



East Asian Savage: Untouched Orientalism and Imperial Anthropology

Introduction to the Special Issue: Anthropology and East Asia

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Introduction

This special issue of *Transnational Asia* focuses on East Asia, an under explored region within the annals of anthropological theory. One major factor, most obviously, was that no Western Imperialist Power ever colonized the entire continent of Asia. Intermittent encounters between the putative West (chiefly Western Europe and the U.S.) and East Asia can be detected as early as the 13th century, with Jesuit missionaries in China before the arrival of “modern” nation states (Fang 2020).¹ But formal and continued interest from the emerging discipline of anthropology did not occur until after World War II. Significantly, this development concurred with U.S. Cold War ascendancy in the region. As a result, unlike parts of the world squarely colonized by the West, such as Melanesia, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, East Asia represented a relatively “untouched” area within the genealogy of anthropological thought. This presupposed untouched quality—what I term “untouched Orientalism”—exposes specific challenges to the discipline of anthropology. Famously, Edward Said described Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (1979: 2). This definition relies on an act of objectifying abstraction, “one that is evidenced in [Orientalism’s] confusing amalgam of imperial vagueness [e.g., a field called the Orient] and precise detail [e.g., Oriental things and people]”

(ibid). Unspoken here is a parallel boundary making practice. It divides the seemingly unadulterated categories of a marked, studied Orient from an unmarked, studying Occident.

In this Introduction, I coin untouched Orientalism to highlight a dynamic less explicit within Said's famous formulation. Notwithstanding the richness and diversity of anthropologies of East Asia, analyses unmindful of this underlying bias, I argue, risk replicating an earlier imperial logic that ideologically and discursively isolates a purported non-Western other from a Western self. What emerges is an imagined West (and its knowledge producing agents) favorably dissociated from "local" debates in the region concerning legacies of formal colonial rule.ⁱⁱ For example, whereas territorial and wartime disputes between the Empire of Japan and its former colonies in Asia continue unabated, mainstream discussion about the U.S.' uninterrupted occupation of militarized zones in Seoul (the U.S. Army garrison at Yongsan) and Okinawa (Kadena Air Base) are marginalized from mainstream conversation.ⁱⁱⁱ Untouched Orientalism facilitates the reproduction of anthropology's earliest analytic bias towards people and places deemed non-Western. This bias manifests as a kind of preferred "savage slot" that surreptitiously depoliticizes the West's asymmetrical relationship with East Asia.^{iv} It does so by maintaining relative silence about the causes and conditions of the West's hegemonic presence in the region.^v

In referencing a savage slot, I draw on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's instructive proposal for a more ethically congruent anthropology. For Trouillot, anthropology (like all academic disciplines) inherits a field of significance (a pre-established compartment within a wider symbolic field he calls the savage slot), which preceded the discipline's formalization (2003: 9).^{vi} I follow Trouillot's admonition that anthropology can only find new directions using a critical and reflexive lens that reappraises the savage slot "upon which anthropological discourse is premised" (2003: 9). In the context of anthropological studies of East Asia, this savage slot

(and the untouched Orientalism it relies on) encompasses extant legacies of Western encroachment since the late 19th century and continuing through the mid-20th century. Significantly, conceptual pillars like kinship formed alongside the discipline's earlier penchant for veiled ethnocentrism via cultural insularity. Late 20th century critiques by social scientists called for a more reflexive, less Eurocentric analytic "turn." Nonetheless, contemporary anthropology's depoliticizing savage slot remains frequently intact when discussing East Asia.

I address this problematic by examining the relationship between imperialism and early histories of anthropological theory, chiefly those concerning kinship. Of course, there is the temporal fact of imperialism: the formal decolonization of colonial subjects in Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Australia, chiefly from British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and U.S. American powers. In the context of East Asia, however, the primary emblem of imperial brutality, conventionally, is the nearly eight-decade (1868-1947) rule of the Empire of Japan over Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria (and, occasionally, parts of the Russian and German Empires). Animus towards this emblem is palpable in former colonies like South Korea, where legitimate protests over colonial and wartime atrocities often deteriorate into caricatures of Japan as metonymic evil. It is consequential how rarely broad-based indignation over Japan's unrepentant stance translates into related critiques of extant Western imperial influence in East Asia, for instance U.S. hegemony in South Korea.^{vii} Consequently, my delineation of imperialism is not limited to the historical, political, and economic control of a subordinate territory by a dominant one. Rather, I follow postcolonial scholarship, arguing that the end of juridical colonial rule did not necessarily mean an end to asymmetrical relations and entitlements between a historic imperial core and its peripheries.

In his self-described “sequel” to *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said forwards that “[i]mperialism did not end, did not suddenly become ‘past,’ once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires” (1994: 278). Instead, a legacy of connections still binds former empires with their colonial territories. Likewise, the enduring prominence of the U.S.—politically, militarily, economically, and culturally—after World War II suggests a new set of power relations structuring the world (ibid).^{viii} Following suit, I highlight how imperialism’s formal territorial occupation and governance may change in its perceptible form but not necessarily its political function. To demonstrate this, I define certain analytic practices rooted in anthropology’s nascent relationship with formal Western colonialism. I proceed by locating contemporary manifestations of these practices—what we might call imperial anthropology—within Anglophone East Asian social science. In so doing, I move beyond the obvious markers of U.S. military, political, and economic authority in the region. Instead, we are reminded of the intimate ties between anthropological theory and “Eurocentered colonialism” (Quijano 2007: 168). I bring up kinship studies to show how early Western anthropology’s preoccupation with “natural,” bounded bases of kinship (i.e., genetic ties within secluded groups) *outside* the West reflected and reinforced such imperial logics. Finally, by channeling critical movements within the discipline, such as feminist and queer theories, I hope to reveal the potential rewards that may flow from an uncovering of the processes and stakes behind anthropological theory.

Anthropology’s Shifting Savage Slots

Western anthropology’s analytic bias (or savage slot, following Trouillot) can be traced to the discipline’s earliest encounters outside its epistemological and ontological borders. Within

the “territories” of Melanesia the colonial mark of Europe and the U.S. was official (although manifold in the forms of its expression). Accordingly, knowledge acquisition concerning the West’s “savage” others coincided with the colonial expansion of England, France, Germany, and the U.S. in the region. Indeed, one of the founding members of canonical anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, bore this mark, as well. Notably, anthropology’s “father of fieldwork” had the best of intentions, as is evident in the concluding pages of his seminal monograph, *Argonauts of the West Pacific* (1922). Malinowski promoted a new scientific research that “enter[s] into the soul of a savage and through his eyes... enrich[es] and deepen[s] our own world’s vision, to understand our own nature and to make it finer, intellectually and artistically” (1922: 517). Despite Malinowski’s admirable pioneering of long-term ethnographic fieldwork from the perspective of the hallowed local, he could not disclaim his own epistemological ancestry and its relationship to a then-British imperial core.^{ix} For example, as a London School of Economics graduate student, Malinowski and his seminal study of the Trobriand Islands fell under the auspices of the British Empire. Conversely, suspicions by the Commonwealth of Australia over Malinowski’s ambiguous status as a Polish national-cum-potential enemy associated with the Austrian Empire prolonged the fieldworker’s stay and, thus, inadvertently made possible the long-term ethnographic approach that made him famous (Young 1984).^x

Conceivably, the imagined purity of early anthropological field sites was a major component of early disciplinary branding. Ulf Hannerz remarks that foundational theories of the inchoate discipline, including studies of kinship, emerged chiefly from the “prestige regions” of classical anthropology. These were parts of world had been exposed to colonialism and modernity, but were also sufficiently culturally exotic and, therefore, considered more “authentic” than others (Hannerz 2006: 563).^{xi} Hence, Melanesia, Africa, and the Indian

subcontinent were attractive because they represented regions conceptually untarnished by encroaching modernization and attendant theories advanced by the West about its non-Western others. Underscoring this “virginal” status as one reason behind the region’s hallowed reputation within anthropological theory may not be so unseemly. After all, another seminal anthropological study, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), was preoccupied with the sexual life of Samoan adolescents.^{xii} More pertinent, however, is Margaret Meade’s characterization of her ethnographic subjects as “quite simple peoples, primitive peoples, whose society has never attained the complexity of our own” (1928: 7). In response to the supposed denial of “the most rigid control” and “ideal laboratory conditions” when studying humans and their social worlds, Meade championed anthropology as the *only* method whereby a “trained student” could master the “fundamental structure of a primitive society in a few months” (1928: 7-8).

Save for the now anachronistic terminology of the primitive—a literal case of placing the infamous savage within Trouillot’s symbolic slot—several dynamics are evident in these passages. First, an earnestly progressive (nay missionary) zeal is palpable. One catalyst for early ethnographers’ humanitarian verve was likely to have been a eugenics-informed climate that, until Malinowski’s and Meade’s pioneering fieldwork methods, popularized the existence of material and metaphysical space between “civilized” Western scientist and “savage” non-Western human subject. Concurrently, this compulsion to aid humankind relied on a strict cleavage between the impartial/philanthropic anthropologist and their “colored”/“primitive” people of study (Meade 1928: 8). Germane to my discussion is how the prose of early canonical texts produced this rhetorical distancing through a kin-like vernacular. This language designated levels of relationality and reciprocity between the anthropologist and their subjects. Implicitly, it also fortified the lines of unbalanced power between the West and its objects of study.

Convinced of its humanitarian bona fides by virtue of its rich ethnographic descriptions of and humanitarian solidarity with the non-Western other, incipient anthropology portrayed its understanding of itself and its growing encounters with the unknown as universalizable truths about all humanity.^{xiii} In spite of its altruistic intent, however, shades of benevolent paternalism colored the spirit of early anthropological theory. Decades later, the discipline's focus on another seemingly untouched territory, East Asia, provided an opportunity for this spirit to rise anew.

Anthropology's Overlooked Oriental Other

Western scholarship concerning once squarely colonized territories like Africa, Latin American, and other parts of Asia (e.g., South and Southeast Asia), must contend more directly with the conspicuous traces of the West's earlier dominion: principally white supremacy and colonial hierarchies of race.^{xiv} Conversely, the fact that no Western imperial power ever formally colonized an East Asian country produces a unique moral stance to which Western anthropology lays claim. This favorable position allows the West to disavow any vestiges of authorized colonial guilt. Instead, in the case of systematized disciplines like anthropology, the West's extant imperial presence can remain veiled under the guise of humanistic research. Thus, East Asia, as an object of Western anthropological study, can emerge as a comparatively neutral field of knowledge production when directly positioned against a colonially "impartial" West. In turn, conflict between East Asia and the West—if introduced—tends to be framed in less complex terms (e.g., anti-imperialist Asia versus imperialist West). Evidenced by this special issue, recent scholarship has positioned these two regions in greater dialogue, uncovering convoluted histories of inter/intra-regional contact, transnational movement, and internalized East Asian subjection.

Although a promising trend, it is uncertain how this trend is playing out within prevailing anthropologies of East Asia.

In this respect, East Asia can represent something different from the prototypical birthplaces of anthropological theory. Not surprisingly, anthropologists of East Asia tend to focus on the geographic proximity and cultural prominence of intra-regional powers like China during the late 19th century and Japan during the early to mid-20th century.^{xv} In contrast, sustained interrogations of extant Western imperial influence in East Asia remain sparse.^{xvi} Yet, as this special issue contends, the political, economic, and cultural grip of the West (chiefly, the U.K. and the U.S.) has endured, especially since the mid-20th century.^{xvii} Interactions between the West and East Asia intensified in the wake of post-World War II decolonization movements throughout other parts of Asia and Africa. This later coincided with post-World War II imperatives of Cold War Containment where the “Occupation anthropologists” (Oppenheim and Ryang in this issue) of the 1940s and 1950s or the “Peace Corps generation” anthropologists of the 1980s (Lie 2016) codified formal anthropological interest in East Asia. Credibly, these groups perceived East Asia as another theoretically untouched yet geopolitically significant region. As David H. Price rigorously catalogues in his monograph, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (2016), U.S. military and intelligence agencies were fundamental (though quiet) in developing U.S. anthropology at the dawn of the dawn of the Cold War.

Hence, reminiscent of anthropology’s earlier savage slot perspective towards Melanesia, this seemingly untouched orientation (what I term untouched Orientalism) proliferated eastward. The fact that most anthropological accounts imply East Asia to be “untarnished” by Western colonial encroachment has arguably facilitated this disciplinary bias. We might term these

practices “particular kinds of politicocultural ‘fields of study’” (Yanagisako 2014: 175). This occurs when ethnography repeats a tendency to frame East Asia as ideologically othered from the West, a region in which circulations beyond nation-state borders stay insulated within “inter” or “intra-Asia” (seldom “inter” or “intra-*Western*”) categories like transregional, transcolonial, or transhistorical. For example, it is not uncommon for standardized studies of East Asia, including those by anthropologists, to demonstrate variants of this untouched Orientalism. In its latest August 2020 issue—justifiable limitations on analytic scope by individual articles notwithstanding—the disciplinarily defining *Journal of Asian Studies* features cultural practices constrained by time (e.g., modernization and development in India between 1912 and 1952) (Kumar 2020) and geographic place (e.g., student politics in Bangladesh) (Kuttig and Suykens 2020). This tendency is strengthened by the journal’s overall stance foregrounding the nation state. The related *Journal of East Asian Studies* features similar trends, although with a greater emphasis on contemporary issues in the region. Its March 2020 issue, for instance, reports on a variety of subjects, including, for example, analyses of recent elections in Vietnam (Malesky and Schuler 2020), Korea-Japan relations (You and Kim 2020), and universal healthcare in Thailand (Harris and Selway 2020). Ultimately, though, both influential publications exhibit a decidedly international relations-style approach reminiscent of Cold War foreign policy strategies of preemptive ideological containment and isolation.

Most prominent Asian-language journals are not immune from this propensity either. As an example, the leading South Korea-based anthropology journal, *Korean Cultural Anthropology* (*Han'gugmunhwaillyuhak*), features a wide-range of cutting-edge topics, including urban development, heritage politics, and cross-border movement.^{xviii} Arguably, at times, such internal journals are more nuanced in their treatment of East Asia as a locus of dynamic forces that “go

beyond the limits of national and nationalist historiography” (Chen 2010: xii). But the West and its human embodiments—either as allies or antagonists—still stay safe in their representational detachment. Topics related to transborder phenomena do appear (for example, an article on the movement of international students to local universities in South Korea) (Kim and Choi 2019) or studies comparing emotional socialization in the U.S. and South Korea (Ahn 2019). But the journal’s topical and rhetorical themes still exhibit anthropology’s “village problem” (Henig 2020): depicting (usually) non-Western places and people as “timeless and static” with “bounded communities” (Berdahl 1999) and “localised cultures” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Calls for more “global” approaches notwithstanding, the terminology of East Asian studies (within and without most Anglophone outlets) reflects anthropology’s preferred savage slot. Relations between East Asian countries and countries of the West are framed as comparable and symmetrical yet, ultimately, symbolically siloed.

What materializes is “East Asia” as an established region and its respective areas as discrete nation-states. Following Vicente Rafael, this replicates the idea of “areas” as natural—or at least, historically necessary—formations for the containment of temporally and spatially-delineated differences within and between cultures (1994: 91). Frequently adopted by anthropologies of East Asia, this imagined map misleads. It normalizes the U.S. as a politically uniform space that is either voluntarily entered into (as in the case of annexed U.S. territories, such as the once-colonized Philippines or today’s neo-colonized South Korea) (Pate 2014), or that stands on equal geopolitical footing with other sovereign nation-states (Immerwahr 2019). Consequently, typological and disciplinary borders (delineating academic areas or fields) are newly formed and policed, necessitating the “fatherly” (or, less scrutinized “motherly”) expertise

of field-specific specialists.^{xix} Foundational anthropological theory, specifically kinship studies, reflects this imperial practice—a topic I turn to next.

Infant Theories of Imperial Anthropology

“If the study of kinship largely was defined by anthropologists, it is equally true that anthropology as an academic discipline was itself defined by kinship,” writes Janet Carsten (2012: 1).^{xx} An influential predecessor of Malinowski during the mid-19th century, Lewis Henry Morgan is credited with establishing the study of kinship in the West. Based on his studies of the social organization of the Iroquois nation, Morgan’s theoretical trademark (1871) was his advocacy of intercultural comparison and social evolution (e.g., the supposed stages of development of human cultures “from savagery through barbarism to civilization” (1871: 429).^{xxi} Not unlike Malinowski decades later, Morgan’s extensive fieldwork and collection of terminology concerning non-Western social orders defined not only an intellectual specialty but also the theoretical zeitgeist of his generation. Characteristic of anthropology’s history of self-critique, however, Morgan’s theories are rife with internal debates.

Malinowski mocked Morgan-inspired kinship studies as “conjectural... fact-blindness,” distinguishing it from the former’s more ethnographically rooted approach (1930: 19). Yet, Malinowski, too, was unable to escape Morgan’s paternalistic parochialism. Identifying the chief obstacle to anthropological kinship studies as its “inheritance of false problems from anthropological tradition”—namely its adherence to “spurious... classificatory systems of nomenclature”—Malinowski proposed a solution rooted in a fieldwork method he had pioneered: “understand[ing] what kinship really means to the native... to find out how [elements within a foreign society] are related to each other, and how they *function*, that is, what part they

play respectively within the society, what social needs they satisfy, and what influence they exert” (1930: 21-22). Despite his functionalist-informed flaws, Malinowski was not entirely wrong in championing a more relational, less conceptually isolated method. The irony, of course, lay in how such a call did not extend to Malinowski addressing his own asymmetrical, kin-like relationship with natives that his career relied upon. Moreover, Malinowski’s infamous diary entries during his fieldwork in Melanesia (1989) prompt a related question: can anthropology (and Western social science, more broadly) ever *not* be imperial, epistemological turns involving reflexive, feminist, and queer theories notwithstanding? In his posthumously published diary, an unsavory figure of imperial anthropology appears, one personally complex yet professionally concealed. Malinowski’s private writings shatter the conceit of the ideal ethnographer as respectably asexual, analytically measured, and reliably philanthropic. Instead, the reader encounters a man at odds with the scientific and sensual pressures with which he grappled. Vis-à-vis his island informants, Malinowski’s words portray a man carnally frustrated, intellectually vengeful, and subtly ethnocentric.^{xxii} If paternalism is defined as a series of conditions—one’s interfering with the autonomy of another while believing the former’s involvement improves the welfare of the latter—foundational anthropological theories and their makers may fit the bill (Dworkin 2020).^{xxiii}

Views on kinship expressed by early anthropologists (including Malinowski and Meade) further typify this point. Confronting primitive others’ seeming lack of “civilizational” systems, such as class, governments, or states, foundational anthropologists saw kinship as the key to understanding alterity abroad. In contrast, as Carsten notes, studies of industrialized societies (in the West) reflected (masculinized) theories considered more substantial, such as sociological ones centered around “domestic” issues like economics and politics. The subject of kinship—

although valorized among the first anthropologists—was of lesser broad-based academic interest “at home” given its demoted association with the private, domestic domain of women (Carsten 2012: 1). Observable here is a wider gendered logic ascribing the native to nature and culture. This framework helped facilitate anthropology’s earliest analytic bias, or savage slot, towards people and places deemed non-Western. On the contrary, the West was considered more removed from nature and, therefore, more masculinized with its technological advancement—albeit less “spiritually pure.” Scholars of East Asia, such as Gina Marchetti comment on this constructed difference marked by gender and race. These markers operate through an untouched Orientalism, in which Asia signifies the “untamed barbarian, the nonwhite, ‘natural’ woman absorb[ing] both the projected sexual wantonness and the coveted maternal fertility of the white male imagination [while] point[ing] the way for a masculine domination of the wilderness and its peoples through force of arms sugar-coated by romance and Christian righteousness” (1994: 93).^{xxiv}

Applied to scholarly fields developed under the fatherly aegis of post-Cold War Western knowledge production, this gendered and racialized orientation produces a “particular type of partiality” (Ryang 2016). What results are studies of East Asia or East Asian countries insulated within boundaries of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). Uncritical of these vexed dynamics but openly acknowledging its presence, a West (or Westerner) can face an uneasy ethical territory. Both confront a West frequently positioning itself as “rational, progressive, adult, and masculine” in relation to an East that is “irrational, backward-looking, childish, and feminine” (Klein 10-11). Openly recognizing this untouched Orientalism is to awkwardly evoke anthropology’s ongoing preference for and application of savage slot biases towards non-Western regions and their people. Yet, anthropologies of East Asia routinely

overlook this dynamic in the service of, citing the *Journal of Asian Studies*' mission statement, "the very best empirical and multidisciplinary work on Asia" (Chaturvedi 2020). Not surprisingly, keeping criticism of untouched Orientalism *untouched* may persist as the preferred anthropological practice.

Conclusion

In her article, "Anne Frank in Japan" (2019), Sonia Ryang discusses an issue germane to this special issue: the thorny politics of imperial accountability. In one potent example, Ryang introduces an unspoken and arguably more insidious moral relativist tendency—what she terms, "the equal exchange tendency." Common among both popular and academic critics, this tendency assumes that the morality of one event may be rationalized or offset if temporally or spatially removed from that of another. A customary effect of this rationalizing sentiment is for an individual, collective, or government to maintain a politically profitable stance: enabling one to simultaneously limit one's liability in answering to past crimes while also reinforcing one's claim to acting in accordance with universal notions of "right and wrong" (Ryang 2019). The equal exchange tendency can be applied to the issue that is the focus of this journal: the familiar tendency of the anthropology of East Asia to explain the lived experiences of people and places seemingly untouched by the West (either by anthropology or the anthropologist herself). Coupled with this practice is minimal motivation by Western anthropologists to recall their ever-present debt to legacies of imperialist power. Such figurative debt includes sedimented histories of geopolitical privilege that enable Western ethnographers to keep studying the non-West, resulting in the saturation of non-Western markets with Western knowledge production (both in English and via local translations), but which do not enable a reverse phenomenon to occur.

Specific to Western anthropology's relationship with East Asia, Ryang's argument raises a critical question concerning 21st century ethnography: short of "politico-ethical paralysis" (Scheper-Hughes 1995), how might we confront the fraught representational politics of writing about "Imperial peripheries governed by the West"? (Ryang 2020). There are no easy answers. As the winding history of kinship studies illustrates, even the most progressive pushes have struggled to remedy anthropology's stubborn partiality for figurative savage slots.

But, nevertheless, dealing with this question in a direct manner can produce unexpected rewards. Doing so invites a deeper survey of the human condition, as well as anthropology's impressive catalogue of related subjects: "native" interpretive meaning (Hurston 1995), situatedness and partiality (Marcus 1994), subject positioning (Rosaldo 1993), and the colonial encounter (Asad 1973)—to name just a few. Since the 1960s and 1970s, kinship studies has also witnessed productive theoretical and thematic shifts. David Schneider is widely credited, firstly for bringing the analytical aspect of kinship out of the figurative village (of the other) and relocating it within the industrialized setting (of the Western self). His book, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1968), reflects anthropological desires to expand theoretical treatment of kinship beyond presumed biological bases to the symbolization of gender itself (Carsten 2012: 15). Memorably, Schneider's scholarship inspired new research shifting the anthropological gaze from the putative non-West back to the West (namely, the U.S.). Feminist studies further advanced the field by interrogating traditional kinship studies' latent androcentrism, heterosexism, and marginalization of women's labor within the devalued realms of the private and domestic.

After falling out of favor, kinship studies has recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest. This is in no small part due to activist movements concerning LGBTQIA rights, marriage

equality, transnational adoption, and medicalized reproduction (Collins 2009). Robust scholarship has debated the classificatory rigidity and presumed applicability of kinship concepts: Carol Stack, for example, echoed Schneider's interest in U.S.-based kinship, focusing on extensive kin networks in African American communities (1983). Janet Carsten explored the metaphoric meanings of "blood," as well as the legacy of earlier proponents of kinship studies, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (2013). And borrowing her playbook from historical anthropology, Marilyn Strathern applied her fieldwork findings from Papua New Guinea in theorizing social ties that were based neither on Morgan's consanguineal (blood) relations nor on affinal (marriage) relations (i.e., fictive kin) (1992). Fields as varied as queer theory and adoption studies have felt the impact of such groundbreaking scholarship. Collectively, these works demonstrate the power of reflexive anthropological theory, typically based on fine-grained ethnographic field work. Many overlook the underlying conditions of unequal power that render anthropological "cross-cultural comparison" possible, replicating, for instance, the idea of "kinship culture" in a single country or making comparisons "between" the kinship cultures of two countries. Despite this, their examples of bold, critical self-reflection still offer hope.^{xxv} Similarly, East Asian anthropology in the West also offers potential and possibilities. Increased attentiveness to the imperial legacies of Western anthropology in East Asia will help the discipline better produce ethically congruent, globally inclusive knowledge.

The articles in this special issue attest to this. Specifically, this issue's articles address overlapping concerns. In "Historicizing Mid-Century American Anthropology of Korea: Vincent S.R. Brandt, Stereoscopically," Robert Oppenheim provides an absorbing "prologue to a broader historical evaluation of American social or cultural anthropology of Korea in the mid-20th century" (2021: 2). Through a partial re-reading of Vincent S.R. Brandt's *A Korean Village*,

Oppenheim demonstrates how the reinsertion of anthropology into history adds necessary layers of depth, context, and contingency to earlier ethnographic texts. In a similar vein, Megan Steffen's "Refusing to Inherit "China": The Troubled Histories and Continuities of an Anthropological Object" questions the assumptions and stakes behind the anthropological conceit of studying China. By examining the convoluted anthropological history of the territories now referred to as the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, Steffen describes how anthropologists working in this politically fraught territory "need to be vigilant, to do as little harm as they can" with their representational and citational practices (2021: 33). In "The Writing of North Korea's ICBM," Hoon Song proposes bold methodological rethinking. Perceptively interrogating anthropology's power to know, Song examines the shifting discourses surrounding North Korea's first successful test flight of an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile), raising larger questions about "historicizing anthropology" and "understanding the anthropology of (East) Asia" (2021: 13). Finally, in her article, "Toward a New Anthropology of Japan: A National Frame of Study and Its Potential Use in the Study of Japan as Biopower—with the Focus on the Figure of the Korean," Sonia Ryang astutely locates how Japan emerged as a shape shifting object of theoretical and ethnographic investigation. By locating the changing and contingent figure of the Korean in Japan, Ryang charts the conditions through which Japan entered "into the western anthropological corpus as a nation, and the other side of its postwar formation as a culturally and racially homogenous nation with a hierarchical yet harmonious order" (2021: 35). Together, these articles effectively show that East Asia—the region that was incepted in Western anthropology as a late-comer—offers new potentials and possibilities in advancing such critical inquiry.

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<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3106513/beijing-diplomats-brush-away-k-pop-korean-war-controversy-saying>.

ⁱ Defining "the West" is difficult but important. Scholars have noted the term's multivalent and sometimes empty signification. For example, Stuart Hall's description of "one of the most hallowed social constructs in the Western world, the very idea of 'the West,'" is useful (Gupta, James, Andersen, Galabuzi, and Maaka 2018: 85). For Hall, the concept of the West operates as a naturalized regime of knowledge through which other forms of knowledge and subsequent representations of reality (usually of the other) are mediated (ibid). Robert Young goes further. Criticizing Said himself as "unselfconsciously within the European cultural heritage," Young describes postcolonial theories' own tendency to reify the idea of a West distinct from a dissenting Oriental other (2004: 180). Young writes: "What Said's analysis neglects, therefore, is the extent to which [O]rientalism did not just misrepresent the Orient, but also articulated an internal dislocation within Western culture, a culture which consistently fantasizes itself as constituting some kind of integral totality, at the same time as endlessly deploring its own impending dissolution" (ibid). Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit provide a case in point, reminding us that "non-Westerners" have been just as likely to employ the West (and its binaristic logics of self and other) to produce relational meaning. For example, to Asians around World War II, the West figured as a high mark of modernity, but also, consequently, a (colonizing) force for Asia to overcome (Buruma and Margalit 2005: 3-5). Suppressed within the barrier of non-English translation, however, Asian-language sources have indicated productive (although not entirely unproblematic) lines of investigation: for example, around the geographic demarcation of the West and its imperial others throughout history (Lee 2012) or Western academia's studies of ancient Korean history (Yo 2010). The diversity of these perspectives suggests one shared quality: any critical analysis of the concept of the West must interrogate the word's commitment to stereotypical absolutes, such as unshared identities based on the myth of coherent, unified rationality (Herzfeld 1992: 2).

ⁱⁱ Influential publications like *The Journal of Asian Studies* provide a good example. In its August 2020 issue, authors Leigh K. Jenco and Jonathan Chappell persuasively present new modes for envisioning "continuity between empires and nation states." Unfortunately, their reevaluation does not venture beyond their assumed area of expertise, China. Instead, they reconceptualize imperial forms only in relation to the Qing dynasty's territorial expansion, sidelining the presence of any parallel Western power in China at the time.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on the relationship between U.S. militarism and imperialism, see Magdoff 1970 and Bello 2007. For scholarship on anthropology's ties to militarism, refer to Gusterson 2007 and Price 2016.

^{iv} Following the instructive feedback of an anonymous reviewer, some scholars may find this article's mix of Orientalist discourses (in their considerable ambivalence, complexity, and contradiction) and those of "savages" somewhat odd. However, as this reviewer convincingly notes, invoking Rousseau is adequate to signal the considerable complexity and confusion on how to make sense of these seemingly incompatible discourses. Likewise (and, again, noted by the reviewer), I agree that this article may elide a simple, but significant, analytic divide: how nineteenth century European thinkers tended to make sharp divisions between literate civilizations (most obviously, China) and non-literate ones (what this article might refer to as those of "savages"). Finally, although beyond the scope of this article, I agree with the reviewer that an approach based on comparative geography and history would better emphasize how *no* continent was fully colonized (and not just East Asia). Furthermore, following this careful observation, Asia as a unit crystallized only in the 1950s, this being largely the work of John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and their Harvard underlings.

^v A vast body of interdisciplinary literature debates different forms and functions of this hegemonic presence within fields like Asian studies (Blum 2010; Sum 2010); cultural studies (Chakravartty, Paula and Yuezhi Zhao 2008; Ben-Ari and Otmazgin 2012); education (Lo 2011; You 2020); political science (Beeson 2007); and international relations (Posen 2006). Mindful of the sovereignty and agency of East Asia and its diverse people, my intention is less to overstate the hegemonic influence of the West (and its myriad expressions) in the region than to bring attention to Western imperialism's persistent omission from more orthodox anthropological scholarship. Correspondingly, as a minoritized agent of the Imperial U.S., I recognize my own fraught positionality vis-à-vis my "foreign" objects of study (see Lee 2018).

^{vi} Worth noting is the complex history behind anthropology and "the savage." To be sure, early use of the term (specifically in English) adhered to the connotation of people less advanced on an imagined scale of human development. Yet, as Claude Lévi-Strauss made famous in his seminal work, *The Savage Mind* (1962), the original title, *Pensée Sauvage*, was meant as a pun. Unhappy with the title of the book—he would have preferred "*Pansies for Thought*"—Levi-Strauss noted the double meaning of the word, both as "wild thought" or "wild pansies" (Savage Minds 2020).

^{vii} Perhaps the most famous symbol of this criticism in the West is the ongoing controversy between Japan and South Korea over the installation of "comfort women" statues in select Western cities. Less momentous, though no less contentious, are other "controversies" that regularly emerge, often around popular culture dynamics. A recent example occurred on September 5, 2020 when Filipina American TikTok personality Bella Poarch posted a video of herself dancing with a tattoo depicting Japan's rising sun flag. Triggered by its violent symbolism of Japanese imperialism, many South Koreans voiced their outrage through stereotypically "racist" remarks towards their Southeast Asian neighbor. These comments were directed not only against Poarch (who later apologized) but also the Philippines as a "[p]oor country [of] non-educated short people" [sic] (The Korea Herald/Asia News Network 2020). Many online Filipina/os promptly reacted with anti-South Korea messages, adopting Facebook and Twitter hashtag like #CancelKorea and #CancelToxicKoreans (ibid). South Korean pop icon ambassadors like the Bulletproof Boy Scouts, aka BTS (*Bangtan Sonyeondan*), have not been immune to similar intraregional accusations. In a show of symbolic filial devotion to the West, BTS lead singer Kim Nam-joon (aka RM) vowed to "remember the history of pain that [the U.S. and South Korea] shared together and the sacrifice of countless men and women" (Dong 2020). Kim's English words to U.S.-based nonprofit organization, the Korea Society on October 7, 2020 spurred online outrage among many Chinese claiming "humiliation" at the perceived

national slight. So impactful was the incident that the Chinese foreign ministry felt compelled to reassert that relations between China and South Korea were still “harmonious” (Zhang 2020). Several imperial oversights and ironies are reflected in these everyday examples. First, these everyday controversies over mid-20th century imperial and wartime events typically do not mention Western Powers, chiefly the U.S. For example, media reports around these issues almost always overlook the U.S.’ arbitrary “North”/“South” partitioning of the Korean peninsula (as a “zone for the American occupation,” following the characterization by former U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Rusk) (Lee 37). This factor alone set the stage for the Korean War. Likewise, although regularly heralded as a national savior, U.S. Army General Douglas reportedly considered ending the Korean War by dropping nuclear weapons in China (Weihua 2017). Even without such a devastating outcome, as Bruce Cumings notes, U.S. bombing of the Korean peninsula had already been more destructive and caused more damage than that of Germany and Japan during World War II (Democracy Now 2018). Outside major events like the 2002 Yangju highway incident where a U.S. armored vehicle struck and killed two South Korean schoolgirls, mainstream criticism over the legacy of U.S. war crimes in South Korea (such as the 1950 No Gun Ri massacre, in which countless South Korean refugees were killed) is also less likely to be seen. In a similar vein, decades of hidden violence between the U.S. military and South Korean “camptown” (*kijichon*) sex workers is seldom referenced outside the most ardent activist-scholar circles (Moon 1997; Yuh 2004). Finally, how these unreconciled national traumas have been projected to “subimperial” (Lee 2010) impulses towards economically subordinate countries like Vietnam and the Philippines remains an unexpressed dynamic of globalizing South Korea.

^{viii} Partha Chatterjee supports this contention, offering an even more sobering assessment of the current postcolonial condition: “Faced with the palpable, and often horrendous, failures of the postcolonial state, many have turned to imagining the possibility of a more benign empire where liberal colonized elites might share power with an enlightened imperial authority” (2017: 95).

^{ix} Befitting his functionalist-informed orientation, Malinowski’s observations of putative non-Western society as an organic system of essential parts and processes indisputably were rich.

^x Later in his career Malinowski even endorsed “useful” (versus “useless”) anthropology that directly aided administrative-cum-anthropological jurisprudence of otherwise “unscientific” colonial officials (Foks 2018).

^{xi} Here, Jane Ferguson’s observation appears apt: “cue the colonial (white) anthropologist in his pith helmet amongst the (dark) natives, preferably in a tropical setting” (2018: 190).

^{xii} The famed anthropologist of kinship, David Schneider, goes further, describing sex as central to the development of early kinship scholarship: “[W]ith sex as a major Victorian obsession of the time, and the family as the only way to control sex, that’s where kinship came in” (Schneider and Handler 1995: 195).

^{xiii} Such a rhetorical position is evident even in the work of anthropological giants like Franz Boas. Boas coded his condescension of “primitive man” behind a veiled rhetoric of dispassionate description, regarding the latter’s “power of logical interpretation of perceptions” merely as “deficient” (1901: 6). Despite Boas’ later work on anti-racist advocacy, this early passage is telling.

^{xiv} Top journals for these region-specific fields like *African Affairs* or the *Journal of Latin American Studies* are not noticeably different from the “domaining” practices (Vora 2008) characteristic of the area studies that I criticize in this article. Nevertheless, other reputable disciplinary journals do seem more comfortably pinpointing legacies of the West’s imperial presence. For example, there is *African Studies*’ recent article on toxic waste in the Global South

as a form of environmental racism (Okafor-Yarwood 2020) and the *Journal of Southern African Studies*' recent piece on African responses to European colonialism (Volz 2020).

^{xv} East Asian imperial power ranged from loose tributaries to colonial domination.

Correspondingly, as in the case of “pre-modern” nation-state China, significant differences marked by region, ethnicity, or tribe existed in other East Asian areas despite relatively stable political/cultural environments (Smith 2019).

^{xvi} Even less common (but more controversial) may be questioning the form and impact of the West's surrogate incarnations like “Westernized” native elites. Just the same, these sorts of critiques appear more fully explored in fields exploring Asia outside “the East” (e.g., South Asia): for example, history (Adas 2010; Hevia 2012; Barlow 2012); international studies and area studies (Duus 2007; Hobson 2007; Larsson 2008); political science (Arisaka 1997); cultural studies (Nam 2013); development studies (Gill 1993); and legal studies (Woan 2008).

^{xvii} Western contact in East Asia can be charted as early as Christian missionary campaigns in China during the 13th and 14th centuries. The West exhibited more aggressive and effective tactics during the early to mid-19th century.

^{xviii} I use the McCune–Reischauer romanization system for Korean to English language translations.

^{xix} Arguably, this paternalistic/maternalistic dynamic between Western field specialist and East Asian field object echoes the kin-like vernacular of early canonical anthropological texts. Media representations between the U.S. and South Korea make this situation visible. For example, South Korean presidents frequently have used the metaphor of family and blood to fortify ties with their transpacific patron, the U.S. On the 70th anniversary of the Korean War on June 25, 2020, President Moon Jae-in delivered a speech to the South Korean people: “Our people will never forget the sacrifices of the Korean War veterans from each of the twenty-two participating United Nations member countries, including the United States... The U.N. Korean War veterans I met during my overseas trips have invariably regarded Korea as their second home and taken great pleasure and pride in Korea's development as if it is their own” (Yonhap News Agency 2020). Former presidents like Kim Young-sam have been more categorical in their aspirational relatedness to America. During a July 26, 1995 speech to a joint session of U.S. Congress, he described the United States as having “always stood beside [South Koreans]” to “buil[d] [South Korea into the country it is today, with blood, sweat and tears” (C-Span 1995). Representations in popular culture have fortified this image. 2016's *Operation Chromite (Incheon Sangnyuk Jakjeon)* (2016) positioned popular Hollywood actor, Liam Neeson, as a hagiographic version of General MacArthur. Depicting the infamous general's successful orchestration of the amphibious invasion of Incheon during the Korean War, one scene features lead actor Lee Jung-jae, playing a South Korean soldier, figuratively referring to the Irish actor as his “father.” Finalizing this paternalistic whitewashing of U.S.-South Korean imperial relations is Liam Neeson's likening of the general to another famous “savior” he once portrayed, Oskar Schindler, during a press interview (Kil 2016).

^{xx} Famously, Kathleen Gough referred to anthropology as “the child of imperialism” (1968).

^{xxi} Morgan is credited as one of the first social scientists to apply Charles Darwin's theories of evolution. Interestingly, scholars like Kenneth E. Bock question the extent of this influence, arguing that evolutionary ideas were already hegemonic by the mid-19th century. Morgan's ideas around social and cultural evolution, therefore, may simply have been a “reinforcement of ideas [in the West] long current and already exploited in the study of man” (Bock 1955: 123).

For more on the historiography of the Iroquois vis-a-vis European colonialism, see Stevens 2013 and Forbes 1987.

^{xxii} At the risk of excessive psychoanalytic speculation, one of Western anthropology's greatest appeals might be its ready supply of untouched ideological-cum-territorial fields (like East Asia) through which favored individuals can reconcile personal issues under the guise of humanistic inquiry.

^{xxiii} For more on the complexity and cultural specificity of informed consent, see Fluehr-Lobban 1994; Corrigan 2003; Malone 2010; Bell 2014.

^{xxiv} Instantiations of this dynamic are not only metaphoric. A sizeable literature examines the material implications of this geopolitical trope within numerous spheres of intimacy, including dating and marriage (Constable 2003; Caluya 2006; Nemoto 2009; Robinson 2015); friendship (Pyke and Dang 2003); family (Kim 2010); leisure (Kelsky 2001; Yano 2011); queer culture (Fung 2005; Eguchi 2015); transnational sexuality (Kang 2017), and international statecraft (Moon 1997; Lee 2010).

^{xxv} Of course, promising exceptions within East Asian anthropology do exist. One example is Eleana Kim's study (2010) on the legacy of transnational and transracial adoption between Western adoptive parents and South Korean adoptees. Her work illustrates how familiar anthropological theory can be refashioned both in service of and resistance to Western imperialism in East Asia. Similarly, although not specific to anthropology, scholarly developments within territorial East Asia, such as South Korea, reveal important scholarship on historicizing Western ideological hegemony in the region during the Cold War ((Korea University Institute of Ethnic Culture (*Koryŏdaehakkyo minjongmunhwayŏn'guwŏn*) 2013).