

EDITORIAL

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Introduction: On Post-Western Sociology



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This thematic series of the *Journal of Chinese Sociology* is a part of an intense and successful scientific cooperation between Chinese and French sociologists since 2006. In 2012, Professor Li Peilin, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and I decided to jointly establish the International Associated Laboratory (LIA)¹ with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) of Lyon and the CASS. I suggested the name “Post-Western Sociology” for this collaboration as a process of circulation and co-production of knowledge between European and Chinese sociologies to pursue our shared reflection on non-hegemonic sociologies. Professor Li Peilin would have preferred another name as “post” is a fashionable prefix, and Post-Western Sociology could be interpreted as opposed to Western sociology. I did agree. Later in 2013, following intense discussions with Chinese professors Xie Lizhong, He Rong, Li Youmei, Liu Neng, Liu Yuzhao, Shen Yuan, Sun Feiyu, Qu Jingdong,...., and French professors Ahmed Boubeker, Agnès Deboulet, Christine Détérez, Michel Kokoreff, Michel Lallement, Danilo Martuccelli, Paula Vasquez, etc. We concluded that we could not find a better concept at this stage.

We started organizing how to define the meaning of Post-Western Sociology. All scholars involved agreed that Post-Western Sociology should not be confused with non-Western, de-Western, and anti-Western sociology. Professor Xie Lizhong put forward “Post-Western Sociologies,” referring to several sociological systems constructed by Western and non-Western sociologists. We, Chinese and French scholars, also shared fieldwork experiences in China and France, made it crystal clear in each step how Post-Western Sociology was different from Post-Colonial sociology, international sociology, and global sociology. It is meant to open an epistemological and multi-situated space where the circulation of concepts and theories prevents dichotomies between Western and non-Western knowledge. In recent years, we have invited international sociologists with a wealth of experience studying non-hegemonic sociologies to join us, including Professors Svetla Koleva (Bulgaria), Shujiro Yasawa and Yoshiyuki Yama (Japan), Kim Seung-Kuk, Han Sang-Jin and Shim Young-Hee (South Korea), and Sujata Patel (India).

¹The LIA is now called “the International Advanced Laboratory (IAL) ENS Lyon- CASS Post-Western Sociology in Europe and in China” since January 1, 2021. Professor Li Peilin, CASS Member and Director of the Academic Division of Law, Social and Political Studies of CASS (Beijing) and Professor Laurence Roulleau-Berger, Research Director at CNRS are the IAL’s co-directors.

Beyond the “East” and the “West”

Although the social sciences and particularly sociology may have been almost entirely monopolized by certain Western countries, they were born in Europe for the most part. However, for almost 20 years now, the Western world has lost its hegemony over the production of their paradigms (Wieviorka 2007), organized around two master narratives: the superiority of Western civilization (through progress and reason) and the belief in the continuous growth of capitalism. Some Western scholars supported the hypothesis of the marginalization of Eurocentrism and the weakening of European traditions in science. While scientific thought has been constructed as an element of Western societies, this phase in global sociological reasoning has challenged the conditions for creating universalizing and tautological accounts in Western social sciences. We can perceive a diversity of Westernisms—some more Eurocentric, others more Americanocentric—either merging or in tension. There is a diversity of Westernisms and semi-Westernisms; there is also a plurality of Easternisms and semi-Easternisms situated in different epistemic spaces and ordered into hierarchies according to differentiated political, historical, and civilizational contexts. To open a Post-Western Space means taking into account the “cosmopolitan turn in social science”—as Beck and Grande (2010) argued—where sociological cosmopolitanisms may be defined by radical openness and inclusiveness and where a plurality of narratives can exist. Westernisms form graduated, plastic, and moving hierarchies that rapidly become elusive. Therefore, it is vital to undo both Westernisms and Easternisms in order to reveal transnational spaces that bring into the light of day a tissue of knowledge that is still partially concealed and even—in some cases—invisible.

Post-Colonial studies were a major step forward in the production of sociological knowledge by displacing Eurocentrism, deconstructing binaries, and creating a narrative to include the multiplicity of world views in the social sciences; this, in turn, gave rise to Subaltern Studies through epistemologies from the “third-space” (Patel 2003). For over three decades, hegemonic Western thought has been subjected to critical reviews in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Arab world by intellectuals responding to Eurocentric fundamentalism and epistemic discrimination (Grosfoguel 2010). Western hegemonies also received criticism from non-Western and Westernized intellectuals living and working in the heart of the West. A considerable portion of post-colonial critique came from universities in the North. The “Westernization” and “de-Westernization” of knowledge have often gone hand in hand in showing that weapons against Western domination were manufactured in the Western empire (Brisson 2018). The political decline of colonial empires failed to recognize knowledge developed outside the “imperial” borders. According to Raewyn Connell (2019), the sociological canon was essentially formulated in the USA, where social science was viewed through an imperialist lens in the second half of the twentieth century. The institutional and academic dependency of certain researchers in the global South on Western social sciences encouraged the replication of theories conceived in the USA, Great Britain, France, and Germany. These mimetic processes have stymied reinterpretations, reformulations, and the production of knowledge in other societies, most notably in Asia.

Numerous avenues are leading to emancipation from Westernisms. For example, *Western Westernisms* are based on the awareness and use of non-hegemonic theories while keeping in mind that they cannot become hegemonic. Or *Reimagined*

Westernisms are produced by integrating fragments of non-hegemonic thinking while retaining epistemic frameworks derived from hegemonic frameworks. Alternatively, *Eastern Westernisms* are based on the co-production of hybrid thinking by means of strong emancipation from the processes of epistemic colonialization.

Post-Western Sociology proceeds from de-centering and the renewing of universalisms originated in different Eastern and Western spaces. Post-Western Sociology is, above all, relational, dialogue-based, and multi-situated. This positioning goes beyond Post-Colonial Studies, which could be understood as reinforcing hegemonic positions by means of a strong assertion of critical postures visible in the work of certain intellectuals from the Anglo-Saxon academic world. In Post-Western Sociology, a strong awareness of hegemonism serves to reveal transnational knowledge spaces in which the diversity of situated knowledge and shared or joint knowledge is rendered visible (Rouleau-Berger, 2016; Xie and Rouleau-Berger, 2017; Rouleau-Berger and Li, 2018).

Sujata Patel starts her article by recalling the long academic presence of sociology in India, dating back to over a century ago when the colonial government established India's first sociology department at Bombay University in 1919. In East Asia, Korea and Japan were undergoing partial and gradual Westernization processes for several decades. After the 1990s, Korean sociology merged Western theory with Korean reality. Kim (2014) introduced the new concept of *East Asianism*, the orientalizing of East Asia westernized through hybridized "Western" and "non-Western knowledge." In Japan, social sciences have formed dual continuities with the Western world and Japanese society. Nonetheless, the Westernization of Japanese society has contributed to maintaining and shrouding Japanese knowledge. In his article, Yosghiyuki Yama also describes how hybrid spaces of local knowledge linked to Confucianism in Japan's Edo period influenced contemporary sociology, most notably environmental sociology.

From 1949 to 1979, Chinese intellectuals could not participate in the development of sociology. This blank page in history produced a double invisibilization affecting both the knowledge produced in that period and before 1949. On a continental scale, Chinese sociologists have recreated and instilled new life into sociology (Li, Li and Ma, 2008). Since 1979, diverse Chinese sociology theories have been developed from different perspectives, attesting to a real internationalization of the discipline and the solidification of new boundaries. Chinese sociology developed epistemic autonomy before 1949 and since 1979 outside the dichotomy between the West and the non-West, the colonist and the colonized, outside Post-Colonial sociology (Li and Qu 2011). Therefore, contemporary Chinese sociologies constructed from conceptions of the process appear to be placed within a mosaic of situated and contextualized constructivisms. It is often against backgrounds of historical or civilizational contexts (Xie 2012).

In this edition, we offer a glimpse beyond the "East" and the "West" by opening the horizons to a wealth of self-directed narratives by societies worldwide, thus laying the foundations for a Post-Western space. This is a place where "Western" and "non-Western" sociologies can intersect and interact, forming shared divergent understandings of a myriad of *ethnoscapes* (Appadurai 1996).

Epistemic injustice and autonomy

Hegemonic thought in the history of social science was generated through a process of "epistemic injustice" (Bhargava 2013). Post-Western Sociology means to struggle

against any form of “epistemic injustice” by working towards displacement and constructing planes of epistemic equivalence between the conjunctive and disjunctive borders of knowledge. However, addressing epistemic injustice through a constructivist approach in the production of knowledge raises the question of epistemic autonomy. Epistemic autonomy entails the transition from an imposed set of standards and conventions to a new epistemological framework or the formulation of a new set of standards and conventions entirely.

In her paper, Sujata Patel presents two key figures in Indian sociology to raise the question of the indigenization of knowledge against a background of national indigenous and colonial modernity in an effort to overcome the binaries of Eastern/Western and tradition/modernity and produce “self-reflexive sociologies.” She analyzes the work of two Indian sociologists, M. N. Srinivas and A. R. Desai, who shaped the framework of sociology in India in the immediate post-independence decades. Patel argues that their scholarship can be linked to sociology’s legacy as anthropology in India and its embeddedness in the episteme of colonial modernity. According to Sujata Patel, Srinivas’s sociology is founded on an indigenous theory of social change based on the caste system, which he considered to produce social mobility. Srinivas’ three concepts—a dominant caste, Sanskritization, and Westernization—were perceived as civilizational attributes. While Srinivas introduced a civilizational perspective in the way of doing sociology, for example, he assigned a social and spatial meaning to an Indian village, Sujata Patel argues that recognizing the supposed attributes of Indian society revealed a form of theoretical captivity to the imperial narrative of modernity through the perspective of Indian society. This could be identified as a form of epistemic autonomy that is dependent on Westernisms.

Svetla Koleva examines the relationship between the colonization of knowledge and epistemic autonomy in a new light with a surprising paradox. She demonstrates that prior to 1989, under conditions of Marxist monoparadigmality, political and ideological pressure, sociologies in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were characterized by methodological rigor and conceptual innovation. By contrast, the dominant tendency after 1989—against the backdrop of the institutionalized plurality of paradigms—was to borrow methodologies and theories from the West without analyzing their epistemic relevance to the changing Central and Eastern European societies. Throughout the period between 1945 and 1989 being examined, Svetla Koleva identified two cognitive trends: *the internal segmentation of the Marxist epistemic area* and *the emergence of a post-Marxist epistemic space*. According to this author, conceptual creativity in the national sociologies of the countries under study is both a condition and an expression of these two tendencies: firstly by searching for concepts and theories to understand and explain the contradictions between the politically proclaimed project of socialism and the actual functioning of the then socialist societies (e.g., the Ossowski’s conception of “three types of social order,” the Nowak’s theory of “social vacuum,” the Roško’s theory of the “two working cycles,” the concepts of “second” society, economy, culture, network elaborated independently in different Central and Eastern European countries) and secondly by working together within the International Sociological Association in order to explain trends and processes common to societies regardless of their type of social formation through comparative analyses attentive to the peculiarities of each society.

Although these theories have not circulated in the academic spheres of Western sociology because of political barriers during the Cold War, the national and international experience of Central and Eastern European sociologists shows that the indispensable condition of possibility for the production of scientific knowledge remains the maintenance and enlargement of the spaces of epistemic autonomy. This is strongly endorsed by the development of sociology in China where the organization of intellectual discussions with Europe and the USA after 1979 spurred the development of spaces of epistemic autonomy in sociology.

Chinese sociology has reconstituted itself since 1980 (Li, Li and Ma, 2008; Roulleau-Berger, Guo, Li and Liu, 2008). While Chinese sociology was also marked by the Communist vision of the world, after 1979, we have observed an unpredictable epistemological pluriparadigmality caused in part through exchanges with Western sociologies. Chinese sociologists are familiar with the various schools of sociology in Western Europe and America; they both draw clear distinctions and mark the similarities between them—while at the same time withholding legitimacy from any one school. Indeed, considering that sociology as a discipline was born in the capitalist world, the sociology they produce is firmly rooted in the Chinese civilization of the past and the present, as well as in a series of affiliations, perspective shifts, and hybridizations with regard to North American and European sociologists. Chinese sociology has diversified by producing theoretical propositions based on the effect of Chinese civilization. They combine different structural processes, practical action, interactions, and subjectivities and may be differentiated by the individual status granted to each concept. In my article, through my understanding of the reinvention of Chinese sociology, I will distinguish different epistemic autonomies: *historic epistemic autonomy*, *alternative epistemic autonomy*, *local epistemic autonomy*, and *plural epistemic autonomy*.

In his article, Yosghiyuki Yama establishes a space for epistemic autonomy in Japanese sociology by creating a new Confucianism called *Kogaku*. This theory is born of a critical interpretation of Edo neo-Confucianism combined with *Nativism* to produce a form of Post-Confucianism. Yama then introduces the work of Norinaga, in which he establishes the relationship between waka poetry and feelings. This is considered a narrative theory that falls under social constructivism to describe disaster-affected communities and their process of emotional recovery. Social constructivism in Europe and America does not place much importance on feelings or their relationship to poetry. Thus, Yosghiyuki Yama has established an Eastern East space of epistemic autonomy.

The contributing authors in this thematic series help situate sociological traditions in time and space in order to encourage epistemological freedom and overcome the binaries of East/West, tradition/modernity, and universalism/indigenization. Thereby, they promote a dialectic and simultaneous approach across different modes between legacies linked to epistemic injustices and forms of epistemic autonomy situated in plural spaces and temporalities.

Sociological imagination and Post-Western assemblages

In this thematic series, Xie Lizhong and I outline analogous conceptions of Post-Western sociologies. Their perspectives broaden the epistemological horizons where the borders of “established” sociologies are erased to make way for more inclusive ideas,

both in local societies and in an increasingly blended but exclusive global world. These two approaches shed light on the epistemic assemblages between different international sociologies that are part of the post-Westernization of social sciences.

Li and Wei (2018) considered “Post-Western Sociology” as neither a weapon to deconstruct the hegemony of Western discourse in the post-colonialist discourse nor the further “ideologicalization” in the concept of “East.” Instead, they attempt to construct a sociological knowledge system beyond the binary opposition of the West and the non-West. In his article, Xie Lizhong presents a similar perspective by classifying the indigenous sociologies developed in a non-Western country like China into four possible types: “object-transformed indigenization,” “supplemented-modified-renewed indigenization,” “theoretical substitution indigenization,” and “theoretical-methodical substitution indigenization.” All except the last, which falls under the category of “non-Western sociologies,” fail to uncouple their relationship from Western research traditions. Xie Lizhong demonstrates in his classification of indigenous sociologies that processes of transformation, reinterpretation, overlapping, distancing, and ignorance inform spaces of epistemic autonomy and transnational assemblages of knowledge. It is impossible to identify the same types in Western countries as the circulation of knowledge from non-Western sociologies to indigenous Western sociologies is a recent phenomenon.

Sujata Patel addresses epistemic assemblages by illustrating that A. R. Desai’s Marxist posture aligns well with European Marxist theories in its critique of capitalist exploitation. But she also notes that A.R. Desai was confronted by the limits of Marxism in his sociology, which failed to unravel the caste-class linkages that organized the Indian “social” which was embedded in Indian nationalism; notwithstanding Desai’s contribution through his emphasis on the introduction of capitalism by the colonial power, he also reproduced the colonial episteme by default.

In his article, Yoshiyuki Yama produces “hybrid sociology” through assemblages of knowledge that blend Durkheim’s sociology, Japanese Confucianism, and narrative sociology. More to the point, he introduced the sociology of rituals and narratives, bringing together the ritualism of the Confucian philosopher Ogyu Sorai, the narrative theory of nativist scholar Motoori Norinaga, and Durkheim’s sociology of religion.

In my paper, I describe an ecology of knowledge in the *Western-West*, the *non-Western West*, the *semi-Western West*, the *Western East*, the *Eastern East*, and the *re-Easternized East* situated on an epistemological continuum. I introduce the idea of the de-multiplication, the complexification, and the hierarchization of new epistemic autonomies vis-à-vis Western hegemonies in sociology and new epistemic assemblages between European and Asian sociologies (Roulleau-Berger 2016, 2018). On the one hand, I discuss several theoretical heritages in Western sociology and their forms of circulation and appropriation in Asia. On the other, I consider Confucian heritage as an Eastern one and examine how it is revisited today in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean sociology to produce epistemic autonomy or new epistemic assemblages. It means to be inscribed in a dynamic theoretical space where concepts and theories are not static but always circulating from one epistemological/geographical space to another. It is also a way to argue, as postured by Xie Lizhong, that Western sociologies do apply to Western and non-Western societies, and non-Western sociologies do apply to Western and non-Western societies.

In Post-Western Sociology, we are producing an ecology of knowledge where diverse forms of knowledge may interact, articulated through cosmovisions, as well as emancipatory and creative practices (Pleyers 2011). Post-Western Sociology is developing in a continuum of assemblages, tensions, and the cross-pollination of different segments from this ecology of knowledge. In her paper, Svetla Koleva reminds us whether sociological practices are viewed as “relationships of equivalence” in the Post-Western space of knowledge. Her question embraces important epistemological challenges concerning context as an epistemic variable and contextualization as a research procedure.

To define the production process of this ecology of knowledge, Xie Lizhong places greater emphasis on the steady rise and varying level of intensity of the hybridization process between indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge. I am calling attention to the simultaneity of different forms of spaces of epistemic autonomy and theoretical pollination in the co-presence of differently situated sociologies. While the processes of cross-pollination and hybridization are particularly manifest in non-Western sociologies, Western sociologies are only slowly integrating situated knowledge produced by other intellectual, scientific, and cultural traditions.

Author's contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Declarations

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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