

## Postface

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Among relentless literature today questioning the imbalance in knowledge production between different regions in the world, the *Handbook Post-Western Sociology: From East Asia to Europe* appears particularly innovative in its approach and the comparativism in theories and case studies. In this postface, I would like to show how this handbook is timely and resonates with my agenda as a president of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in connecting different traditions of sociology in order to forge a sort of a global sociology. A sociology that has three principles of *positionality*, *comparativism*, and *mild universalism*; a sociology that formulates criticism of some aspects of postcolonial discourse in some regions<sup>1</sup> and my call for *Sociologies in Dialogue* (Hanafi and Yi 2020) or dialogical sociology (Hanafi Forthcoming)

The handbook took us on a journey of crosscutting themes (social stratification, labor sociology, migration, gender, family, individualism, etc.) well thought out through research that carried out mostly by senior scholars who are capable of producing critical and epistemological reflection on paradigms that directed these themes. One will certainly enjoy reading them and particularly about Eastern Asia societies, research that is not always visible outside this region. The confrontation between theories coming from East Asia with western theories is the fruit of longstanding collaborations between French and Easter Asian scholars culminated in this wonderful edited volume of Laurence Roulleau-Berger, Li Peilin, Kim Seung Kuk and Shujiro Yazawa but with their previous work as well. This volume is not only theorizing Post-Western Sociology but providing many concrete contributions to how this sociology should be. As Laurence Roulleau-Berger clearly defines in this volume, Post-Western Sociology is several sociological systems constructed by Western and non-Western sociologists (not separately but together) and thus it should not be confused with non-Western, de-Western, and anti-Western sociology. This is why the handbook has two categories of authors thinking jointly and contrasting their reading to their society with the other societies: one located in the global north and the second interesting located in the global south and particularly East Asia.

This is a substantive difference from postcolonial studies that are actually produced often by the global North even with the contribution of those who are originally from the global South. From

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<sup>1</sup> While the importance of considering the impact of coloniality in the past is still salient today, the use of postcolonial studies is not without certain conceptual challenges. I will identify three of them before discussing them together: the way different contradictions within societies have been understood, the overemphasis on external factors with the simultaneous neglect of local ones, and the antagonistic logic of categories such as empire/colony, East/West, and universalism/contextualism. (Hanafi 2019; 2020) Having said that, France academia needs to acknowledge the scars of the colonial era in knowledge production.

South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, often from well-to-do families with political connections, many migrated to metropolitan universities. They subscribed to, what Hussein Omar<sup>2</sup> called a “big bang” theory that no resistance had existed before them. In contrast, post-sociology is produced by scholars who are located in both the global South and North. Post-Western Sociology stood above the crude idea that ideas were dependent on the person delivering them. An equation between what one knows and what one is that even Edward Said had always opposed. Post-sociology’s knowledge is thus evaluated based on its heuristic value and not the location of its emergence.

This volume accommodates theoretical hybridization but also some local theoretical orientations, as we see with the contribution of Kim Seung Kuk (from South Korea) (in this volume) who theorizes solipsist and spiritualist individualism and the middle way for love or with the contribution of Akira Kurihara (from Japan), whose theory of identity of tenderness elucidates contradictions in the reproduction process of personal identity and society at large, namely how this dysfunction of identity formation generates the mentality of tenderness which is opposed to values of productivism. We are sufficiently surprised how convergent the analysis of different societies on specific issues that rightly gathered under the same chapter. For instance, in Chapter 5, Louis Chauvel’s sociology of social stratification, where “occupational classes” based on jobs cannot be understood without a context of wealth-based domination in the west, resonates with LI Chunling’s analysis of the wealthization driven by housing wealth inequality in China, despite the importance of rural population in this country compared to the western countries. Sometimes the contrast is more substantial like in the chapter of Kazuhiro Kikutani comparing the French Dreyfus Affair with a similar affair in Japan, the Taigyaku Affair. He labels sociology in Japan as without Society: “Unlike in Zola’s France, in Nagai’s Japan there was no awakening of an individual’s creativity, no ordinary people in pursuit of liberty and art, and no people who confronted the state to win these. This means that Japan had been unable to produce the soil, namely, society.” But more contemporarily, gender and family are two sites of the sharp contrast between western societies and other ones. JI Yingchun’s chapter on “Changing Gender Dynamics and Family Reinstitutionalization in Contemporary China” offers a great insight into China’s mosaic modernity and how it is impacted gender and family relationships in an also mosaic way. While it is universal today to reduce gender inequality, gender boundaries have contrasting meanings depending on the society. For family, me too I find such strong contrast between the West and the Arab World today. Many Arab sociologists argue in favor of considering the family as a very salient social structure and are not ready to dilute it as this is the case in the West. (Hanafi 2020)

Post-western sociology took its importance with the emergence of many works on the sociology of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) where new East-South assemblages have been established outside the classical dichotomy of North-South. [See for instance, (Li, Gorshkov, and Scalon 2013) and (Dwyer et al. 2018)].

Like the global sociology, Post-western sociology acknowledges the importance that a declaration of the *positionality* of its authors that must include everything related to their

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/unexamined-life-omar>.

biographies and varying geographies that may affect their vision in relation to this sociology and to the "sociological tradition" into which one has been socialized during one's studies. I would praise how French scholarship in this volume whose authors add clearly positionality of their knowledge production by adding a geographical marker in the title of their contributions in this volume, something not often done in French sociology, as I studied empirically with a sample of journal articles and books produced in France. (see (Hanafi 2022))

Finally, in my scholarship, as someone who grew up in an authoritarian state (Syria), I am aware of how social knowledge production has been produced with many unspoken issues because of (self) censorship. Where did knowledge production in a country like Syria go wrong? Did the problem really stem from using the tools and theories elaborated by sociologists such as Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons? Or was it a result of intellectual self-censorship, in an effort to manage the repressive state taboos? This is why sociological research omits any reflection of political economy and the nature of tyranny. The eternal question of "who writes history," which has long occupied postcolonial scholars, has been directed not only to the victorious colonialists but also to authoritarian regimes.

Let me finish by wishing long life to such conceptualization of Post-western sociology. I am sure it will find its paths in academic fields worldwide.

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