self-sufficiency and harmony with nature, SH's required courses for graduation include "Self-Awareness (a transdisciplinary programme integrating mindfulness, self-awareness, history, philosophy and religion)", "Sustainable Agriculture", "Sustainable Architecture", "Sustainable Innovation", "Aesthetics in Life and Nature", and "Self-Directed Projects", in which the student has to plan and carry out learning projects on their

57. For example, the first thing the members did when they moved to Hongcheon was to get rid of the modern toilet and build an eco-friendly outhouse, which is a symbolic act of recovering the circulation of life. Faeces and urine that were flushed away and wasted become renewed as fertilizers after fermenting for years.

58. The floor of the main building in the Ecovillage is made of Korean paper (한지) mixed with natural ingredients for fire and water resistance, and the walls are made of traditional rammed earth and overlapped with waste egg cartons to strengthen the structure. It is embedded with a natural temperature conditioning system which can comfortably accommodate more than a hundred people without any electric air conditioning, even when the temperature was below zero degrees during the author's visit. It is also designed with a stunning feature based on Eastern architectural philosophy, which is to harmonise with the rule of nature instead of controlling nature at one's own will: The main hall serves as a large space for diverse activities, such as village or school meetings, dining, and presentations, and is located in the centre of the complex to fully utilise the height and spaciousness afforded by the roof tip in the centre; around the centre of the complex, the spaces beneath the lowered eaves are used for smaller groups and activities, such as classrooms, kitchens, and storage rooms. The result of such minimally artificial design is the harmony among traditional aesthetics, ecological sustainability, plus incredible functionality. Photo taken by Adler Yang at Sang Saeng Ecovillage, 20 December 2019.

own. While the main campus is in Gangwon Province, classes can be held anywhere, including other ecovillages.

The required courses in the mainstream education system, such as languages, mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences, are available in SH as electives and students won't be judged even if they don't take them – these courses are available just to make sure that students are not involuntarily secluded from the rest of society. Of course, as SH is also not a government-accredited university, whether to “graduate” or not is completely at the student's discretion – students learn at their own pace and are allowed to *discontinue* or *resume* their progress toward receiving SH's “diploma”. For example, there is a year called “independent year”, (similar to “gap year”), which is a period when students materialise what they have learnt and face challenges from “reality”. Most students leave the campus and find a place where they can apply their studies and reify their values. At the end of the year, students decide whether they will continue to study at SH or not. This is often a tough time for them, since they have to face the harsh reality of not following the mainstream and endure worried interrogations even from their families. But through such hardship, students often better realise what kind of life they want to live.

Under this rationale of curriculum design, the coerciveness of schooling often experienced by students in the conventional system is largely absent, as the activities of “required courses” are largely inseparable from all villagers' communal life and responsibilities, and there is no pressure for “graduating”.

Figure 16: Information board on the wall of the Main Hall explaining its architectural design⁵⁹.



While SH lives up to its commitment to environmental sustainability in many dimensions of its practices of communal learning and living in the Life and Peace Ecovillage, its members are not secluded in their own utopic commune but instead are active in participating in striving for greater social change. Among their many approaches to achieving greater social change, there is a specific area of policy⁶⁰

59. Photo taken by Adler Yang at Sang Saeng Ecovillage, 21 December 2019.

60. As of the end of 2019, SH's policies have been evolving since then and are undergoing significant changes to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19. For more, see footnote 64.

culture for college admission prevalent in Asia to be alleviated, or at least significantly reduced among those who can succeed without a college degree.

Figure 18: A workshop run by SH/Bargn Nuri members in the local neighbourhood to bring daily SD designs to Hongcheon people's lives⁶³.



Second, the Bargn Nuri community intentionally decided not to have a pre-school, kindergarten and primary school division in Hongcheon. On the other hand, they also didn't have a secondary and tertiary education division in their other chapter in Inseo, Seoul. Without having a pre-primary and primary division available, members of the Bargn Nuri community in Hongcheon will have to enrol their pre-primary and primary school-aged children in local schools that are struggling with a lack of students and even risks of school closure due to the population exodus to the metropolises, thus supporting and building bonds with the local community. Without having a secondary and tertiary education division in Seoul, families and students who are unwilling to join the hypercompetitive and unsustainable mainstream secondary and tertiary schools that are likely to get them further trapped in

63. Photo taken by Adler Yang in Hongcheon County, 21 December 2019.

Hell Korea and “fatigue society” upon graduation, are thus incentivised to move to the rural Hongcheon, thereby not only revitalising the hollowised rural Hongcheon but also transforming Hongcheon’s community toward a more regenerative culture with their participation in, and contributions to the local community. While such a design is greatly impacted by the advent of COVID-19 and is undergoing significant changes⁶⁴, this approach towards the revitalisation of rural regions is in fact consistent with a significant body of existing literature, which indicates that the presence of flourishing institutions – such as industry clusters or educational institutions – can effectively revitalise previously underpopulated or underdeveloped regions⁶⁵.

64. On 6 October 2022, Seoyoung Gil wrote to the author (edited/proofread, emphasis added):

As we faced COVID-19, maintaining a boarding school became more challenging. As students in Saengdong middle school and SH continued to rise, the number of cases was getting too many. Rather than passively closing the school or recklessly trying to accommodate all of the students in danger of getting infected, we decided to be more positive and started middle schools in each village. In Seoul, Hongchen and Gunpo in Gyeonggi Province, we started new alternative middle schools and also created a new village in Yangpyeong, Gyeonggi Province (in the middle between Seoul and Hongcheon). It is easier to focus and nurture when the scale is smaller, so divide ourselves into smaller scales just like cells. In this way, we can live more actively and nurture/educate students with more care and love.

As this community is a living being itself, changes are inevitable and natural. Saengdong middle school became a seed and perished in the soil, and the lives of four new middle schools started to sprout in each village. The important task for SH now is to create an ecosystem where graduates can be in solidarity with others with similar minds or who attended alternative schools. We think that just providing alternative education and being indifferent to their life pathways is irresponsible. Korean society is very narrow and harsh to those who have different backgrounds. We cannot keep the graduates safe from all difficulties, but making a platform or system for them to flourish freely, is our responsibility.

65. For example, see: Yang, Adler. May 2021. 從「教育與地方發展」的關係 梳理「教育地方創生系統」的可能 [The Possibility of Creating "Region-Revitalizing Education Systems": An Analysis of the Systemic Relationship Between Education and Regional Development]. Presentation at 國家發展委員會「前草實驗大學x地方創生x育才扶產工作坊」. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351439759_congjiaoyuyudefangfazhandeguanxi_shulijiaoyudefangchuangshengxitongdekeneng_The_Possibility_of_Creating_Region-Revitalizing_Education_Systems_An_Analysis_of_the_Systemic_Relationship_Between_Education); Apatov, Eyal, and Arthur Grimes. 2019. Impacts of Higher Education Institutions on Local Population and Employment Growth. *International Regional Science Review* 42(1): 31–64.

VI. FOSTERING A LEARNING ECOSYSTEM BY TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF SELF-ORGANISATION: SWARAJ UNIVERSITY, UDAIPUR, INDIA

While all of the AUs covered in our studies embrace ecological and organic over industrial and mechanistic values and practices, we found the communal/organisational structures and cultures in the East Asian AUs inclined more toward the homeostasis end of the eco/organic spectrum, while the following case in India, Swaraj University, is inclined more towards the homeodynamics end⁶⁶.

For one, while Swaraj University gets the attention of the Indian mass media every now and then, it appears in press in different names with seemingly different goals and kinds of members and participants⁶⁷. With initiatives such as "Khoji Programme", "Hunarshala Tribal Youth Academy", "Unschoolers' Ecovillage", "Jail University", "Complexity University", "Walkouts Network", "Learning Societies Network", "Udaipur as a Learning City", "Healing Ourselves from the Diploma Disease Movement", and more, Swaraj University's education system engages people from a variety of backgrounds, from gap year students to jail inmates, tribal youth, farmers, artists, families, the elderly, local businesses, international social changemakers, and so on⁶⁸.

66. Homeostasis and homeodynamics are concepts mainly used in biology, with the former referring to the "state-oriented" and the latter to the "rate-oriented" stability of an open system achieved with its self-organisation. For more, see: Lloyd, D., M. A. Aon, and S. Cortassa. 2001. Why Homeodynamics, Not Homeostasis? *The Scientific World Journal* 1: 133–45; Trzebski, Andrzej. 1994. Homeodynamics versus Homeostasis: Periodicities Superimposed on Non-Linear Dynamic Sympathetic Tone Generated in Ventral Medulla. *Acta Neurobiologiae Experimentalis* 54: 109–109.

67. For example, see: Jain, Manish. 22 August 2016. My Freedom to Unlearn: "Real Freedom Is Not the Ability to Just Choose Our Politicians. Real Freedom Is When We Can Choose Our Gurus". *India Today*. (<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/independence-day-special/story/20160822-manish-jain-shikshantar-swaraj-university-my-freedom-to-unlearn-829407-2016-08-12>); Khan, Faizal. 16 February 2020. There Is a Great Amount of Talent Inside Prisons: Swaraj Jail University's Manish Jain. *Financial Express*. (<https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/there-is-a-great-amount-of-talent-inside-prisons-swaraj-jail-universitys-manish-jain/1869156/>); Khan, Faizal. 23 August 2020. This University Operates from Inside a Central Jail. *Money Control*. (<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/this-university-operates-from-inside-a-central-jail-5743971.html>); Menon, Anasuya. 2014. A New School of Thought. *The Hindu*. (<https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/a-new-school-of-thought/article5538472.ece>); Raghuraman, N. 2015. Gap Year Pays for Life. *The Hindu*. (<https://www.thehindu.com/features/education/gap-year-pays-for-life/article6775420.ece>).

68. See: About Us. n.d. Swaraj University. (<https://www.swarajuniversity.org/about-us>). Accessed 20 August 2022; Who We Are. n.d. Shikshantar Andolan. (<https://www.shikshantar.org/who-we-are>). Accessed 21 August 2022.

Figure 19: Featured talks of Swaraj University members on the Swaraj University website⁶⁹.



Also, although Swaraj University also attempts to change the society towards a more regenerative one through an ecosystemic approach, thus sharing the aims and visions of all of the aforementioned AUs, the vast number of parts, branches or processes within the Swaraj University ecosystem, “partially” listed above, do not appear to have clear functional features or roles that complement or support one another as in the case of the East Asian AUs. From a traditional organisational viewpoint, you would imagine that the Swaraj University must be backed by an affluent foundation or corporate to be able to sustain so many initiatives, or multiple “brands/product lines” in business language. On the contrary, all of Swaraj’s initiatives are initiated and sustained by the people and comrade businesses and organisations they have forged from the bottom-up.

69. Source: Swaraj University Talks. n.d. Swaraj University. (<https://www.swarajuniversity.org/#comp-kpxskiou>).

Figure 20: A musical band formed by Swaraj Jail University students (inmates) performing at a music festival⁷⁰.



Compared to the previous AUs, Swaraj's change model may seem obscure, if there is any. However, with a deeper investigation, we found its model and its success can actually be explained through the lens of *complex adaptive systems*, which are systems manifesting complex behaviours that emerge from the often leaderless self-organisation of their parts following simple rules⁷¹. An ant colony is a classic example of a complex adaptive system, as its sophistication is not the result of a plan or leadership dependent upon specific members, but rather arises from the ants collectively following simple rules, such as releasing and following the traces of pheromone when they discover food⁷².

While there are no clear *commandments* that Swarajians are required to obey, from the available information about Swaraj and our interviews and interactions, we found there are indeed several *guiding principles* that foster the university and its members/participants' flourishing (Figure 21). As its name suggests, *swaraj*, an

70. Source: Swaraj Jail University. n.d. Swaraj University. (<https://www.swarajuniversity.org/swaraj-jail-university>).

71. According to Swaraj's co-founder Manish Jain, he shares similar views on leadership and change with the works at the Berkana Institute on emergence in living systems. For more, see: Wheatley, Margaret, and Deborah Frieze. n.d. Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale. The Berkana Institute. (<https://berkana.org/resources/pioneering-a-new-paradigm/>).

72. For example, see: Cabrera, Derek, and Laura Cabrera. 2015. *Systems Thinking Made Simple: New Hope for Solving Wicked Problems*. Odyssean Press.

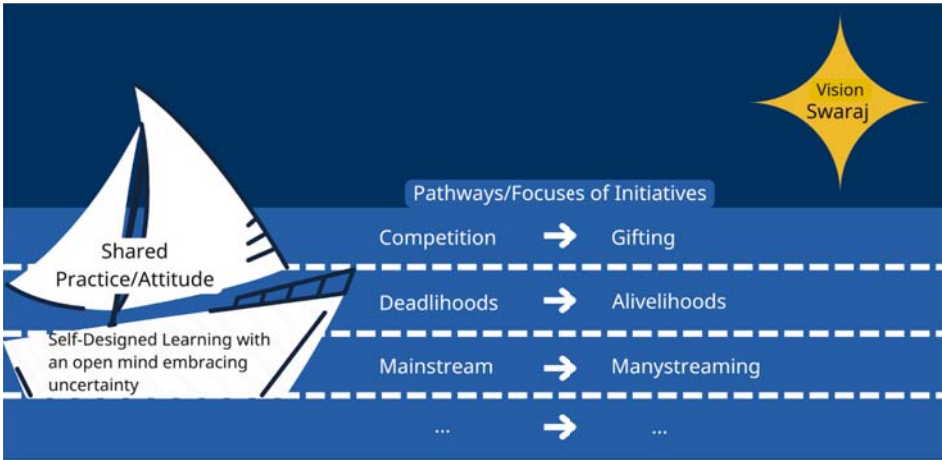
Indian concept popularised by Mahatma Gandhi that can be roughly translated as *self-governance*, *self-mastery* or *harmony of the self*, is the vision that Swaraj University pursues through a shared *jeevan andolan* (life movement). Based on their shared practice of *self-designed learning* and a shared belief that recognises “life and all its surprises/challenges/opportunities as the best guru”⁷³, Swaraj uses plain language understandable by people with all kinds of backgrounds to communicate the kinds of initiatives that Swaraj encourages its members to do, including but not limited to those that unlearn cultures of “scarcity/poverty” and move towards “abundance/wealth” via “gifting” over “competition”; those that reduce “deadlihoods (ways of living that is detrimental to people and the ecosystem)” and foster “alivelihoods (ways of living that flourishes people and the ecosystem)”; those that decolonise the “mainstream (detrimental static monoculture)” and embrace “manystreaming (diverse and resilient indigenous/local cultures)”; and those that help people to not become “job-beggars (competitors for scarce job opportunities at the cost of one’s health and likely the planet as well)” but instead become “job-creators (designers of their own career that supports the flourishing of oneself, their community, and the planet)”. In this way, initiatives at Swaraj are adaptable to specific audiences and contexts, spring and evolve spontaneously when “surprises/challenges/opportunities” arise, and can be changed or discontinued when the conditions change, as its co-founder Manish Jain puts it, “as this is how life is”⁷⁴. Also, the multiplicity and variety of initiatives make engaging people with diverse backgrounds or from separate “echo chambers” possible; thus, an ecosystem of communities with shared values continues to grow organically, eventually to a scale where the quality and quantity of goods and services exchanged among themselves will greatly reduce their dependence on the mainstream, thereby leading to an emerging alternative society⁷⁵.

73. Source: Unschoolers Ecovillage. n.d. Swaraj University. (<https://www.swarajuniversity.org/unschoolers-ecovillage>).

74. Jain, Manish. Interview. Conducted by Pi, Angela and Yang, Adler. 30 May 2022.

75. In fact, Swaraj’s “Healing Ourselves from the Diploma Disease Campaign” has enlisted over 1000 businesses and NGOs who are willing to hire people without formal degrees, and many of their 500+ “faculty mentors” around the country are also people without degrees or formal education - such as grandmothers, farmers, healers, artisans, etc. With this vast and growing ecosystem, the need for Swaraj students to obtain a “legitimate diploma” for their careers or rely on products or services provided by big corporations is greatly reduced. Source: Jain, Manish. Email correspondence with Adler Yang. 22 August 2022.

Figure 21: Some of the guiding principles driving the emergence of the various “Complex Adaptive Initiatives” at Swaraj University⁷⁶.



VII. DISCUSSION

With the case studies of the five AUs covered in this paper, we found that instead of aiding SD indirectly through the training of sustainability professionals or leaders, or through the basic and applied research that furthers the frontier of sustainability know-what and know-hows, HEIs can actually play a more direct role in facilitating SD at a systemic level if they *stop separating learning from life and campus from society*⁷⁷. Whether it's TDU's focus on the development of *authentic relational selves*,

76. Produced by the authors. Given the relative inclination towards homeostasis observed in the change theories/models of the previous AUs, theirs are easier to be visually represented in processual or stakeholder system maps with clear edges and nodes denoting the relatively stable/recurrent main processes or interactions within their systems. However, it is more difficult to similarly visually represent the homeodynamics observed in Swaraj's change theories/models, as the authors have not found major processual or functional edges and nodes that are relatively stable/recurrent. Thus, we chose to visually represent Swaraj's change model with the metaphor of a *voyage* on uncharted waters, in which the sailboat (shared practice and attitude: self-designed learning with an open mind embracing uncertainties) enables the voyager to sail towards a clear direction (vision: Swaraj), yet via different waterways (pathways or focuses of the initiatives) contingent upon whichever their circumstances bring them into.

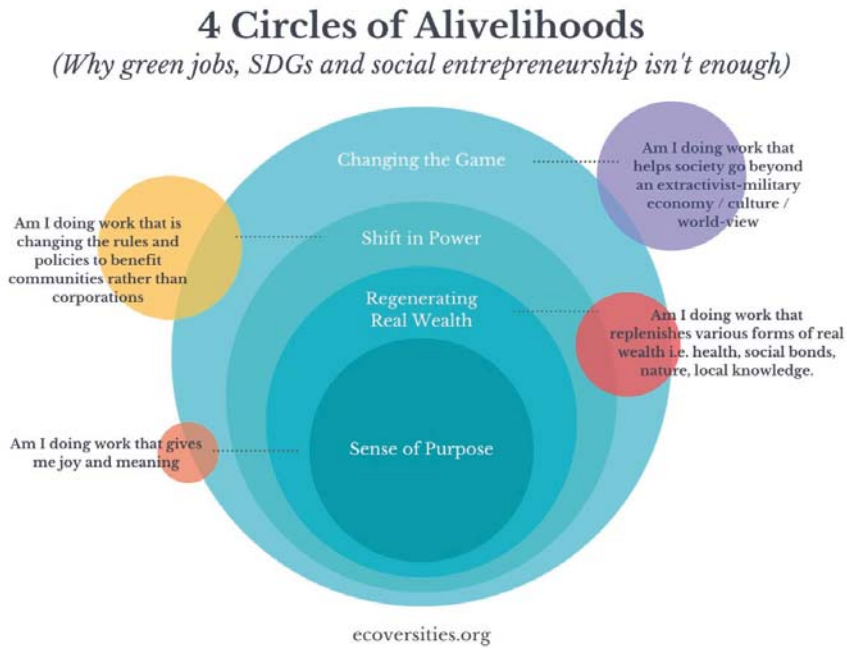
77. There are, in fact, more commonalities among these AUs that cannot be unfolded further due to the paper's word limit, such as: they all embrace democratic governance among faculty, staff, and students; focus on building portfolios over credentials; emphasise self-directed or self-designed learning; actively cooperate with civil society organisations; and so on. But we indeed find that the non-dichotomy between living and learning/society and campus underpinning all of these nontrivial common features.

KCCU's knowledge democratisation and circulation based upon individual tacit knowledge, or BOPT's, SH's and Swaraj's *curriculum as direct action* and *university as a cradle/hub for social change*, they show no attempts to impose artificial boundaries between learning/life and campus/society – In fact, *their educational process is SD in itself*, instead of just a *separated preparational stage* before the real thing.

This may seem easier said than done, especially when one considers the fact that all of the AUs covered in this paper are not accredited by the government. However, conventional HEIs can still learn from their change theories/models, which in essence, is that a HEI can integrate SD not only by the typical ideals mentioned in the Introduction, but also by taking account of the institution's dynamics in relation to its students, communities, and the greater social and ecological environment in designing its leadership and operational models or principles⁷⁸.

78. In fact, some scholars already share similar or even stronger views. For example, Ryan et al. (2010) writes: "The institutionalization of the principle of sustainability is *only* achieved when accepted and integrated in the university governance culture and progressively becomes part of the activities implemented. In other words, the governance approach of universities oriented to social responsibility is aimed at enhancing the close interdependence between economic and social efficiency, optimizing performance along the triple bottom line and *involving all the management processes*: from research and teaching to administrative and service activities, from the top management to the *entire organization*. This approach is implemented in both behaviours and internal communications, in external relationships and accountability. *A partial vision of the theme does not lead to real change and a holistic approach to sustainable development.*" (emphasis added) See: Ryan, Alexandra et al. 2010. Sustainability in Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific: Developments, Challenges, and Prospects. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 11(2): 106–19.

Figure 22: Four Circles of Alivelhoods – A framework developed by the Ecoversties Alliance to help AUs, or organisations and individuals aiming for SD to evaluate and transform their practices⁷⁹.



That said, if it is difficult for conventional HEIs to fully integrate SD into their practices, which is not only to practise an “education *for* SD” but an “education *as* SD (EaSD)”, it is likely a sign urging us to examine what are the regulatory, or even the background axiological and epistemic frameworks that restrict HEIs from doing so, as well as to set up enabling frameworks in which AUs and their contributions can be widely acknowledged, cross-pollinated, and supported to flourish further. For example, alternative schools in Taiwan have long served as the *research and development* division of the national education system: activists and innovators treat alternative schools as pilots for broader policy changes; the government eventually granted them the legal status as *experimental education*; an increasing portion of education policymaking draws lessons from their experiences; and many

79. Unpublished figure used with author’s permission under Copyleft. For more about “alivelhoods”, see: <https://www.alivelhoods.in/>.

alternative educational practices previously alien to conventional schools are also becoming common sense⁸⁰.

In the face of aggravating SD challenges, we urge stakeholders of HE systems around the world to come out from their silos, aim not just for EfSD but EaSD, and forge alliances with AUs for the future we all share⁸¹.

80. Pi, En-Ju (Angela), Yang, Adler, Kao, Chi-Peng, and Chang, Shenglin Elijah. 2022. Decoding Progress and Equality in Taiwan's Education: A Dialectic Between Value and Instrumental-Rationality. In Echle, Christian (eds), Konrad Adenauer Sharing Political and Civic Engagements Spaces (KASpaces): Accelerating Progress and Equity in Education. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ltd. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358661528_Decoding_Progress_and_Equality_in_Taiwan's_Education_A_Dialectic_Between_Value_and_Instrumental-Rationality).

81. This paper and the case studies behind it would not have been possible without the tremendous goodwill, hospitality, and assistance from the people at the five alternative universities: Tekisen Democratic University (TDU), Knowledge Circulation Cooperative University (KCCU), Busan On Peum To (BOPT), Samil Haklim (SH), and Swaraj University.

Since Adler Yang became a visiting member at TDU from 2017, Dr. Kageki Asakura opened up the world of independent scholarship and AUs before him and serves as the supervisor of Adler's several major research projects until today. Without joining Kageki's trip to Korea to attend a conference on "AU for SD" in November 2019, we would not have known about the rest of the AUs. We also thank all the members of TDU for being inspirations during Adler and Angela's long and short stays at TDU and forming deeply supportive and personal relationships with us.

We were incredibly fortunate to meet the representatives of KCCU (Dr. Jung-seok Kang and Mr. Dong-won Kang), BOPT (Mr. Sang-pyeong Chae and Ms. Jung-ho Lee), and SH (Ms. Seo-yeong Kil), and to receive their warm acceptance of Adler's request to visit their AUs. Without Dong-won and Ms. Eun-a Lee's voluntary interpretation from Korean to Japanese during Adler's visits to KCCU and BOPT respectively, we would not have gained such a depth of understanding during his visit. We also thank Dr. Nae-hui Kang, then president of KCCU, and other uncountable faculty/staff/student members at KCCU, BOPT and SH for being supportive of our research and warmly hosting Adler's visits and providing invaluable insights that enriched our research and led to the formation of this paper. Although not mentioned in this paper, we are also indebted to Mr. Young-chul Tae, then principal of Guemsan Gandhi Democratic High School, for organising the AU for SD conference; and to Dr. Tae-wook Ha, Korea's leading researcher and policy advisor on alternative education, for continuing to share their knowledge about the alternative education movement in Korea as one of its leading pioneers.

Within three weeks of starting the organising process, we successfully hosted the Reimagining Experimental Higher Education Unconference in 16 January 2020 with the support of TDU, KCCU, and BOPT. Jung-ho flew to Taipei to deliver a talk with the Korean-Mandarin interpretation by Soo Ko, while Jung-seok and Mr. Takeshi Nagai (graduate of TDU) shared their pre-recorded presentations. We are very happy that TDU and KCCU (represented by Ryu Jeong) continued to help foster the dialogues on AUs in Taiwan by speaking at the 2020 Taiwan International Education Summit (TIES), which Mr. Manish Jain from Swaraj University first joined, 2020 Conference on Extending Experimental Education to Universities, and 2021 TIES. All of these presentations provided us with greater comprehension and appreciation of AUs' endeavours. Manish's invitation for Adler to join the steering committee of the Ecovercities Alliance also broadened his knowledge about AUs' solidarity with the global ecological/regenerative movements further, which continued to consolidate our foundation to write this paper.

Adler Yang has committed his life since adolescence to addressing systemic problems and increasing empathy in society through research and educative, peaceful initiatives. He is the Founding Director of the Awakening Cooperative Lab, a think-and-do tank aiming to research/design for, and actualise regenerative and harmonious societies with compassion and critical complex systems awareness. Some original concepts researched at Awakening include *Allocation Dependence* and *Learning by Caring*. The Lab has also supported marginalised youths to become award-winning, impactful, and compassionate leaders of their generation; directed the R&D for ZA Share, Taiwan's largest educational experimentation and innovation platform, to develop programmes and policy proposals for fostering progressive and equitable education ecosystems; and pioneered the experimental higher education movement in Taiwan.

Between the ages of 14 and 21, he completed the documentary film *If There is a Reason to Study* (2016), which won awards internationally, influenced education movements in Taiwan, and was lauded as the "Epitome of 2016 Taiwanese Movies" and the "Most important film on Taiwanese education." He also works or worked for the National Chung Kung University, Ministry of Education and National Development Council (Taiwan), EDiversity and Ednovators Fellowship (Hong Kong), Japan Society of Synthetic Anthropology, Alternative Education Resource Organisation (US), and Konrad Adenauer Sharing Political and Civic Engagements Spaces (Asia Pacific/Germany). His talk at TEDxTaipei was named one of the "10 Most Important Taiwanese TEDx Talks in 2014." He was named to *The News Lens* 2015 "30 under 30" list.

En-Ju (Angela) Pi is a Staff Member at Jendo Association, one of Taiwan's earliest civic think-tank and activism hub for the democratisation of education and society. Founded during the Martial Law, Jendo has pioneered most of Taiwan's progressive education reforms and was lauded as the "Underground Ministry of Education".

At Awakening Cooperative Lab, En-Ju currently works as an Assistant Researcher, while she simultaneously studies at the Arete Honors Program (Bachelors), National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU), Taiwan. During NYCU, she mentored at a democratic early childhood education community and co-authored the *Homeschooling Handbook* (2020) published by the National Chengchi University. Before NYCU, she had worked as a co-host at the National Education Radio Station; journalist at *Shokuzine*, a media that covers stories and issues about vocational education; assistant at the International City Wanderer Education Association, an innovative programme empowering youths' self-exploration through location-based education, which was featured by *Forbes* and *HundrED*; and taught/mentored at several educational programmes, including a democratic school, an after-class programme for at-risk children, and an experimental architecture high school.

As a graduate of Humanity (Zhanfu) School, one of Taiwan's earliest democratic high schools, En-Ju developed an interest in educational issues, especially about their interplays with "multiculturalism" and "social change". She is now bringing sociological, anthropological, and complexity-aware lens into her work and research at Jendo and Awakening, also into the exploration of her future.