

Decolonizing Epistemology: Deconstructing the Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding of Western Centrism

Jiacheng Wu*¹ and Chengxi Shi²

¹College of Computer Science and Technology, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China

²School of Art, Southeast University, Nanjing, China

Abstract: Within global educational systems, ‘knowledge hegemony’ manifests not only as the dominant dissemination of Western content but more profoundly as the systematic occlusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) through Western ‘Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding’. Current decolonial curriculum reforms in Global South countries largely remain at the superficial level of content substitution, failing to engage with the deeper cognitive structures and epistemological foundations. This study employs Zhang Xusheng’s triadic cognitive framework of Soma-Emotion-Meaning from *Knowing and Speaking*, alongside Wang Dongyue’s principle of Progressive Weakening-Compensation articulated in *General Theory of Material Evolution*, to conduct an ontological critique of the epistemic violence inherent in Western-centric education. The research reveals that Western rationalist education, through the ‘Language Masking Effect’, marginalizes non-Western, embodied, and holistic knowledge systems as ‘myth’ or ‘superstition’, severing the generative roots of Indigenous knowledge at the somatic, emotional, and meaningful levels. Engaging in dialogue with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s ‘Epistemologies of the South’ and Miranda Fricker’s theory of ‘Epistemic Injustice’, this paper proposes a cognitive reconstruction pathway for decolonial education: dismantling hegemonic cognitive scaffolding to realize epistemic pluralism, restoring the ontological status of Indigenous languages, and integrating embodied and ecological knowledge revitalization into educational evaluation frameworks. The ultimate aim of decolonial education is to achieve a Progressive Weakening-Compensation balance within the global knowledge ecology, thereby mitigating the civilizational vulnerabilities engendered by a singular cognitive paradigm.

Keywords: Decolonial Education; Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS); Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding; Epistemic Justice; Language Masking Effect; Soma-Emotion-Meaning

1 Introduction: From Content Replacement to Cognitive Deconstruction

At the intersection of globalization and the postcolonial era, the educational systems of Global South countries are undergoing a profound decolonization wave [9]. From South Africa’s “Rhodes Must Fall” movement to curricular reforms across Latin America, decolonial education endeavors to challenge the Eurocentric knowledge systems that have long dominated academia and foundational education. However, as many critical pedagogues have noted, contemporary decolonial curricular reforms often fall into a “superficial” predicament: merely incorporating indigenous authors’ literary works into syllabi, supplementing precolonial historical events, or juxtaposing Western science with local common knowledge in a simplistic manner [7]. This form of “content substitution” reform, while enhancing the visibility of marginalized groups to some extent, fails to engage with the

most fundamental mechanisms of power operating within global educational systems—namely, the deep cognitive structures and epistemological foundations.

Knowledge hegemony’s true power does not lie in compelling individuals to learn specific content but rather in defining “what constitutes legitimate knowledge” and “what counts as rational ways of knowing the world” [1]. Within modern universities and formal schooling, Western scientific rationality has been internalized as the universal standard for evaluating all knowledge systems [8]. When Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are subjected to scrutiny under this Western standard’s microscope, they are frequently downgraded to “myth,” “superstition,” or merely “folklore” of anthropological interest, thereby suffering systemic epistemicide [4].

To genuinely fulfill the promise of decolonial education, it is imperative to transcend mere additions or deletions in curricular content and delve into the ontological dimension of cognitive generation. This article introduces Zhang Xusheng’s

* Corresponding author: 1320389424@qq.com

triadic cognitive structure of Soma-Emotion-Meaning and the concept of Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding, as articulated in *Knowing and Speaking: An Ontological Inquiry into Human Cognition* [14], supplemented by Wang Dongyue's principle of Progressive Weakening-Compensation from *A General Theory of Material Evolution* [11], thereby providing a novel philosophical analytical framework for decolonial epistemology. This study argues that Western-centric education fundamentally constitutes a particular form of Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding which, through a potent Language Masking Effect, systematically excludes the embodied and affective dimensions of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The core task of decolonial education is to restore the cognitive legitimacy of plural Indigenous knowledges within the triadic Soma-Emotion-Meaning structure, thereby advancing toward genuine Epistemic Justice.

2 The “Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding” of Western Centrism

Within the theoretical framework of Knowing and Articulating, human cognition is not a mirror reflection of the objective world but rather an evolved compensatory mechanism designed to navigate the complexities of the survival environment. Zhang Xusheng [14] posits that cognitive agents establish a relatively stable order of meaning in an uncertain world through the dynamic process of “Discover-Imagine-Regulate” (the RID model). To sustain this order of meaning, specific cultural communities develop what is termed Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding—a symbolic matrix comprising classification systems, conceptual networks, evaluative criteria, and logical rules.

2.1 Rationalist Paradigm as the Sole Legitimate Global Scaffolding

Since the Enlightenment, Western civilization has constructed a set of Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding centered on Descartes' “Mind-Body Dualism” and the Newton-Galilean mechanical universe paradigm. This scaffolding emphasizes objectivity, universality, measurability, and value neutrality, detaching “Reason” from somatic perception and emotional experience, thereby establishing it as the sole pathway to truth [13]. Accompanying colonial expansion and globalization, this Western cognitive scaffolding has been universalized as the “default setting” of global education through modern school systems, academic publishing frameworks, and standardized assessments [10].

Under this Eurocentric scaffolding, knowledge is defined as a set of propositions that can be abstracted from specific contexts, detached from the embodied and emotional experiences of cognitive subjects, precisely symbolized, and transmitted across time and space. As Omodan [9] elucidates, the power dynamics within higher education are profoundly embedded in the valorization of this Western epistemology, whereby any modes of cognition that deviate from the normative standards of this scaffolding are systematically filtered out or marginalized within the academic system.

2.2 The “Language Masking Effect” and the Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge

The operation of Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding is highly dependent on linguistic symbolic systems. Zhang Xusheng [14] proposed the “Language Masking Effect”: any language, in the process of naming and categorizing the world, inevitably illuminates certain dimensions of experience while casting others into obscurity. The masking effect of Western scientific language is particularly pronounced; through highly abstract mathematical symbols and specialized terminology, it conceals the organic, fluid, and ineffable ecological interrelations among phenomena.

When global education systems adopt Western languages—not merely natural languages such as English or French, but more critically, the conceptual language of scientific rationality—as the exclusive medium for instruction and assessment, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) encounter devastating forms of occlusion. Indigenous knowledge is typically highly embodied, situated, and holistic, deeply intertwined with spirituality and communal affectivity [8]. For instance, many ecological knowledges of African or Indigenous American peoples cannot be reduced to the Linnaean taxonomy of Western biology, as they encompass ethical responsibilities and affective bonds between humans and nature. However, under the scrutiny of Western cognitive scaffolding, the embodied and emotional dimensions that cannot be extricated into “objective propositions” are dismissed as cognitive “impurities” or “irrationalities.” This process results in the downgrading of Indigenous knowledge to a pre-scientific status, deemed backward notions in need of enlightenment and replacement.

3 Cognitive Violence and Ontological Exclusion: The Fracture of a Three-Tiered Cognitive Structure

Western-centric cognitive scaffolding not only suppresses Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) at the epistemological level but also exerts profound cognitive violence on non-Western learners at the ontological level. According to Zhang Xusheng's framework [14], a complete cognitive process must be grounded in the emergent bottom-up and regulatory top-down interactions among the three strata of soma, emotion, and meaning. The disciplining of Indigenous learners within Western rationalist education manifests precisely as a systematic severance of these three interconnected strata.

3.1 Discipline at the Somatic Level: Severing Embodied Connections with the Lifeworld

In the tri-layered cognitive structure, the somatic layer constitutes the foundational basis of cognition, responsible for processing direct sensory interactions with both physical and social environments. The generation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is profoundly dependent on the somatic presence within specific geographical and ecological contexts, such as agricultural practices, hunting, and ritual dance.

However, the physical spaces and pedagogical modalities of Western modern schooling—characterized by practices such as passive listening and textual reading—enact a disciplinary regime of “disembodiment.” This regime not only constrains the bodily activities of Indigenous learners but also severs their deep ontological connections to land, nature, and community, which are mediated through somatic perception. As Fanon [5] elucidates regarding the colonial alienation of the colonized body, the somatic discipline embedded within modern educational spaces deprives Indigenous students of their most fundamental perceptual anchors when confronted with Western abstract knowledge, rendering them suspended cognitive subjects.

3.2 Emotional Suppression: The Illegitimization of Affective Schemas

3.2.1 Emotional Layer

The emotional layer plays a crucial role in value assessment and motivational arousal within cognition. In many Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), affective and spiritual experiences—such as reverence for ancestors and gratitude toward nature—constitute indispensable components of knowledge production. However, Western cognitive scaffolding equates “objectivity” with “emotionlessness.” Within mainstream classrooms and academic evaluations, the emotional expressions and spiritual experiences of Indigenous students are often devalued as subjective, private, or even irrational disturbances [2]. This delegitimization of Indigenous emotional schemas results in profound emotional alienation during the learning process—students are compelled to suppress their cultural affective substratum and adopt a feigned, detached posture of “objectivity” to conform to Western academic norms.

3.3 Unidimensionalization at the Level of Meaning: The Supplanting of Life Narratives by Standard Answers

3.3.1 Meaning Layer

The meaning layer represents the highest form of cognition, involving the construction of symbols, concepts, and logic. Indigenous knowledge is often constructed through nonlinear narratives such as oral traditions, mythological metaphors, and ritual symbolism. However, within Western standardized education, the construction of meaning is reductively linearized into the logical deduction of written texts and the singular correct answers of standardized testing. This reduction not only deprives Indigenous students of the right to interpret the world through their mother tongues and indigenous narrative modes but also compels them to adopt a heterogeneous Western conceptual scaffolding to reshape their worldview [10]. In this process, indigenous modes of meaning construction are systematically excluded, resulting in what Zembylas [12], drawing on Fanon’s concept, describes as a “zone of nonbeing”—a cognitive space wherein the epistemologies of the colonized become invisible and unrecognized within mainstream education.

4 Theoretical Dialogue: The Philosophical Foundations of Cognitive Justice

Revealing the hegemony and violence inherent in Western cognitive scaffolding aims to seek new philosophical foundations for decolonial education. In this process, the three-tiered cognitive structure of Knowing and Speaking can engage in profound theoretical dialogue with contemporary cutting-edge Social Epistemology, particularly Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s “Epistemologies of the South” and Miranda Fricker’s theory of “Epistemic Injustice.”

4.1 Dialogue with “Southern Epistemologies”: Resisting “Epistemicide”

Boaventura de Sousa Santos [3,4] proposed the concept of “Epistemologies of the South,” offering a profound critique of the “Epistemicide” engendered by Western modernity—that is, the destruction of the rich Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) of the Global South. Santos argues that universities must assume the responsibility of advancing Epistemic Justice by dismantling the cognitive monopoly of Western science.

Integrating Santos’s theoretical framework with Knowing and Speaking, we discern that the micro-mechanism underlying “epistemicide” is precisely the radical manifestation of the “language masking effect.” The cognitive scaffolding of Western science not only obscures the possibility of alternative knowledges but also solidifies this obscuration into an unassailable standard of truth through educational institutions. Decolonizing education must transcend the mere “rescue” of endangered Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS); it necessitates the reconstruction of the cognitive ecology, acknowledging the ontological dignity of knowledge systems grounded in diverse soma-emotion-meaning configurations. This imperative calls for a paradigmatic shift from “abyssal thinking” toward an “ecology of knowledges,” establishing mechanisms of equitable translation and dialogue among heterogeneous cognitive scaffolds.

4.2 Engaging with “Epistemic Injustice”: From Testimonial Injustice to Structural Masking

Miranda Fricker’s concept of “Epistemic Injustice” [6] encompasses both “Testimonial Injustice,” wherein a speaker’s credibility is diminished due to identity prejudice, and “Hermeneutical Injustice,” which arises from a lack of collective interpretive resources that renders the experiences of marginalized groups unintelligible. Babu et al. [2] have introduced this theoretical framework into curriculum studies, highlighting that marginalized students frequently suffer from such injustices in the co-construction of knowledge within classroom settings.

From the perspective of the three-tiered structure of Knowing and Speaking, Fricker’s notion of “hermeneutical injustice” fundamentally manifests as the structural exclusion of Indigenous experiences by the Western mainstream Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding. Due to the absence of symbolic slots within the Western conceptual network capable of accommodating Indigenous somatic perceptions and spiritual

emotions, the experiences of Indigenous students become a “speechless” silence within mainstream classrooms. Therefore, overcoming epistemic injustice cannot rely solely on the individual moral reflection or attitudinal shifts of teachers; rather, it necessitates a thorough deconstruction of the existing curricular scaffolding and the creation of new interpretive resources that can accommodate diverse Soma-Emotion underpinnings.

5 Cognitive Reconfiguration Pathways in Decolonial Education

Based on the aforementioned ontological and epistemological critiques, decolonial education must transcend mere content supplementation and move toward profound cognitive restructuring. This restructuring aims to dismantle the unilinear scaffolding of Western centrism and establish an educational ecology that embraces pluralistic Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

5.1 Dismantling the Hegemony of Cognitive Scaffolding: Establishing Cognitive Pluralism

The primary task of decolonizing curriculum reform is to introduce Epistemological Pluralism. This entails the explicit recognition at the educational system level that Western scientific rationality constitutes merely one among many Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding employed by humanity, rather than the sole and absolute standard of truth [9]. In concrete pedagogical practice, educators should guide students to compare the classificatory logics and meaning-generation mechanisms underlying different knowledge systems—such as Western medicine versus Indigenous herbalism, and Western ecology versus Indigenous natural worldviews—thereby revealing their respective Language Masking Effects. Through this meta-cognitive reflection, the universalist myth of Western knowledge can be deconstructed, creating epistemic space for the legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

5.2 Restoring the Ontological Status of Indigenous Languages

Language is not merely a tool for communication but serves as a cognitive matrix embodying specific soma-emotion-meaning structures. In decolonial education, it is imperative to elevate Indigenous Languages from the periphery to a central position [8]. This elevation is not solely for cultural preservation but fundamentally aims to safeguard unique cognitive modalities that resist translation into Western languages. For instance, many Indigenous Languages encapsulate rich embodied metaphors and relational ontologies, whose lexicons can directly evoke particular emotional schemas and ecological responsibilities. Within multilingual pedagogy and translanguaging practices, educators should encourage students to employ the cognitive frameworks inherent in their mother tongues to comprehend complex issues, thereby transcending the cognitive constraints imposed by Western languages.

5.3 Embodied and Ecological Knowledge Revival: Reshaping Educational Assessment

The most fundamental reconstruction lies in dismantling the narrow definition of knowledge imposed by rationalism and reintegrating the dimensions of the soma and emotion into the legitimate purview of education. This necessitates a thorough transformation of the existing standardized assessment systems. Future decolonial educational evaluations must embrace Embodied and Ecological Knowledge, incorporating community practices, ritual experiences, acute sensitivity to the natural environment, and emotional resonance as critical evaluative dimensions [10]. For instance, when assessing students’ understanding of ecology or history, reliance should not be placed solely on written examinations with propositional statements; rather, their engagement in authentic community contexts, capacity to address Indigenous issues, and affective identification with Indigenous values should be included. Only when assessment criteria comprehensively reflect the integrated structure of Soma-Emotion-Meaning can Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) truly thrive within educational frameworks.

6 Conclusion: Progressive Weakening-Compensation and the Future of the Global Knowledge Ecology

The ultimate aim of decolonial epistemology is not to replace Western hegemony with a new form of indigenous hegemony, but rather to mitigate the escalating vulnerabilities of human civilization under a singular cognitive paradigm. According to Wang Dongyue’s principle of Progressive Weakening-Compensation [11], as a species in the late stages of evolution, humans possess an extremely low existential robustness and must rely on highly developed cognitive attributes—referred to as “compensation”—to sustain survival. However, contemporary Western-dominated instrumental rationality and techno-capitalism, while providing substantial compensatory efficacy at the material level, have propelled humanity into unprecedented crises at the spiritual and ecological levels.

Western-centric Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding, due to its pronounced “Language Masking Effect,” severs the profound connections between humans and nature, as well as between individuals and their own soma-emotion-meaning nexus, resulting in a global crisis of meaning and ecological catastrophe. In this regard, decolonial education is not only a political demand by Global South countries striving for epistemic justice but also an imperative act of self-rescue for all humanity to achieve a more sustainable balance of Progressive Weakening-Compensation.

By restoring the integrity of the triadic structure of Soma-Emotion-Meaning within education and reconstituting the cognitive legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), we aspire to establish a pluriversal and symbiotic global knowledge ecology. Within this ecology, diverse cognitive scaffolding mutually complement and translate one another, collectively resisting the vulnerabilities engendered by mono-

lithic rationalism and thereby opening broader existential horizons for the future of humanity.

7 Further Case Analysis and Empirical Implications

To further elucidate the operational mechanisms of decolonial epistemology in practice, this section will integrate specific educational case studies to demonstrate how Western-centric cognitive scaffolding can be deconstructed and epistemic justice reconstructed.

7.1 Cognitive Conflict and Integration in Science Education

In traditional Western science education, knowledge is regarded as universal, value-neutral, and objectively true. However, when this educational paradigm is imposed upon communities possessing rich Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), it often engenders profound cognitive conflicts. For instance, in certain regions of Africa, local inhabitants' understanding of plants and herbal medicine is grounded in embodied experiences and cultural narratives accumulated through generations of interaction with nature. Such knowledge frequently lacks correspondence within Western botanical classification systems, such as the Linnaean binomial nomenclature, and is often dismissed as unscientific "folk remedies."

However, decolonizing science education does not entail the wholesale abandonment of Western science; rather, it seeks to dismantle its monopoly as the sole legitimate cognitive scaffolding. By introducing the concept of "cognitive pluralism," educators can guide students to concurrently study Western botany and Indigenous herbal knowledge, comparing their similarities and differences in "problem identification," "structure generation," and "rule expression" as delineated in the RID model. Students come to recognize that Western science emphasizes the decomposition of plants into chemical constituents and biological mechanisms, whereas Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) foreground the holistic role of plants within specific ecosystems and their soma-emotional-meaning connections to human communities. This juxtaposition not only enriches students' epistemic frameworks but also cultivates their capacity for flexible switching between diverse cognitive scaffolds.

7.2 Multiperspectival Narratives and Affective Reconstruction in History Education

Historical education serves as a crucial avenue for shaping national identity and cultural memory. During the colonial era, history textbooks were often written from a Eurocentric perspective, marginalizing or even erasing the histories of the colonized. Decolonizing historical education necessitates a critical reexamination of the processes involved in constructing historical narratives.

Based on the three-tiered cognitive structure of Knowing-Saying, decolonizing history education must transcend the mere supplementation of historical facts and delve into

the reconstruction of affect and meaning. For instance, when narrating the history of the colonial period, it is imperative not only to present objective chronologies and events but also to incorporate the oral histories, literary works, and artistic creations of the colonized. This approach restores the embodied suffering, anger, and courageous resistance experienced by the oppressed. Through the awakening of such affective schemas, students can attain a more profound understanding of the ontological significance of historical events, rather than merely treating them as discrete knowledge points for examination purposes.

7.3 Metapragmatic Practices and Ontological Empowerment in Language Education

As previously articulated, language constitutes the core medium of Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding. In numerous postcolonial nations, the languages of former colonial powers (such as English and French) continue to serve as the official languages of instruction. This phenomenon not only marginalizes indigenous languages but also engenders structural disadvantages in the cognitive development of indigenous students.

7.3.1 Translanguaging as a Viable Solution

Translanguaging offers an effective pathway to address this issue by encouraging students to flexibly employ multiple linguistic resources—including both their mother tongue and the language of instruction—in the construction of meaning within the classroom. Through translanguaging practices, students are no longer compelled to forcibly fit their cognitive processes into the grammatical frameworks of Western languages. Instead, they can leverage the rich embodied metaphors and affective lexicon inherent in their native languages to articulate complex ideas. This approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also constitutes an ontological empowerment of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the cognitive modalities they embody.

8 Decolonial Educational Ecologies for the Future

Decolonial epistemology is not merely a critique of historical colonial legacies but also an active construction of the future global educational ecology. In the context of the profound development of artificial intelligence and globalization, a singular cognitive paradigm is increasingly inadequate to address the growing complexity of global challenges such as climate change and social inequality.

We need to construct a future educational system grounded in the principles of "cognitive justice" and "ecological knowledge." Within this system, learners from diverse cultural backgrounds can engage in the creation and sharing of knowledge while fully embodying their integrated soma-emotion-meaning structures. Education ceases to be a unidirectional process of cultural assimilation; rather, it becomes a multidirectional, dynamic cognitive dialogue and integration. Only

through such an approach can we genuinely achieve a progressive weakening-compensation balance within the global knowledge ecology, thereby providing a continuous cognitive impetus for the sustainable development of human civilization.

9 Institutional Safeguards and Policy Implications for the Decolonization of Knowledge

To ensure that decolonial epistemology transcends mere theoretical critique and takes root in practice, it is imperative to establish corresponding institutional safeguards and policy frameworks. This section will explore the institutionalization pathways of decolonial education from three dimensions: curriculum design, teacher education, and academic evaluation.

9.1 Curriculum Design: From Marginal Supplementation to Core Reconstruction

Current decolonial curriculum reforms predominantly adopt an “additive approach,” which entails supplementing existing Eurocentric curricula with Indigenous content at the margins. This strategy fails to transform the core architecture of the curriculum. Decolonial epistemology demands a “core reconstruction” of curriculum design.

Specifically, curriculum design should transcend the boundaries of single disciplines by adopting interdisciplinary, thematic learning approaches. For instance, in environmental education, instruction should move beyond merely teaching Western ecological principles to integrating Indigenous natural resource management practices, ecological wisdom embedded in oral histories, and Western scientific methodologies. Through such a curriculum framework of “ecological knowledge,” Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are no longer subsidiary to Western science but constitute cognitive resources with equivalent explanatory power. Furthermore, the curriculum should provide students with increased opportunities to engage in community-based practices, enabling them to apply Indigenous knowledge to address real-world problems within authentic social contexts. This engagement serves to reinforce identification with Indigenous knowledge at the soma-emotion-meaning level.

9.2 Teacher Education: Cultivating Decolonial Educators

Teachers are pivotal agents in decolonial educational praxis. However, the majority of teachers themselves are trained within Western-centric educational systems, through which they often unconsciously replicate these cognitive scaffolds. Therefore, teacher education must undergo profound decolonial transformation.

First, teacher education curricula should incorporate the theoretical frameworks of Epistemic Justice and Southern Epistemologies to assist pre-service teachers in recognizing the implicit power dynamics and the Language Masking Effect present within educational processes. Second, teacher education must emphasize embodied reflection, encouraging educators to critically examine how their teaching practices may suppress or overlook students’ emotional expressions

and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Finally, teachers need to acquire the skills to implement decolonial pedagogical strategies such as metapragmatic practices and performative assessment, thereby fostering classroom environments that are inclusive of diverse cognitive modalities. Only by cultivating educators who possess decolonial awareness and competencies can decolonial curricula truly achieve their transformative potential.

9.3 Academic Evaluation: Disrupting the Monopoly of Western Standards

The academic evaluation system in higher education serves as a crucial mechanism for maintaining Western knowledge hegemony. Contemporary evaluation standards heavily rely on Western-dominated citation index databases (such as SSCI and SCI) and English-language publications, which often marginalize the research of non-Western scholars.

Decolonial academic evaluation necessitates the establishment of pluralistic and inclusive evaluative criteria. This entails not only recognizing scholarly outputs published in indigenous languages but also acknowledging the academic value of non-traditional forms of knowledge production, such as community reports, artistic creations, and oral histories. Evaluation committees should incorporate “epistemic diversity” as a central metric, thereby encouraging researchers to explore novel methodologies that integrate Western scientific paradigms with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Furthermore, research funding agencies ought to increase investment in the study of IKS and support the development of autonomous academic publishing platforms and evaluation frameworks in Global South countries. Such institutional measures are essential to dismantle the hegemony of Western academic standards.

10 Conclusion: Towards Cognitive Emancipation and Civilizational Symbiosis

The proposition of decolonial epistemology is not intended to incite new antagonisms and divisions within the field of education; rather, it seeks a more profound cognitive emancipation and the coexistence of civilizations. Within the theoretical framework of Zhang Xusheng’s *Knowing and Speaking* [14], the essence of human cognition lies in the triadic structure of “soma-emotion-meaning,” through which individuals anchor their existence in an ever-changing world. Although the Western-centric Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding achieved considerable success during specific historical periods, its systematic repression of soma and emotion, alongside its exclusion of diverse modes of meaning-making, has revealed significant limitations.

The core of decolonial education lies in deconstructing the singular, hegemonic cognitive scaffolding and restoring the epistemic legitimacy of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). By establishing cognitive pluralism, elevating the ontological status of indigenous languages, and reconstructing evaluative frameworks that inclusively embody soma-emotion-meaning and ecological knowledge, we can cultivate

a more equitable and inclusive educational ecology for global learners. Within this ecology, diverse cultural traditions and knowledge systems cease to be mutually exclusive opposites; rather, they constitute a vibrant network of “ecological knowledge.”

Faced with the global challenges of the twenty-first century, humanity requires cognitive diversity and flexibility more than ever before. Decolonizing education is not only an imperative pathway for Global South countries to achieve epistemic justice but also a collective endeavor for all humankind to realize a more sustainable balance of Progressive Weakening-Compensation and to advance toward the symbiosis of civilizations.

11 Appendix: Explication of Core Concepts and Theoretical Models

To facilitate a deeper understanding of the theoretical foundation underpinning this study, a concise elucidation of the core concepts presented in Zhang Xusheng’s *Knowing and Speaking* [14] is provided below:

- **Three-Layer Cognitive Structure (Soma-Emotion-Meaning Framework):** Refers to the human cognition constituted by three interwoven dimensions: the soma layer (processing sensory-environmental interactions), the emotion layer (providing value appraisal and motivational arousal), and the meaning layer (engaging in symbolic, conceptual, and logical construction).
- **RID Model (Discover-Imagine-Regulate):** Describes the dynamic process through which cognitive agents establish an order of meaning in uncertain environments, namely problem discovery, structure generation, and rule articulation.
- **Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding:** The symbolic matrix developed by specific cultural communities to maintain an order of meaning, encompassing classification systems, conceptual networks, evaluative criteria, and logical rules.
- **Language Masking Effect:** The phenomenon whereby linguistic symbolic systems, in naming and classifying the world, inevitably foreground certain experiential dimensions while obscuring others.
- **Progressive Weakening-Compensation Principle:** An ontological hypothesis proposed by Wang Dongyue [11], positing that the lower the existential degree of a species (e.g., humans), the more it must rely on highly developed attributes (such as cognitive capacities) to compensate and sustain survival.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that Western-centric educational systems reinforce specific Cognitive Stabilization Scaffolding, thereby amplifying the Language Masking Effect, which results in the structural exclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The core task of decolonial education is to disrupt this hegemony within the triadic cognitive framework, restore cognitive pluralism,

and thereby achieve a progressively weakening-compensatory balance in the global knowledge ecology.

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