

## Editor's Note

© 2018 Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan

As an expanding community and a field that keeps attracting scholars from various disciplines, STS seems to have been seeking consensus—on its definition, orientation, and scope and on the ways in which science and technology are interpreted in society. Nonetheless, disputes and disagreements continue to arise. From the debates on actor-network theory and the third wave of science studies to the recent one on the “post-truth,” we learn from journals of the field how to develop common ideas while allowing the coexistence of different approaches, research agendas, and even the philosophical grounds on which these studies are based.

*East Asian Science, Technology and Society* does not exclude itself from the institutionalization of STS. Engaging in this process, it provides strategic viewpoints necessary to mainstream scholarship; meanwhile, it is sensitive to the applicability of these approaches, agendas, and philosophical grounds. Like the panel discussion it held on the semicentennial of the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (vol. 6, no. 4), *EASTS* not only traces how Thomas Kuhn was introduced to East Asia via this classic; it also reflects the meaning of STS by challenging a narrative that presumes a consensus on Kuhn and his transcendental book.

Another of Kuhn's classics, *The Essential Tension*,<sup>1</sup> provides further insights into these dynamics. In the preface, Kuhn recalls his use of the term *paradigm* for scientific activities. Many might be surprised to learn that the concept of the paradigm was not originally intended to describe a group of scientists working around a consensus. Instead, paradigms are problems for scientists to “model their own subsequent research on . . . without needing to agree about which set of characteristics of these examples made them standard, [or] justified their acceptance” (xix). Looked at this way, East Asian STS needs paradigms; they serve both as scholarly tasks and as intellectual threads with which researchers work and might better know one another.

The research articles in this issue are exemplars of such threads. Individually, they can be seen as studies in agricultural history, gender studies, and medical sociology. Yet, to juxtapose them here creates an “essential tension,” to borrow Kuhn's term, that demonstrates the usefulness of STS for these fields and the need for a more encompassing program in STS. Shuntaro Tsuru's article focuses on the transformation of sugarcane cultivation in the Taiwan of the 1910s. Arguing against a convenient account that

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

farming technology was used as a colonial tool, Tsuru casts it as “embedded” in a technological system that required various social engineering efforts (notably economic ones) to make it acceptable to Taiwanese farmers and an accustomed part of their farming practices. Hyomin Kim, Youngju Cho, Sungeun Kim, and Hye-Suk Kim’s article investigates the underrepresentation of women undergraduates in computer science (CS) in Korea. Avoiding easy explanations that tend to weight gender over other factors in this phenomenon, the authors explore this complexity by situating these students in the culture of Asian higher education. The findings are interesting. Unlike in Western contexts, in Korea “geek” identities and practices are often associated with masculinity, while university rankings and institutional environments play substantial roles in shaping CS majors’ professional identities. Gender is still an important determinant for interpreting geek proclivities, as the authors remind us, but it should be considered more carefully, along with other determinants, by tracing how it mediates the symbolic hierarchies of geek over non-geek.

Compared with the other articles, Tereza Stöckelová and Jaroslav Klepal’s engages directly with East Asian STS. Observing the spread of Chinese medicine (CM) to Central Europe and its relationship with biomedicine, the authors do not follow conventional narratives on either “CM goes global” or the integration of biomedicine and Asian healing arts. Instead, they absorb STS sources from previous *EASTS* issues—notably “The Globalisation of Chinese Medicine and Meditation Practices” (vol. 2, no. 4), “What Are East Asian STS Theories” (vol. 6, no. 4), “Beyond Tradition: Asian Medicines and STS” (vol. 8, no. 1), and “Knowledge/Value: Information, Archives, Databases” (vol. 8, no. 4)—and develop their inquiries around situated knowing of CM, its conceptual adoption in biomedical settings, and its lexical reconstruction. Departing from a discussion of geopolitics as seen in CM, Stöckelová and Klepal set their arguments at a theoretical level, engaging closely with Wen-yuan Lin and John Law’s work on correlative STS and the concept of *shi*. We draw your attention to the fact that, in addition to their publication in major STS journals, *EASTS* has published a forum on Law and Lin’s article “Provincializing STS: Postcoloniality, Symmetry, and Method” (vol. 11, no. 2). If that forum indicates that there exists no consensus on what East Asian STS should be, Stöckelová and Klepal’s article demonstrates nicely why Asian exemplars, or “paradigms” in Kuhn’s terms, are badly needed. They not only capture a globalizing world of STS but also provide places for researchers, from Asia proper or beyond, to create appropriate STS tools to cope with it.

This issue includes an essay by Gregory Clancey, the former associate editor of *EASTS* and currently its advisory editor. He is also a renowned historian of technology and a preeminent component of the STS community in Southeast Asia. As part of our “Informal Histories of STS in East Asia” series, Clancey’s essay sheds light on the building of STS in Singapore, or, as the title indicates, on how to make STS Singaporean. Just as Kuhn reflects his take on the history of science in *The Essential Tension*, Clancey does not just describe how STS was institutionally established in Singapore; in the process he is aware of the relationships of this Asian STS with other disciplines, universities, societies, and international networks. *EASTS* is delighted to be a part of a Singaporean STS, joining Southeast Asia as a part of the East Asian STS that the journal projects.

So, with these paradigms and this essay in mind, let’s enjoy a lively, consensus-free East Asian STS in 2018!

—Wen-Hua Kuo