

Encounters, Trajectories, and the Ethnographic Moment: Why “Asia as Method” Still Matters

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In the first place, it is a difficult question if one can distinguish *invasion* and *solidarity* in a concrete situation.

Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Nihon no Ajia-shugi” (“Japanese Asianism”)

1 Context and Contextualization

In “Provincializing STS: Postcoloniality, Symmetry, and Method” in this issue, John Law and Lin Wen-yuan forcefully argue for what they call “a third postcolonial version of the principle of symmetry” (214). This insistence is firmly rooted in their ethnographic encounters with practices of Taiwanese STS and Chinese medicine. In these encounters, Law and Lin put their own analytical practice in a symmetrical relation with their interlocutor’s Chinese medical practice, such that not only does STS provide insight into Chinese medical practice but also the latter informs an alternative mode of STS.

Their complex mode of contextualization is striking. Anthropologists often see context as a set of connections between the object in focus and its surroundings. Because context plays a significant role in giving meaning to the object, contextualization, in the sense of providing a new set of connections, transforms the object’s meaning. Such transformation is usually part of what it means to do anthropological analysis. Context, that is, makes sense of a phenomenon that at first glance looks strange (Dilley 1999; Strathern 1987).

Law and Lin’s exploration is no exception. They start with a perplexing moment in a STS workshop in Hsinchu, which gave rise to “disconcertment” (Verran 2001)

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taking the form of an uncomfortable recognition of self-contradiction. They write, “STS was telling Law that what we know is situated, but he was talking to a Taiwanese audience as if the need for a messy method was a decontextualized truth” (215).

The anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1999) calls this kind of disconcerting encounter the “ethnographic moment”—when the ethnographer’s conceptual frame and an odd situation bump into each other. For Law and Lin, this disconcertment even involved an embodied affect of the disunity of self. They write, “We are immersed in two different worlds: common sense in Hsinchu is often unlike common sense in Lancaster. Indeed, Lin sometimes feels that his head and his body are in different places, as if he has been intellectually beheaded” (215). Strathern (1999) argues that the ethnographic moment is also an anticipatory moment. The perplexity of the encounter invites the ethnographer to further explore context to make sense of it. In this moment, perplexity becomes a harbinger of a new understanding, potentially brought about by future contextualization.

Responding to this situation, Law and Lin employed two strategies. First, they locate the disconcertment experienced in Hsinchu in the more encompassing context of “postcolonial intellectual asymmetries” (213). This makes sense of the disconcertment by putting it in a larger context. In turn, this led them to formulate the cause of the disconcertment as largely stemming from the uneven global network of higher education, which centers on the United States and the United Kingdom. This asymmetry often takes the form of the division of labor between theory and case studies. Thus, Law and Lin argue that in STS “we have case studies, Euro-American and Southern on the one hand and theory on the other. But the latter, together with the theory–case study division itself—comes from Euro-America” (213).

However, Law and Lin quickly shift to another strategy. In doing so, they aim to make an intervention that destabilizes the theory–case studies divide by drawing on a rather unconventional use of context. Here, they turn to another ethnographic moment in Dr. Lee’s counseling room, where they encountered the coexistence of seemingly incommensurable forms of knowledge. In engaging with Lee’s practice, they let her heterogeneous practice inflect STS theory rather than explaining it by this theory. In other words, they put their own analytical practice and Lee’s Chinese medical practice in a symmetrical relation in which each becomes a context for the other. Chinese medicine “inflects” STS theory by becoming its context.

This attempt seems to share central features with lateral analysis, which is emerging at the interface between anthropology and STS (Gad and Jensen 2016). While conventional social analyses usually apply analytical frameworks to cases, thus sorting out cases according to these frameworks, lateral analysis tries precisely to put the case and the framework in a symmetric position. The basic presumption of this approach is that “it is not the prerogative of the (STS) scholar to conceptualize the world; all our ‘informants’ do it too”; this recognition “creates the possibility of enriching our own conceptual repertoires by letting them be inflected by the concepts of those we study” (Gad and Jensen 2016: 3). Indeed, Law and Lin successfully question the asymmetric relation between theory and case, the conceptual and the empirical, not

only by indicating its link with the equally asymmetric power relations but also by performing an alternative analytical move.¹

However, I cannot help feeling a certain tension in the authors' dual moves to contextualize. Whereas both kinds of contexts aim to introduce new meanings to the objects in focus, they work quite differently; in some ways, they are in contradiction. While the lateral move aims to disrupt the theory–case studies divide by bringing out energy from the perplexity of the ethnographic moment, invoking a holistic context alleviates this perplexity by giving a stable meaning to the disconcerting moment. How can one deal with this tension?

2 Putting Law and Lin's Article in Context

Putting their article itself in context might bring some insight. Indeed, Law and Lin allude to the text's context when they introduce postcolonial intellectual asymmetries. They admit that this is a rather "broad-brush picture [that] needs to be nuanced" (217). This suggests that the deliberately broad characterization is an artifact that helps smooth the argument. But why is this generic characterization of Taiwanese academia as representative of other non-Western academic worlds needed? And who needs it? In fact, isn't it rather unlikely that readers of *East Asian Science, Technology and Society (EASTS)*, many of whom are actually residents of such worlds, need this broad-brush picture?

The trajectory of the article offers an answer to this question. Law first read it as an acceptance speech for the Bernal Prize 2015 at the annual Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) conference in Denver, Colorado. Thus, its original audience consisted mainly of North American and European STS scholars (not anthropologists). In my view, the context of "postcolonial intellectual asymmetry" mainly worked as shorthand to guide the European and American audience in Denver, who could not be assumed to have first-hand experience of non-Western academic worlds.

To be relevant to the 4S Denver audience, the authors could not easily discard this generic context even as what they do afterward amounts to its undoing. The tension between the two contexts arises primarily from the friction between the authors' lateral experiment and the necessity to engage the specific audience.

There is yet another layer of complexity. Although the voice of Law addressing the Denver audience sets the basic tone of the text, reading carefully one can also hear the voice of Lin as a Taiwanese scholar trained in the United Kingdom. And Lin's voice keeps situating the text within yet another context of conversations within the East Asian STS community.

This polyphonic nature of the text brought about a further complex effect when the text actually traveled to Lin's hometown. Not surprisingly, this new context made Lin's voice more forceful. At this point, the text is located in a forum in *EASTS* to

¹ Lateral analysis in anthropology is inspired by actor-network theory (ANT) and Bruno Latour's notion of infralanguage in particular. Gad and Jensen (2016) carefully trace this link. However, it also might be possible to look into lateral-ANT linkage by taking up the use of alterity in their analysis. For commonality and difference in the dealing with alterity in related approaches, see Van de Port and Mol 2015, Jensen 2013, Holbraad 2012, Riles 2000, and Miyazaki 2004.

facilitate conversation in and beyond the regional STS community. In this context, it is not difficult for readers to perceive Law and Lin's argument as yet another take on the possibility of a distinctive East Asian form of STS, a topic of debate that has played out in this journal since its inception (Fu 2007; Fan 2007; Chen 2012; Anderson 2012). Whereas the debate may not be the first thing that the Denver audience imagined, it may now appear as one of the immediate contexts for Law and Lin's call for a "Chinese-inflected STS."

The rather unusual trajectory of the article locates it between the widely different settings, histories, and interests of a Euro-American majority in Denver and East Asian STS. One context remains generally invisible to those committed to the other. For example, as a long-standing reader of *EASTS*, I did not recognize the Euro-American context of Denver until Annemarie Mol and her research group at the University of Amsterdam indicated it when we discussed an earlier draft of this response. They directed attention to the context as seen from European STS that had been eclipsed from me. Noticing this made it possible to see the complex configuration of contexts created by the layered text.

In this light, the tension between the contexts of "postcolonial intellectual asymmetries" and a "Chinese-inflected STS" looks less like incoherence within the text than the inevitable cost of bridging different extratextual contexts. These varied contexts also pose a difficult challenge for the commentator, because taking up a certain position in relation to an argument also means defining a certain context for it. But in this case, this easily comes to mean privileging one of the two contexts over the other. The risk is that this may obscure the whole point of invoking and responding to multiple contexts in the first place.

Inspired by my conversation with the Dutch colleagues, here I try to engage with this complexity by dealing with the text as a kind of artifact bridging different contexts that are usually kept separate. To fully appreciate the openness of this artifact rather than searching for a coherent storyline, I try to make various latent connections visible (Strathern 2004). Using my own term, I will take Law and Lin's text as "a machine for making strange connections" and, indeed, try to make it even stranger (Morita 2014).

My starting point is the tentative solution Law and Lin introduced to ease the tension between the two contexts. They highlight a future-oriented temporality in which Chinese-inflected STS partly belongs to the future of STS that they "imagine" (214). In other words, at the present moment it remains as a "possibility" (215) less factual than "postcolonial intellectual asymmetries," which take the form of the theory–case studies divide.

This is the hinge that allows the textual machine to hold the two contexts stable. So what happens if one unhinges it?

3 Revisiting the Divide between Theory and Case Study

It is equally possible to argue that the very idea of a divide between theory and case studies is something less than factual, being rather an effect of a particular type of knowledge practice. This would redefine changing the (supposed) theory–case studies divide into an issue of present disciplinary politics rather than deferring the implications to an envisioned future. Indeed, this is the argument of the Japanese

cultural studies scholar Sakai Naoki in his critical examination of Asia and the humanities.

Inspired by Japanese sinologist and cultural critic Takeuchi Yoshimi's 1961 lecture on "Asia as Method," Sakai (2010) asks why Takeuchi's association of Asia with method at first sounds strange. His answer is that, in the humanities, method and theory are usually associated with the West or with Europe. Sakai then explores how this association emerged. Here, he highlights a complex historical entanglement between geopolitical imaginations and knowledge practices under modern colonialism. Through this entanglement, a relational notion of the West became equated with a self-reflective renewal of knowledge, the practice that came to be known as "theory." He also emphasizes that the emergence of the West-theory complex is profoundly dependent on its other "the Rest" of the world and Asia in particular.

In associating theory with the West, a distinction between two different kinds of knowledge practice also was created. At the time, European scholars were of course aware of the existence of knowledge making elsewhere. However, under the colonial regime, which saw the West as superior, knowledges found among the Rest were delegated to a position of what the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl called "anthropological type" (Sakai 2010: 441). Contrary to Western theory, such knowledge concerned only factual problems bound up with local circumstances. In contrast, the West was charged with organizing this factual knowledge and discovering general patterns. Moreover, the West bestowed upon itself a privileged ability to reflect upon and renovate method for the making of knowledge.

Especially important for my argument is Sakai's emphasis on the continuous transformation of these binaries. Neither the binary of West and Asia nor that of the two different types of knowledge exists as simple reality. Rather, they emerged from what Sakai calls an experience of "discontinuity," a sense of incommensurability akin to the disconcertment discussed by Law and Lin. Through the operation of what he calls the "microphysics of power relations," this discontinuity became embedded in the binary. However, Sakai also argues that there is a continuously widening gap between the conditions of academic practice and the divide between case studies and theory. As area studies and anthropology, which were traditionally in charge of collecting factual knowledge about the Rest, have undergone transformation, the "presumed division of intellectual labour has been eroded" (Sakai 2010: 456). For Sakai, the interesting question is therefore "how and why our essentialist insistence upon the putative unity of the West restricts us from acknowledging the dislocation of the West" (ibid.).

Now, STS is undoubtedly representative of the changing knowledge practices that have undermined the separation of the West from the Rest. For one thing, STS treats science, the archetype of theoretical knowledge in Sakai's sense, in terms symmetrical with non-Western knowledge practices of Husserl's anthropological type. Against this background, it seems quite ironic that Law and Lin's postcolonial STS reintroduces the divide as a dominant context.

Even so, the theory–case studies divide also remains rather persistent *within* the East Asian STS community. While there is significant diversity in styles and arguments, the aspiration to an "alternative Asian approach" is widely shared. Ever since Fu Dawie's (2007) inaugural paper in *EASTS*, the notion of a distinctively East Asian–flavored STS theory has repeatedly surfaced in this journal (e.g., Chen 2012; Anderson 2012).

Sakai seems to anticipate this kind of resurgence. He writes, “Precisely because the historical conditions for the separability of the West from the Rest are in the process of being undermined, I am afraid its distinction might well be emphasized all the more obsessively” (2010: 456). Yet, I wonder whether these are simply reactions to the collapse of a general distinction between the West and the Rest. For example, in the East Asian debate and related arguments (Zhan 2011), new Asian approaches are presented as not yet quite existing future possibilities. Thus, it is not only Law and Lin who see the alternative as a partially existing object that belongs to a possible future (Jensen 2010: 19–31). In other words, the aspiration seems less about reinforcing an older order of knowledge practice than about hopes for a changing orientation of knowledge (Miyazaki 2004).

Here, I suggest, it is important to push Law and Lin’s lateral movement one step further. What I have in mind is treating their yearnings for East Asian method as part of the empirical problem. Concretely, this means attending to the heterogeneity of STS (and social scientific) practices in various locations in Asia, because this may help a recursive exploration of how the aspiration for a distinctive Asian theory emerges in various forms. Moreover, it also means unpacking the shorthand of “postcolonial intellectual asymmetry.” This notion might work to lure Euro-American STS colleagues to the perplexing world called “non-West.” However, I hope this newly introduced diversity can operate as an additional context that destabilizes this generic notion and helps shed light on the perplexing fact that this very diversity continuously creates the craving for the distinctiveness of Asia. The generalization of postcolonial asymmetries can then be seen as the flipside of this insider’s dilemma and aspiration.

This is a tricky task that may well end up in an incoherent mess, but following Law and Lin, I will give a try.

4 Complexity

As Law and Lin have noted, it is not difficult to unpack “postcolonial intellectual asymmetries” or to find diversity within and across these regions. For example, none of Law and Lin’s bullet points about the “analytical-institutional complex” seem to apply directly to Japanese situations. Most of my colleagues, including some with European nationalities, were trained in Japan. They are not generally affiliated with any particular Euro-American theoretical approach unless they have developed personal friendships with Euro-American colleagues. Indeed, Japanese STS and anthropology have their own rich traditions even as they also share several important thoughts with other disciplines.² Takeuchi’s work exemplifies this point.

The seeming autonomy of Japanese anthropology and STS might be self-evident since Japan is another colonial empire, which colonized Taiwan for fifty years. However, if you turn to wider discussions, Japan is often seen as sharing postcolonial traits

² For example, the theory of practice developed by the Marxist philosopher and historian of technology Nakaoka Tetsuro (1970, 1974) represents such a shared tradition. His pioneering studies of work practice and sociotechnical heterogeneity in organizational and infrastructural processes have long served as a common legacy for these fields and even conditioned the initial Japanese understanding of ANT at the very early stage in the 1990s (Jensen and Morita 2012).

with its neighbors (Chen 2011; Fu 2007). The Taiwanese cultural theorist [Chen Kuan-Hsing \(2011\)](#) makes one of the clearest arguments about this topic. He argues that, despite its imperialism, the Japanese intellectual environment is also deeply conditioned by its colonial relation with the Euro-American world. And it is true that, despite its relative autonomy, Japanese scholars have been enthusiastic importers of Western social theories, a situation that has called forth mixed reactions from Japanese scholars ([Jensen and Morita 2012](#)).

Yet, it might be equally possible to locate complexity within the Taiwanese situation. Thus, Chen has pointed to significant changes brought about by inter-Asia cultural studies, a regional network of cultural studies. While Chen admits to major difficulties, he also remarks on the novel possibilities for “using Asia as an imaginary anchoring point [that] can allow societies in Asia to become one another’s reference points, so that understanding of the self can be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt” (2010: xv).

Chen’s initiative closely follows and critically updates Takeuchi’s “Asia as Method.”³ This lecture, which has gained recent international recognition, has two faces. As hinted by its attractive but ambiguous title, the lecture’s main message, that Asia can be a method, is difficult to grasp. Takeuchi saw Japanese modernity as an imitation of Western modernity, such that it could not be real. Apparently committed to the universal modern values, he claimed that

the Orient must change the West in order to further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced.

When this rollback takes place, we must have our own cultural values. And yet perhaps these values do not already exist, in substantive form. Rather I suspect that they are possible as method, that is to say, as the process of the subject’s self-formation. This I have called “Asia as method,” and yet it is impossible to definitively state what this might mean. (Takeuchi 2005: 165)

However, in addition to this mysterious method, which Takeuchi himself cannot define, the lecture hinted at some practical steps for reforming Japanese academia. Takeuchi particularly criticized the then predominant practice of comparing Japan and Europe. In this comparison, European cases were always invoked as the normative standard for evaluating the Japanese case. Takeuchi tries to circumvent this comparative effect by adding a third term: China. Thus, he argued that the Xinhai revolution of 1911 and the thought of Lu Xun, father of modern Chinese literature who studied in Japan and devoted himself to the Chinese revolution, embodied another mode of Asian modernity ([Murthy 2012, 2016](#)). In “Asia as Method,” he also promoted Asian studies in Japan as a way of multiplying the reference points of comparison. This is exactly the path pursued by Chen some forty years later and on a much larger, international scale.

In Japan, Takeuchi’s practical vision has become partly institutionalized. After some detours, it was partly realized as a new form of area studies led by the anthropologist Umesao Tadao and his colleagues. Resisting binary comparisons privileging the West, Umesao in 1958 developed a multilineal development theory in which each society develops in its own way based on its interactions with a unique environment

³ For critical examinations of Chen’s “Asia as Method” lecture, see [Sakai 2010](#) and [Chen 2010](#).

(Umesao 2003 [1958]). His project was institutionalized at the National Museum of Ethnology and the Graduate School of Asian and African Studies, Kyoto University.

Takeuchi's practical vision for reform was thus partially realized in Japan. Chen and Inter-Asia cultural studies seem to have accomplished such a realization on a larger scale with more innovative ways. These developments and emerging fields represent the overall change in the humanities that Sakai alluded to.

More than fifty years after Takeuchi's lecture, Asia as method thus seems already to be a part of our knowledge practices. Taking this as a context for understanding post-colonial intellectual asymmetries and the yearnings for a distinctive East Asian theory, we might be able to see these as politics not of the future but of the changing present.

5 Alterities, Future and Past

Sakai articulates the divide of theory and case studies as constantly emerging from the mess of present practice, and this also may apply to Asian theory. As I have noted, Law and Lin characterize a Chinese-inflected STS as a future possibility. It is a partially existing object that may generate pathways to a divergent future (Jensen 2010). In their article, most of this potential is premised on the alterity of Chinese medicine. The anthropologist Martin Holbraad takes alterity as the source for his recursive anthropology—what we may see as his version of the lateral move—and characterizes alterity as a problem that concerns the impossibility of representation: “The problem of alterity . . . is just the problem of nonsense: when even your best attempt to make sense of people's lives by representing them in terms you understand fails, you know you have hit upon it” (2012: xvi). In Law and Lin's lateral analysis, the elusiveness of Chinese medicine that does not fit conventional STS analytics provides the driving force for their postcolonial inflection of STS theory.⁴ Therefore, the main rationale behind engaging with alterity is therefore not to represent (or explain) it but rather to let it reconfigure its own framework. Similarly, the anthropologist Mei Zhan (2011: 123) has explored Daoism as entailing a “oneness” that offers “an immanent analytic of the human and the world.” Zhan, too, presents oneness as a future possibility for a new mode of engaging with the word, writing that “in spite of efforts to subsume the Daoist idea of oneness under Western thought or to turn it into no more than an object of study, it remains a critical analytic that does not succumb to the universalistic narrative of modern humanism. In oneness there is a possibility for us to think and live *with* rather than *within* the legacy of European intellectual tradition. Imagine that” (123). In both approaches, the alterity of a new method appears as something akin to Strathern's ethnographic moment. The innovation of method resides in the encounter with a perplexing alterity that refuses to fit the given framework but rather anticipates a new understanding presently beyond imagination.

However, assuming Takeuchi's Asia as method has already been partially realized, I propose that this alterity resides not only on the other side of the encounter, such as in the incomprehensible practices of Chinese medicine, but also on the side of our own practices. I wonder whether the persistent yearnings for a distinctive East Asian STS

⁴ In this sense, Law and Lin's argument seems in line with Holbraad's (2012) recursive anthropology.

stem less from the alterity of traditional knowledge than from something like Takeuchi's Asia as method, the East Asian scholars' struggle to transform academic fields. To substantiate this rather counterintuitive suggestion, I explore the trajectory of Takeuchi's Asia as method a bit further.

6 The Future That Never Happened

Takeuchi's ambiguous claim about Asia as method seems to stem from his deep commitment to a kind of alterity that he found in the history of Asianism in both Japan and China. While known as an expert on Lu Xun, Takeuchi also is known in Japan as the rare scholar who took Japanese Asianism seriously as social thought. Alongside the thought of Lu Xun, he located the possibility of an alternative modernity within this controversial intellectual current.

From the late nineteenth century until 1945, Asianism was one of the popular ideologies in Japan. Because of its complicity with Japanese imperialism, it was basically taboo after World War II until Takeuchi took it up in the 1960s (Takeuchi 2006 [1963]). While most scholars regarded Asianists as demagogues of imperialism, Takeuchi explored Asianism's potential as a social thought of pan-Asian solidarity.

Japanese Asianism originated in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (Jiyu-Minken Undo), a grassroots democratic movement in the late nineteenth century. Thus, it had originally aimed to link the processes of democratization in Japan, Korea, and China. Indeed, at the heyday of solidarity with Chinese revolutionaries, Japanese Asianists worked closely with Sun Yat-sen, believing that the Chinese revolution would significantly contribute to political reform in Japan.

Miyazaki Toten, who grew up as a young democratic activist, was the central figure of this movement. Under the influence of his older brother Yazo, Toten came to see the revolution in China as the only way to decolonize and democratize all of Asia and to bring true democracy to Japan. He engaged in various attempts to support and organize Chinese revolutionaries, and after meeting with Sun Yat-sen during his Japanese exile, he devoted most of life to supporting Sun's revolution (Nakajima 2014).

Toten's life was characterized by participation in various failed revolutionary attempts: He traveled to Siam to organize Chinese immigrants in the revolutionary movement; then, with Sun Yat-sen, he smuggled weapons to support the failed Philippine revolution. He also helped Sun organize a failed revolt in China in 1900. After these various failures, he became a *rokyokushi*, a performer of a then popular form of traditional narrative singing. He narrated the story of Sun's struggle for a Chinese revolution and also wrote an autobiography that featured his and Sun's struggle (Miyazaki 1902). Both gained wide audiences at the time, and the book was quickly translated into Chinese under the title *Sun Yat-sen*. Indeed, this book greatly contributed to the popularization of Sun, "father of the Chinese revolution," in China. After publication, Miyazaki kept working with Sun, and they founded the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance that played a central role in the Xinhai revolution. He himself supported the revolution from Japan and remained one of Sun's closest friends until his death in 1922.

In his critical examination of Japanese Asianism, Takeuchi (2006) discussed various Japanese activists and scholars who directly and indirectly became engaged in Sun

and Miyazaki's attempts. The profiles of these people vary enormously, including those of Okakura Tenshin, a cosmopolitan art historian who claimed the oneness of Asia; Toyama Mitsuru and Uchida Ryosaku, right-wing leaders who financially supported Sun and organized paramilitary activities in Korea and China; and Nakae Chomin, the intellectual leader of the Japanese liberal democratic movement, who also is known for translating Rousseau's *Social Contract* into Chinese, which was the common written language for both Chinese and Japanese intellectuals at the time.

Takeuchi's study was centrally preoccupied with how and why Asianists who found themselves in solidarity with Chinese revolutionaries turned to invasion. Around the time of Miyazaki's death, the alliances between the Chinese revolutionaries and the Japanese Asianists had already nearly collapsed under the mounting tension raised by Japan's colonial invasion of Manchuria. While Takeuchi could see older generations of the Asianists still stayed at least partially critical of the government's colonial policy, younger generations were becoming more concerned with justifying the invasion by emphasizing Japan's "historical role" of leading Asia. Takeuchi's question was thus finding the turning point from solidarity to invasion. He found, however, that solidarity and invasion were not easily separable even when Sun and the Japanese Asianists closely worked together.

In his engagement with Asianism, Takeuchi searched for the lost possibility of bringing about an alternative and noncolonial mode of modernity in Asia. By asking why Miyazaki's idealism had failed to gain influence, he was trying to see a future that never happened. His study was a retrospective investigation of the conditions under which solidarity might have overcome the invasive impulse of Japanese Asianism and brought about the pan-Asiatic revolution of which Sun and Miyazaki dreamed.

Takeuchi's exploration of Asianism resonated with his yearning for the indefinable Asia as method. What Takeuchi tried to see in the Asianist past was the stillborn possibility of Asia as method, an alternative "process of the subject's self-formation" that could have changed the history but never happened. He seemed to try to answer an unanswerable question.

7 Why "Asia as Method" Still Matters

The ambiguity of Takeuchi's "Asia as Method" seems to stem from his enduring interest in this unknowable possibility. "The process of the subject's self-formation" was simultaneously located in the future that Asia as method might bring about and in the past where the missed opportunity resided. There is an interesting parallel between this alterity and that of Law and Lin's Chinese-inflected STS, which also is not quite definable. While Takeuchi's Asia as method gains the driving force from this unknowable possibility of the past, Law and Lin's Chinese-inflected STS does so from the otherness that they see originating within traditional Chinese medicine.

Here I have suggested that alterity also might arise from the fact that Asia as method has already become a significant part of our knowledge practices. As [Chen \(2010\)](#) notes, introducing Asian societies as reference points for one another also entails a reorientation of knowledge from seeing the West as the inevitable future to finding open and yet unknown possibilities. Just as Umesao argued for multiple development paths based on socioecological idiosyncrasies, comparison is thus freed from the

normativity of an advanced West. At the same time, this inevitably introduces an alterity of the unknowable future. From a Japanese viewpoint, Takeuchi's interest in Asianism closely ties this unknown future with yet another stillborn future in the past, the missed chance of an alternative self-formation of Japanese subject by the solidarity with the Chinese revolution. Thus, I wonder whether the alterity that drives Law and Lin's approach might equally reside in new analytical-institutional complexes that partially embody Asia as method.

In this response, I have played with the complex web of contexts evoked by Law and Lin. Rather than imposing my interpretation on their story, I have tried to take the text as an artifact, a sort of bridge as it were, that binds together largely different contexts, both internal and external. By loosening the central hinge of this artifact, I have tried to release the internal tension of the text, with a view to adding yet more contexts. This endeavor is thus concerned with extending Law and Lin's bridge in several directions, including some that are not mutually comfortable.

It is my hope that the extension now bridges the audience at 4S Denver, the Taiwanese STS community, Dr. Lee, Japanese and Taiwanese cultural critics, the revolutionary-*rokyokushi*, Japanese right-wingers and socialists, and Sun Yat-sen. This messy web of contexts draws attention to the complex and noninnocent nature of the aspiration for an East Asian alternative. Guided by Takeuchi, it appears, at least to me, that the aspiration for an alternative Asian future is tied with the bloody past of Japanese Asianism, a context where invasion and solidarity cannot easily be distinguished. In the historical trajectory of Asia as method, the allurements of alterity *in method* resonates with missed opportunities for solidarity, a future that never happened, the future that Miyazaki and Sun might have dreamed of on the eve of the Xinhai Revolution.

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