

# The Stickiness of Knowing: translation, postcoloniality and STS<sup>1</sup>

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16<sup>th</sup> November 2016: LawLin2016EASTSReply18.docx

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Warwick Anderson, Ruey-lin Chen, Judith Farquhar, Daiwie Fu, María Guzmán-Gallegos, Marianne Lien, Annemarie Mol, Atsuro Morita, Knut Nustad, Heather Swanson, Ying-Chun Tsai, Chi-ling Wu, and Rur-Bin Yang for discussion and comment. Wen-yuan Lin would also like to thank Taiwanese Ministry of Science and Technology for its support of projects on alternative knowing spaces in Chinese Medical practices.

‘A language, a culture, or a thought, in its divergence, furnishes other engagements with (another glimpse of) the unthought. And its fecundity is measured by the power of this engagement and this glimpse.’ (Jullien: 2014, 154)

## Opening Comments

‘Provincialising STS’ is one essay in a short continuing line of practical intellectual experiments which seek to explore the character of a possible Chinese-inflected STS.<sup>2</sup> These experiments are partial, location-specific, incomplete, and necessarily fit more or less poorly with standard disciplinary boundaries. They also raise serious problems of terminology and level of analysis (‘Chinese’? ‘Western’?) Unsurprisingly reactions have been varied. Sometimes well received, they have also been seen as wrong-headed, unscholarly, dangerous, mystifying, offensive, weird, or simply uninteresting. We are therefore deeply grateful to Warwick Anderson, Rueylin Chen, Judith Farquhar, Atsuro Morita and to the Editors of EASTS for their attention to the issues we are seeking to raise, the generosity of their comments, and their willingness to continue to think collaboratively about the possibilities implied by ‘Asian’, ‘postcolonial’, ‘Chinese’, and/or ‘Taiwanese’ forms of STS. We are also grateful that they let us down gently when we go astray. Warwick Anderson correctly implies that the essay is not well located in important parts of the postcolonial literatures. Rueylin Chen appropriately warns that Western STS authors should not be encouraged, even implicitly, to ignore the work of their Asian colleagues. Judith Farquhar is right to note the limits to our knowledge of the rich history and contemporary practices of Chinese medicine. And Atsuro Morita is generous in choosing to treat the tensions in the paper between the ethnographic moment of disconcertment and so-called ‘postcolonial intellectual asymmetry’ as an occasion for a further and illuminating experiment of his own.

In effect, all four commentators are gently reminding us that the topics that we explore are much more complex than the manner in which we open them up. So we are rightly reminded: that histories (including academic histories) are different in the different East Asian countries; that the term ‘Chinese’ is an endlessly ambiguous marker; that the Chinese language is heterogeneous; that Chinese medicine indeed comes in many different forms; that ‘West’/‘East Asia’ dualist divisions are misleading in many ways, but not least because there is a long and continuing history of complex power-saturated interchanges between the West and East Asia; that ‘the West’ itself is scarcely a homogeneous category; that Taiwanese daily experience is not always so unlike that of Europe or North America; that the issue of temporalities, a crucial feature of postcolonial encounters, is in urgent need of exploration; and that in STS the division between theory and case study is not simply problematic but has also been extensively problematised. Some of these complexities are foregrounded in ‘Provincialising STS’. For instance, we worry about the difficulty of using such terms as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Western’, and also the extreme difficulty of avoiding terms such as these that are aggregating and binarising. But if we discuss some of the complexities raised by the commentators, more often we set these to one side, sometimes explicitly but sometimes not.

To say this is not to deny that there are also disagreements. Most obviously, the way in which we imagine STS differs from the vision offered by Rueylin Chen on, for instance, the issue of language and translation. Far less than Chen do we take it that words and theories or theory versions can be detached from the practices in which they are embedded and moved elsewhere. We share his view that concepts are unlikely to be ‘national’: this is one of the larger terms that we have indeed sought to avoid.<sup>3</sup> However, our approach to STS assumes that words are embedded within, grow out of, and

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<sup>2</sup> By this we intend an STS that draws on Chinese (huá wén, 華文), or more specifically a Han Chinese (hàn yǔ, 漢語), intellectual legacy, rather than a Chinese national (zhōng guó, 中國) STS. For details of these experiments see Law and Lin (2011), Lin and Law (2014), Law and Lin (2015), Lin (2016, published online before print) and Law and Lin (2016).

<sup>3</sup> In part this because we do not wish to imply support for projects of intellectual (including Chinese) nationalism.

participate in, practices. In our work we therefore usually seek to grasp the character of those practices.<sup>4</sup> This way of thinking suggests that terms unavoidably carry their own only partially negotiable social and intellectual baggage: that they are, in other words, more or less ‘context-sticky’. If this is right, then a whole series of questions follows. How to detect and think about that baggage? Which parts to carry and which to abandon? How to think about and handle the power relations that they imply? How to think about the ways in which the latter set limits to the conditions of possibility for translation? And what if anything might be done to alter those conditions? We touch on these questions in ‘Provincialising STS’ and again below, working in a context that has been shaped by anthropologists, postcolonial scholars and activists who have been thinking about such issues for many decades.<sup>5</sup> How, for instance, to translate a word such as hau – a term that has indeed helped to rework the conceptual architecture of anthropology and more recently of STS?<sup>6</sup> Or meacci, a term which means something a little like ‘landscape’ in Sámi, but when so translated is both seriously misleading and politically damaging.<sup>7</sup> Or shi (勢)? The overall lesson is that translations are simultaneously sites of judgement and locations of continuing, power-saturated struggle.

### STS, Shi and Context

In the case of shi the web of associations and practices that this term indexes fits strangely into ‘EuroAmerican’ contexts, practices, and patterns of thinking.<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, in attempts at dictionary translation the term emerges in many different ways into West European languages such as English or French. Indeed François Jullien devoted an entire book on its associations.<sup>9</sup> But, as Jullien also suggests (see the citation above), if a language hosts the possible horizons of thought, then its divergences from other languages may point to possible ‘unthoughts’;<sup>10</sup> in which case shi (勢) indexes a way of living and knowing foreign to, but potentially productive for, EuroAmerican traditions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The focus on practice is central to EuroAmerican STS. Our particular understanding draws, in particular, on actor-network theory and feminist material semiotics. See, for instance, Latour (1987) and Haraway (1997).

<sup>5</sup> The literatures here are very long, but Malinowski (1922 [1950]), and Mauss (1991 [1954]) are classics. Strathern (1992), Viveiros de Castro (2004) and Descola (2006) have laid out the intellectual territory for contemporary debates. See also Henare *et al.* (2007), de la Cadena (2015), and van de Port and Mol (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Anderson (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Mazzullo and Ingold (2008).

<sup>8</sup> In what follows we use the term ‘EuroAmerican’ (borrowed and adapted from Strathern) as a shorthand for English-inflected North American and West European academic practice and, more particularly the practice of STS. The argument is therefore both linguistic and institutional. We choose our words carefully because there are other West European languages at play in STS, and in some cases these have been profoundly significant. Both poststructuralism and actor-network theory were, for instance, French and French-language creations, and there are real linguistic and conceptual differences between the European languages. For instance, the French term ‘agencement’, widely used by Deleuze and important to poststructuralism and to STS, translates poorly into ‘assemblage’ in English where process gives way to thingness, noun, or object. There is also a growing body of STS-influenced work on the analytical significance of European language differences. See, for instance, the analysis of ‘eating’ (van de Port and Mol: 2015) which is linguistically fairly different in Brazilian Portuguese, the Dutch term ‘lekker’ which translates poorly into English (Mol: 2014), and the idea of ‘Western food’ which comes into being not in Europe but in Guatemala (Yates-Doerr and Mol: 2012). All these reservations noted, the English language together with its increasingly North American-inflected academic contexts is the most widespread idiom/institutional setting for STS in both North America and West Europe.

<sup>9</sup> Jullien (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Jullien (2014). While we share concerns with and draw insights from Sinologists, such as Jullien, and Hall and Ames, our approach is different. Their commentaries are more general, and often rest on a philosophical analysis of texts. Though we also make use of texts and cannot entirely avoid generality, our primary concern is to explore specific and located practices.

<sup>11</sup> Many observers have made related claims. For one example see Hall and Ames (1995).

So what follows from this observation in practice? It may be that our STS experiments with this term are simply infertile. But even if this is not the case, then how they might be conducted is certainly a matter of (power-diffracted) struggle. What to try to carry with the term? Where to try to do the recrafting? What to leave behind? And why? These are issues that will trouble any such endeavour, and to which we briefly return below. However, one thing is certain. If it is to work at all then the contexts and practices, whether Chinese- or English-language, that surround the term will need recrafting. No doubt (and we return briefly to this thought below) that reworking will need to extend to the very notions of 'context' and 'practice' (though we cannot discuss the latter here). But, and to state the obvious, any such reworking will not be easy. An English language STS that took shi (勢) seriously would necessarily betray many of the ways in which the term is embedded in (for instance) Chinese medicine. Analogously, it would also mean betraying some of the current conventions of EuroAmerican STS. What, for instance, would count as evidence? What would such evidence look like? What would 'the empirical' become? Again we briefly return to these questions below, but these might look very unlike the already contested conventions embedded in EuroAmerican STS. One thing, however, is clear. Whatever emerged from such experiments would necessarily be a crafted hybrid, simultaneously connected with and disconnected from both its 'Chinese' origins on the one hand, and contemporary EuroAmerican STS on the other. To use the term proposed by Atsuro Morita, the notion would have the status of a hinge between reshaped contexts, contexts that have in the past customarily been held apart. Perhaps, indeed, this is implied in Judith Farquhar's suggestion that shi (勢) might be treated as 'situated dispositions of power/knowledge', a proposal that can be seen as reflecting not only the language of Michel Foucault, but also both a Chinese Legalist reading of the term, and the way it is used by Sun Tzu in The Art of Warfare.<sup>12</sup>

So as Morita observes, contexts are crucial. The issue, then, is: which contexts to articulate? Morita fascinatingly shifts the context of alterity by evoking Japanese colonial history and Takeuchi Yoshimi's review of Asianism. At the same time, as he also appreciates, the term 'context' indeed carries its own baggage. In the EuroAmerican tradition the search for context is chronic, motivating a never-finished search to remedy the possibly incomplete character of whatever it is that is described, is present, or is said to be self-evident.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless (or perhaps therefore), each profession has its own conventions for proper contextualisation and corrigibility, and STS is no exception, with its forms of evidence (often the 'case study') and its preferred theoretical idioms. So, for instance, in STS we tend to visit field sites and archives, write empirically-founded qualitative accounts which draw on these, cite from within a somewhat common canon of recent EuroAmerican STS and social theoretical practitioners, and frame what we write in terms of particular idioms such as social interest, network, affect or embodiment. The present exchange conforms to this. Should we be oriented to the past or to the future? To an 'East Asian', a 'postcolonial' or a 'Chinese-inflected' STS? Are we staging an encounter between theory and case study? Or about the role of alterity, ethnographic encounter and the politics of theoretical displacement? Or, indeed, the location of alterity? These are some of the questions on the table. And as we make our different arguments at the same time we all necessarily make our contexts and offer our own particular prescriptions. Looked at in this way the issues are always: what are appropriate ways of contexting? where are they appropriate? how are they constrained? and for what purpose or purposes, or why?

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, ancient Chinese Legalist Han Fei Tzu (韓非子) proposes that law, strategy and propensity are the necessary trio for being a powerful ruler (Han Fei Tzu: 1964). And some parts of Sun Tzu also follow this path. For example:

'It is the nature of logs and boulders that on the flat ground, they are stationary, but on steep ground, they roll.... Thus, that the propensity of the expert commander in exploiting his men in battle can be likened to rolling round boulders down a steep ravine thousands of feet high says something about his propensity. (Sun Tzu: 1993); we have changed the translation of shi (勢) from 'strategic advantage' to 'propensity'.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Strathern (1991).

## ‘Provincialising STS’, Context and Style

As Atsuro Morita observes, in ‘Provincialising STS’, we talk (perhaps too quickly) of an ‘analytical-institutional context’. Our concern in that paper was to push against what we take to be the contextual inertia of the contemporary EuroAmerican academic system – a set of arrangements that we suggest is also being reproduced in important respects in Taiwan. Our argument is that these arrangements work to reproduce particular modes of knowing whilst displacing others. At this point caution is needed. Power-saturated though they may be, we are not suggesting that such EuroAmerican academic ways of knowing are devoid of merit.<sup>14</sup> Neither is the argument that we want to make one that is general. (There is, to be sure, no ‘general’: everything is located.) This means that in ‘Provincialising STS’ our concern is quite specific: it is to experiment with a possible Chinese-inflected STS in particular Chinese- and English-language contexts. But how to create spaces in which this is possible or thinkable?

To do this we thought it important to find ways of reducing the self-evidence of North American institutionalised academic forms and practices. Here Atsuro Morita’s diagnosis is correct. The initial context for ‘Provincialising STS’ was EuroAmerican and predominantly North American – the Denver 2015 annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science. In this context Law chose to talk of postcolonial symmetry in the hope that the notion of symmetry, a term important in the disciplinary history of STS, might attract the interest of an audience some of whose members might have little exposure to postcoloniality. How well this worked is uncertain, and in any case audiences are diverse. In Denver some from outside EuroAmerica or with backgrounds in postcolonial or decolonial studies shared the reservations mentioned by Atsuro Morita in the present exchange, finding the binary West/Rest divide overdrawn. Or, like Rueylin Chen and Morita, they did not recognise our characterisation of their national higher education systems. Or, again, they were concerned about the gendering implied in some Chinese language practices for knowing. Obviously we take responsibility where this broad-brush approach was inappropriate, but at the same time we also appreciated that task of making space for experiments in a Chinese-inflected STS was never going to be easy. This is because, as we implied above, it is not just words that are ‘context-sticky’ but modes of knowing too. Indeed, we touched on this in ‘Provincialising STS’ when we wrote:

‘to think well about postcolonial forms of STS the discipline will need to think simultaneously about theory and empirical research and subjectivities and materialities, but also about some pretty matter-of-fact, not to say crass, institutional practicalities.’

This was one of the core points that we wanted to press home at the Denver meeting. But how, then, to think about and resist the stickiness of knowing?

One response is to ask an STS-inflected question: what is entailed in knowing, and what are the contexts that provide for knowing? The paragraph above – and indeed any such exploration of the character of contexts – suggests how this might be done within the idiom of EuroAmerican STS: it becomes a matter of understanding the practices that make up what we might think of as ‘knowing spaces’<sup>15</sup>; and of exploring and characterising the constraints and affordances, institutional, practical, material, conceptual, stylistic, normative, epistemological and ontological, embedded in those spaces. We have worked in this way elsewhere in an idiom that therefore conforms with the

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<sup>14</sup> We try to note this carefully in the extended paper on shì (勢). Any argument about the need to change ways of knowing needs itself to be specific and contexted. If as some have suggested, we are entering a ‘post truth’ era in North American and European political discourse, then the possible disadvantages in many Northern contexts of quickly abandoning the modes of knowing broadly associated with the Western academy are self-evident. And, as Rueylin Chen implies, there may also be reasons for holding onto these in the academy in a country such as Taiwan. Quite differently, it is important to note that there are also many interesting and experimental ways of knowing within or adjacent to the EuroAmerican academy.

<sup>15</sup> Law (2016, in the press), and Lin (林文源: 2015 ; 林文源: 2016).

major conventions of EuroAmerican STS<sup>16</sup>, and versions of this strategy have shaped the present exchange up until this point. Thus as we have noted above, Atsuro Morita productively recontextualises alterity in the alternative context of the history of Japanese social thought, and we have responded in similar style. But as we have also suggested, the notion of context carries its own EuroAmerican baggage: the sensibility that whatever is being discussed is incomplete and in potential need of remedial contextual supplement. Productive though this strategy is, it also rests on a very particular conceptual habit, that of dividing whatever is of interest from its explanatory background. It works, that is, by locating the object of interest. As we have implied, there is much to be said for this strategy of location, but it is scarcely universal. Indeed, and to come to the point, thinking through shi (勢) works quite differently. It does not first distinguish objects or things in their incompleteness, and then seek to rearticulate them by contextual means. Though it is not clear what a non-contextual STS might look like, the likelihood is that any such creature will breach many of the conventions of EuroAmerican STS. And this, indeed, is exactly the kind of issue that we are seeking to explore as we experiment with a shi (勢) inflected STS. Accordingly, to conclude this response we offer a flavour of what we are attempting by touching on two of these experiments. The first concerns a particular set of practices in Taiwanese Chinese medicine. Here the focus is on what is lost in translation if we use apparently appealing STS vocabularies of analysis in a Chinese context. The second puts aspects of the UK's 2001 foot and mouth epidemic in dialogue with features of shi (勢). The latter experiment is bolder both because it uses a Chinese term to think about a Western case, and because it potentially leads to a style of analysis quite unlike that of contemporary Western STS.

### Thinking from Shi (勢): or lost in translation

Dr Hsu is a popular and doubly licensed Chinese medical doctor. He publishes English-language SCI papers on Chinese medicine, finds ways of helping cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and has modified a traditional herbal complex formula into an herbal Kuan-Sin Yin decoction to work against qi deficiency in cancer patients. In addition, he organises patients' associations so that those with cancer can support one another, leads them to Buddhism and teaches patients that living with cancer is a karmic reward. All of these are ways of supporting right qi for patients in order to alleviate the vicious circle of physical, medical, social and spiritual deterioration.<sup>17</sup>

Dr Hsu seems to work very hard as he moves between bodily corporeality, medical materiality, human sociality, and the spiritual or religious. At the same time, he is clear that he simply seeks to follow the propensity of things:

'I just follow the nature of things (shùn qí zì rán, 順其自然).... When predestined relations come together (yīn yuán jù zú, 因緣俱足) things just happen. My CM career, PhD work, Buddhism, the Kuan-Sin Yin, group, lectures and the association are all the same. Everything including the patients leads me forward.'

So what to make of this? How to understand what is happening in STS terms?

One way of responding to these questions is to note there are commonalities between Dr Hsu's clinical and research practice, and the theoretical vocabularies of material-semiotic STS. Thus his approach is arguably relational, process-oriented, heterogeneous and situated. Clearly, then, the vocabulary of material semiotics conveniently catches and translates at least some important

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<sup>16</sup> So, for instance (and putting on one side for a moment the difficulties of binary generalisation) it becomes possible to point to some fairly consistent differences between particular traditional Chinese practices of authority, apprenticeship with their emphasis on the located character of what is known, and the corresponding and very different understandings embedded in and carried by EuroAmerican forms of higher learning.

<sup>17</sup> See Lin (2016, published online before print) for details and discussion of Dr Hsu's practice.

features of Dr Hsu's practice. But while this translation has its merits, it is also asymmetrical. CM terms are being translated into a quite different Western theoretical vocabulary. Something is being lost – or distorted – in translation so we are also witnessing a process of asymmetrical mistranslation. The issue then is how do we want to translate? Or, since any translation is also a necessary mistranslation, how do we want to mistranslate?<sup>18</sup> Where do we want to bend STS terms of theory on the one hand, and those of shi (勢) on the other? How? And to what purpose? We can sense the flavour of the issues that arise if we look briefly at the four terms listed above.

- Relationality? Yes, Dr Hsu's practice is relational, but CM's relations are not simply material-semiotic: they are also expressions of shi (勢). Dr Hsu's practices reflect and express the tendencies, inclinations, dispositions, balances, and countermanding movements of rebalancing implied by the term. But all these disappear if we simply talk of relationality in a material-semiotic mode. As is obvious, this is a substantial mistranslation.
- Process? Here the issue is which should have priority: position or passage? Western intellectual practices may be changing but, as we have just suggested, they first tend to prioritise position and thing, before turning to the question as to how these relate and offering a contextual account of those relations. Thinking from shi (勢) is different. Nothing exists in and of itself. Everything is changing, ebbing and flowing, and balancing and rebalancing. There is, to repeat the point, no framing context. For Dr Hsu's CM each moment of movement is different, and each intervention correspondingly becomes a one-off moment of rebalancing. Most of this specificity is lost if we talk of 'process' in a material-semiotic mode. This, then, is a second mistranslation.
- The STS term, heterogeneity, poses similar problems because the idea that things are different in kind is foreign to CM. For instance, for Dr Hsu Buddhism and the decoction go together: they both support right qi for the patient. Perhaps differences in kind are also foreign to material semiotics. Bruno Latour indeed writes that: 'Nothing is, by itself, the same as or different from anything else.'<sup>19</sup> But even this much more promising form of words doesn't catch what is implied if we think from shi (勢). This is because the latter attends to specific forms of transformability. So, for instance, for Dr Hsu disease, decoction, patient associations and Buddhism are all continually changing, and 'the same' herbs work in different ways in different complex formulae. To translate this working of disposition and propensity as 'heterogeneity' is once again to mistranslate.
- And finally situatedness. There is no question that knowing is radically situated for both material semiotics and Dr Hsu's CM. But for the latter, situation – for instance in the creation and modification of decoctions – again relates to the specificity of shi (勢), dispositions, and particular displacements. This indeed, is what a situation is: the working of shi (勢), of propensities. But there is no hint of this in STS's 'situatedness' which usually works to return us once again to one particular context or another. Once again the term is an asymmetrical mistranslation of a EuroAmerican STS term that does quite different work in an alternative explanatory tradition. Our argument, then, is that for Dr Hsu the contours of knowing from shi (勢) elude the material semiotic language of STS.

Does this mistranslation matter? The answer is that it depends. If the concern were simply to extend the explanatory reach of material semiotics and its terms without bending the latter in a shi (勢)-like manner, then it would be of no concern. Obviously to work in this way would also be to sustain the asymmetry between EuroAmerican 'theory' and the subaltern 'case-study'.<sup>20</sup> We would simply be observing another 'application' of (say) ANT and reproducing the distinction between object and

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<sup>18</sup> Mistranslation is inevitable; see the anthropologists cited above, but also Callon (1986).

<sup>19</sup> Latour (1988, 162)

<sup>20</sup> For Viveiros de Castro (2004) this would be an uncontrolled equivocation: the use of a single term (for instance heterogeneity) to point to different realities.

context. If we wanted to be sceptical we might, however, also ask: what is being learned when we apply an STS terminology in this way? What is new? What is happening if a theoretical idiom does not reshape and rework itself as it encounters new cases? There are plausible answers to all these questions that have to do with explanatory scope and power. But they also suggest that a material semiotic mistranslation of the specificities of Dr Hsu's practice is simultaneously asymmetrical and in some sense uninterested in many of those specificities. In a more symmetrical intellectual project material-semiotics would start to change as its terminology was displaced in a shi (勢)-sensitive manner.

A full discussion of what this might mean takes us beyond the scope of this reply, but let us briefly note that this has potentially significant conceptual consequences. Thus in alternative STSs that were neither EuroAmerican nor 'Chinese' there would presumably be displacements too, but these would be different yet again. The implication is that STS would become theoretically situated and specific. In such an STS similar terms of art would work in different ways in different locations. Terms and their uses would be partially connected and partially disconnected, responsive to the variety of practices and locations that they encountered. We would be watching the explicit creation of an STS multiple.<sup>21</sup>

### Thinking from shi (勢): aphorism, the implicit, and unthought

We have just suggested that if we use an unmodified material-semiotic vocabulary then shi (勢) is being lost in STS translation. But as we have noted, there are further and possibly more radical ways of thinking about this. As is obvious, in a postcolonially symmetrical STS there is no concern to be 'true' to the theory of the discipline. On the other hand, neither is the issue a matter of discovering or articulating authentic versions of CM or Chinese metaphysics, whatever these might be. Instead the concern is to shift the terms of intellectual trade by drawing from and adapting both STS and shi (勢). Mistranslation needs to run in both directions. So how else might a shi (勢)-inflected STS differ from existing forms of STS?

This is for debate and discussion. There can be no one right answer. But consider, for instance, the character of the empirical. Here the issue is: what might count as an appropriate account of events? Elsewhere we have explored this issue for the UK's 2001 foot and mouth epidemic.<sup>22</sup> There are, of course, many – including academic – accounts of that epidemic, and unsurprisingly given the chronic EuroAmerican search for framings, the contexts that they enact are variable and contested.<sup>23</sup> At the same time it is also possible to imagine a shi (勢)-inflected narrative by drawing on and adapting Lao-tzu's epigrammatic style. The results might be startlingly unlike anything that currently finds its place in STS. Consider, for instance, the following:

From one pig to another, from pigs to sheep, and from farm to farm. What is it? Scientists can say it is a virus, the farmers find sick animals, the media hunts for striking images, the village finds itself confined and helpless, while epidemiologists and policy makers are called upon to control it.

Everything has its propensities. But viruses, fears, information, knowledges, animals, people, everything is now flowing at different paces and in different directions.

How to stop this and move back to ebbs and flows? No transportation, no contact, no regular flows any more. Is this heaven's way of benefiting without harming? (天之道利而不

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<sup>21</sup> It could be argued this simply describes the state of affairs in currently STS. As we know (via Kuhn) from Wittgenstein, terms do not describe their applications, and the articulation of new applications is a creative process. Perhaps, then, the difference is less in substance than in the recognition of this contextualised multiplicity. On multiplicity, see Mol (2002)

<sup>22</sup> Law (2016).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Woods (2004) and Ward *et al.* (2004).

害) The answer is that we don't know. Slaughter is the last measure. Massive and radical, it is. Everything is halted. Life, love, fortune, peace and harmony. A brutal victory is a funeral (戰勝以喪禮處之). Indeed.

Waxing and waning. Flowing and ebbing. Halting the movement of the tides. Living with the ever-stronger changing tidescapes (形勢) of technology, markets and food production of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The UK is not a simple country with a small population (小國寡民). The piled-up carcasses and the flames strike at us as well as the enemy. How many more drastic measures are we prepared for in the future? How might we live a life with or without the farms that have such propensities? Is it possible not to fight the disease but to live with its changing propensities? Has the epidemic also arrested the tidescapes (形勢) of our previous knowledge and strategies, the conventions we have drawn on before? Are we efficacious?

There are still lessons to be learned.

Contingent hint, indirective aphorism, implicit knowing, detours that assume nothing about absolute truth or the possibility of general solutions, these are some of the ingredients of this particular invention which draws rather directly from the *Dao De Jing*<sup>24</sup>. There are, to be sure, many possible alternative ways of writing a *shi* (勢) inflected foot and mouth narrative which might look quite different, though many would be equally far removed from the empirical case study accounts of contemporary EuroAmerican STS. Or one might imagine crafting hybrid narratives, for instance of the kind sometimes offered to patients by CM practitioners such as Dr Hsu. Perhaps (we are not sure) the latter might look more like STS empirical accounts. Nevertheless such an STS: might conceive of detouring movements towards living and knowing as immanent but shifting vectors; might be sensitive to *balance* (中), flow and counter-flow; might imagine relations as *tidescapes*, attending in particular to imbalances and blockages; might distinguish between effectiveness and *efficacy* (功效), privileging the latter as a reflection of unfolding relational dispositions; might, therefore, also be essentially *normative*; in the absence of the concern with context mentioned above, the distinction between description and theory might disappear; and in the hope of making space to sense propensities, fixed empirical description might give way to thinking through the contingent detour of contradiction.<sup>25</sup>

These suggestions are all for discussion, and in any case they do not come as a job lot. They are also radical in varying degree. It might, for instance, be relatively easy to talk of tidescapes within a somewhat modified *shi* (勢) inflected STS. The essential normativity of STS might also be similarly assimilable for a large part of STS in any case imagines itself that way. However other items on the list (like the Lao-Tzu-like invention above) imply more radical departures from STS as it is currently constituted. The 'empirical' (if it still made sense to use the term) would come to look quite different.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, too, the notion of the theoretical would also evaporate along with the reframing contextualisations that are embedded so deeply in STS habits.<sup>27</sup> That something would be lost if we made such a move to epigram is self-evident. As we noted above, caution is appropriate. But, here is the challenge: if something were being lost, what might the corresponding gains look like? What would we be learning? Until the experiment is attempted we cannot know.

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<sup>24</sup> Lao Tzu (2004).

<sup>25</sup> 'Dao that can be put into word is not really dao. And naming that can assign fixed reference to things is not really naming.' ('道，可道也，非恆道也。名，可名也，非常名也'). Lao Tzu (2004, 77). We have changed the translation of dao (道) from 'way-making' to 'dao'

<sup>26</sup> See Farquhar (1994a), Lei (2002) and Zhan (2014) for the complexities of making sense of the experiential/empirical in contemporary Chinese medicine.

<sup>27</sup> Theory as abstraction had little place in CM until the latter was modernised into Traditional Chinese Medicine (see Farquhar (1994b) and Nappi (2009)). Jullien suggests that the notion of truth is relatively unimportant in Chinese classical thought compared with wisdom. See Jullien (2002; 2014).

## Concluding words

Our experiments are just that, experiments. They may be variously treated as attempts: to understand how STS sustains the power of its understandings of reality; to reduce the power and self-evidence of its current institutional forms and their ways of knowing; to provincialise STS by arguing that forms of explanation do not necessarily have to move in a one-way traffic from EuroAmerica to the south or the east; to articulate the possibility of a 'Chinese-inflected' STS; or, the particular point of our experiments, to begin to imagine the scope of a possible *shì* (勢)-inflected STS; and then, as a part of this, to undo the disciplinary power of remedial contextualisation within STS. But though these concerns overlap, they may also teased apart. To be clear, this means that postcolonial worries about the Marie Celeste of social theory<sup>28</sup> entail neither commitment to an epigrammatic STS, nor to one that is Chinese-inflected. Other experiments are needed too, in what Atsuro Morita calls lateral analysis, other encounters between different contingent practices and ways of knowing. What we most hope for is the creation of interstitial and non-dominatory spaces that will (again to cite Jullien) 'furnish... other engagements with (another glimpse of) the unthought.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson and Adams (2007).

<sup>29</sup> Jullien (2014, 154).

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