



CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Beyond Alternatives: Decentring Knowledge in Asia

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In-Person Workshop

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Since the 1950s, the call for autonomous knowledge and alternative discourses has been discussed by numerous scholars in the 'Global South', including many scholars and practitioners in Asia (Alatas, S.F., 2006; Alatas, S.H., 1972, 2000; Chakrabarty, 2001; Chen, 2010; Oommen, 1995; Alatas and Sinha, 2017). This response is a critical and comparative appraisal and reflexive exercise of received dominant knowledge regimes imposed through asymmetrical power structures in academia and beyond with the concomitant production and restructuring of relevant knowledge, sensitised to local and indigenous contexts. This makes strong reference to the situated character of knowledge. Such endeavours give primacy to the formerly subjugated – as knowing subjects – as well as to the broader social, political, and economic conditions of these societies.

In his book *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science* (2006), Alatas broadly conceived of alternative discourses as “those which are informed by local/regional historical experiences and cultural practices in the same way that the Western social sciences are. Being alternative means a turn to philosophies, epistemologies, histories and the arts, other than those of the Western tradition”. The call for 'alternatives' includes the attempts of decentred knowledge, decolonised knowledge, autonomous social science, indigenous knowledge, anti-imperialist, and non-orientalist knowledge.

Connected to this academic focus is a thriving arena of alternative educational pedagogies that has emerged to both counter and complement the curricula that mainstream schooling and learning systems have offered for topical questions such as what delineates 'being human in the world' (Kavira and Verges 2016) and what types of knowledge transmission are considered 'valuable' for youth and children. From the alternatives of radical unschooling to cooperative lifelong learning centres, different 'paths of learning' shape diverse ideologies about 'what makes a person' in respective societal and cultural contexts.

Moreover, alternative learning cultures and educational practices relate to concepts that travel transnationally, defining knowledge, its production, and particular ways of engaging in formations of self and personhood. Current tides of influence and flows of learning travel from the 'non-West' to the 'Global North' and circulate in the 'Global South'. With alternative education on the rise, new practices of knowledge construction feed from innovative hybrids of local and transnational pedagogies, producing alternative curricula of subject formations and resistance. The future of learning points 'East', and alternative education on 'unlearning' mainstream school curricula shape persons, communities and their futures in Asia and beyond.

However, Alatas argued that the notion of 'alternative' does not supplant concepts emanating from 'Global North' contexts. In this vein, 'alternative' is not pitched and theorised as a binary against an 'Other'. Rather, it takes non-Western sources of ideas and concepts in the social

sciences seriously. At the same time, Alatas emphasised the importance of avoiding nativism (or Orientalism in reverse) and academic nationalism.

This workshop addresses current debates on the tensions between critical and decolonial pedagogies as allied yet diversely positioned attempts of producing 'alternative' knowledge. It also attempts to engage with these appraisals critically in relation to the broader concerns revolving around knowledge production and circulation, and its concomitant discourses, practices and cultures. The proliferation of such initiatives and interventions in learning within the region has a target of personal and large-scale transformation within different key domains of life: from issues of economic, environmental, and social justice, from structural inequality to local empowerment, pedagogic resistance, or religious reformation movements. What does 'alternative' mean, to whom, and in what temporal and situational context? What are the limits and dilemmas of alternative discourses that can be problematised? How can we extend knowledge production, circulation, and learning in the name of 'good' social science? More recently, scholars have engaged in making sense of and theorising processes of 'silencing' (Alatas, 2018) as a method and how they have been institutionalised in academic settings through publications, research, and teaching.

This approach lends itself to important comparisons, connections and collaborations in the manner in which knowledge is constructed and theorised, which is taken up as a core orientation taken up through the Shaping-Asia network. The key imperative is therefore to embed theorising in the sociocultural and political specificities of Asia without necessarily rejecting all input and contributions that emerge from 'canonic' contexts. The inquiries we expect to raise in the workshop panels include (but are not limited to) theoretical, methodological, and empirical frameworks. In regard to academic knowledge and non-academic learning in the context of childhood, youth, and beyond, we invite contributions that address the following and more questions:

- What are the varieties of alternative discourses in terms of concept formation, theory building, and methodological and pedagogical frameworks that are informed by and grounded on Asian contexts?
- What frames, terms of reference, and perspectives work, what does not, and why and how do these resonate in Asian societies?
- How do alternative discourses help us research, teach and learn in and about Asia and other contexts; what are the methods and approaches we need to deploy to gather data and evidence; what are the limitations and constraints we encounter?
- How can we compare alternative discourses within and between different Asian societies; and between these contexts and other milieus in what has been broadly known collectively as the 'global South'?
- Whereas some of the initiatives engage with each other in immediate personal or mediate conceptual ways, how do alter-pedagogies strategically connect with each other in order to open up opportunities of identifying and addressing common ideals, sensibilities, and practices?
- What historical junctures and conjunctions along with geopolitical and cultural contexts account for the existing similarities among the educational approaches of mushrooming Asian alternative initiatives?
- What insights can be extrapolated from the differences and similarities of alternative discourses and practices within and between these regions in Asia, and the meeting points of connectedness?
- What connections and collaborations are made between the producers of alternative discourses, pedagogies and other social actors in the academe and beyond, which may include non-government organisations, think tanks, state agencies, private corporations, research and funding agencies, and so forth?
- What position do universities play within Asian societies to connect with, collaborate and circulate different varieties of 'alternative discourses' in Asia and beyond?

- How does the programme of alternative discourses and the comparative terms of reference extrapolated from Asian relevances and contexts apply to other social, political, economic and aesthetic settings beyond 'Asia'?

Through these questions, the approach undergirding Shaping-Asia allows for a comparative and collaborative grounding of what is rendered as 'alternative' vis-à-vis broader knowledge production and circulation. Such a perspective foregrounds a range of scholarly interventions, outputs, theories, methods, as well as empirical and substantive research emerging from scholars in Asia and in Asian academic institutions; and beyond. We welcome abstract submissions to engage and debate these inquiries to engender a more critical, comparative, and empathetic recalibration of knowledge production and circulation in global academic settings.

Please submit an abstract of approximately 400 words (with title, author contact, and 5-6 keywords) by **23 July 2023** to the workshop convenors:

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