

[0:00:00] Intro Music

Timothy Neale: Welcome to Technoscience. Podcast recorded at 2019 Society for the Social Studies of Science Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Produced by Timothy Neale

Laura Foster: and Laura Foster. This podcast is a new initiative to share the exciting work being done in Science and Technology Studies, or STS, with wider audiences who are curious about the field. It's here to offer an approachable way to learn more about this interdisciplinary and engaged field.

Timothy Neale: Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge that this podcast was recorded on unceded Indigenous land. We recognize the first peoples of Louisiana including the Chitimacha tribe, Coushatta Tribe, the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, and the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe.

[0:00:52] **Laura Foster:** In this podcast series, you'll hear interviews with STS scholars about a range of issues including what the field means to them, some of its big debates, and what its future yet might be.

Timothy Neale: To quote the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway, "Technology is not neutral. We are inside of what we make and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections and it matters which ones get made and unmade."

[0:01:17] **Laura Foster:** With those guiding words, let's go to this episode's interview.

Intro Music

[01:17] **Aadita Chaudhury:** Hello, I am Aadita Chaudhury. I am a PhD candidate in Science and Technology Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada. I'm also a student representative at the Society for Social Studies of Science. Today we have here with us Professor Wen-Hua Kuo from the National Yang-Ming University in Taipei, Taiwan. He specializes in medical anthropology and he is also the editor of *East Asian Science Technology and Society*. Thank you for being with us!

[01:43] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** My pleasure.

[01:45] **Aadita Chaudhury:** Why did you become an academic?

[01:47] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** Well, I'll say, before I became an academic I was trained as a professional. I went to medical school in the late 80s and at that time... Well, I have to say something about the Taiwanese system. Regular medical school is a seven years training program, so after you finish your high school education you have the chance to say you want to enroll in that program. So I was in. It's very coveted, I should say, so all the people say that the most brilliant minds are in the program, but somehow in medical school I had many questions about what does this profession mean, where does the profession comes from. And why people say you have to care about human

beings or, say, you have to care about your patients without any direct reflection about why and about social responsibility. Those are a lot of questions, so I chose not to jump into the necessary training so quickly. It's a long detour, I earned my Master's degree and my PhD degree in Social Studies before returning to finish this necessary training.

[03:13] **Aadita Chaudhury:** What do you think you would be doing if you hadn't become an academic?

[03:16] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** I think I would've become a surgeon. Somehow. And become a very regular surgeon who cannot speak any English. I would have stayed very local. I would say medicine itself is very personal, very local. That means, say, the only responsibility you should hold is for your patients. So the relationship I think would be somehow very intimate, very close to some of the patients and you do good things. Why I say it's local? Because my license is given by the state, the Taiwanese state. That allows you to do medical practice here, in that place. In a sense, if I had been a surgeon, I would have been a very local one and may have had the chance to study in the United States as a fellow or something for one or two years before I return and spend the rest of my life there. So I would say I'd like to be an academic not just to have an additional job, it has created a new world for me.

[04:22] **Aadita Chaudhury:** You mention that you became interested in the social responsibility of physicians and the medical establishment and through that, how did you come to find out about science and technology studies as a field?

[04:35] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** Well, I would say it was not my first target for my study because at that time, back in the 80s, I would say I did not have any idea about science studies. I mean, what would I know is about history and the philosophy of science, but even in that field medicine is a little bit marginalized. So I first studied regular history, medical history, but it was a very traditional program and I felt, OK, this isn't really what I wanted. So I switched to a history and philosophy of science program. In Taiwan at that time it was the only one. There I received very standard training in the history and philosophy of science with a focus on public health, So before I formally stepped into science studies, my background was more of a historian of science. I was interested in public health and I was a little bit... why this affected me to think more about social responsibility? Because the Taiwanese physicians enjoy a higher privilege or social status, it's had a historical reason. Back in the colonial times, we were sort of colonized by Japan. It's 50 years, from late 19th century to the end of World War 2. During the 50 years, we went through a lot of things. One of them was that they said, if you want to have higher education, that must be to study in medical school. So that is how the Taiwanese physicians started to have higher social status. This is also the historical phenomenon that people sort of try to know more about their previous generations, they want to pay

respect to them and so it's a long heritage. Not just of the medical profession, but also a social public intellectual in the colonial period. So naturally, for me is a way to know what happened in the past. Have an answer why science studies. It was a turning point that I got the chance to study in the United States. And I was introduced again to and there were some possibilities for me to study medical history of say some traditional history of medicine program. But also I noticed at that time there was a program at MIT, it was an STS program that also had some interesting stuff there. So I think it's a... I don't want to say it's a contingency, but I certainly found that some faculty members attracted me. So I made a decision and as I look back retrospectively, I found out I chose a field that I really feel decided about. So it's not like a light decision, I saw a lot of things and this is it. But the past, seeing some people there and some topics they offered, just had the chance to switch smoothly from the traditional history and philosophy of science to STS.

[08:18] **Aadita Chaudhury:** What is your current research on?

[08:21] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** My training at MIT allowed me to do something not very conventional, even in the field of medical anthropology. Last week actually I gave a talk at Academia Sinica, actually, it's a very prestigious institute in Taiwan, on how to do anthropology without any human beings involved. So my training there, the MIT, just gave me the sense to do something about cutting edge science in medicine. So I first started with the clinical trials in East Asia and then I studied how traditional medicines can be sort of globalized, here in the United States and in Europe. And currently I work on the end of life care, but with a focus on an Asian context.

[09:21] **Aadita Chaudhury:** How do you explain or describe science and technology studies to people outside of the discipline and maybe even outside of academia?

[09:29] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** I would say that the simplest answer would be that we like details. We like details from the social sciences perspective. My motto is just to break. To break the boundary between society and science and with the idea that, like, the more scientific detail you find and the more social fabrics you notice in that. So that is an interesting journey that brings you that always science it's a part of society and society is part of how science is produced.

[10:13] **Aadita Chaudhury:** Is there any particular debate in the field of STS that has influenced your work?

[10:19] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** I would say our field is sort of very small, but important field. My friends actually in this conference or in STS in large, we would call ourselves a drugs studies people, or people interested in drugs. Because yeah, I did clinical trials studies and other related to drugs, but go back in 2006 when I participated in this conference, it was rather small because it was very technical. I met some interesting people actually here, but at that time I think we searched each

other in this huge conference because lot of people talk about drugs, but at that time I think drugs still had lots of things to do with, say, how people prescribe drugs or take drugs, but did not have to do with the technical aspect of how drugs are developed. This is a thing. But current debate, after I returned to Taiwan, is something more abstract, I will say, the debate would be whether there's any East Asian theory, STS theory or something, what the most appropriate theory for East Asian cases or topics.

[11:45] **Aadita Chaudhury:** You mentioned you're also the editor of East Asian Science Technology and Society. What's happening within East Asian STS that is particularly unique, what do you think?

[11:57] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** Well, the journal itself is sort of a summary of my learning path as I just said. I started with the medical profession and then moved to the history and philosophy of science with a focus on public health and then STS, right. That is also the thing you can see in the history of the journal. The journal was founded 2007 and we started our connection to 4S very early at its inception. And later we found we're still trying to tune up with that is the mainstream and in this conference and we also present ourselves as one of the very Asian or part of a diversity in this conference. So still I would say that most of the good articles or scholarly work has a lot to do with history of philosophy of science, but we also have papers on science policy or citizen science are some mainstream topics. In the future we want to welcome more interesting, mentoring work to us. For example recently we explored some papers from Indonesia that is not a traditional East Asian territory, but we welcome them. And also we have good relationship with some authors about India. That is because Kim Fortun, the current president of 4S, she's also one of our editorial board members, she's part of that. So I think one of the differences between this journals and others so called East Asian, is that we have very broad definition about STS and about East Asia. So that's why we have submissions from India and other places.

[14:14] **Aadita Chaudhury:** There's a debate about, and you touched on this in your earlier answer, about what East Asia is and as a consequence what East Asian STS is. What are your thoughts on that?

[14:26] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** OK. I would like to take what is East Asian STS first because there are some existing theories about how to comprehend, how to understand science and technology in East Asia. I think colonialism used to be one of the leading concepts to that, but it's from the past. And we originally introduced something about Cold War science in order to know what happens after the collapse of the Japanese Empire in 1945. So it is some of the interesting theories help us to understand the relationships between science, technology and society, but now I think that because we introduce more from anthropology and sociology, so we sort of move our focus a little bit on

what is happening now. And that new disciplinary perspective brings us new theories, for example the network theory where you say like, something about citizen science, that is not necessarily East Asian, but East Asian examples bring new insights to it. So like the way for example in Taiwan and Korea we used to have authoritarian regimes and how they promote their science and what is the purpose of science. It's not easy explanation to say, ok, this is a colonial legacy or to say we want to have more bright future for the state. That kind of easy statement. But instead you want to state what is inside, what are the details, what is the real work of project relating to that. So there's some cases allow us to reflect what is East Asian STS. The first question to answer is what is East Asia? My previous answer says that we take a very flexible, broad definition of East Asia as a region. Just because now we are appreciating more the connectedness. Say like how East Asia or Asia connects with the greater world. So for example, I think two years ago or three years ago, we had a paper about how Japan and India linked together was sort of medical tourism. I mean, some Japanese citizens because of some legal concerns or something, they had to go to India where there's some controversial treatment available there. The way we look at the world is not to say, like, it's a region called East Asia, but just see East Asia everywhere. For example, in this case, India is naturally introduced to the story just because it's sort of a natural link between the two. So that's a way we want to welcome papers not just about East Asia itself, but talk about say the world from this specific position that is East Asia.

[17:51] **Aadita Chaudhury:** Thank you so much for joining us here at Technoscience!

[17:54] **Wen-Hua Kuo:** Thank you!

Music outro

[17:58] **Laura Foster:** You've been listening to Technoscience - a podcast recorded at the 2019 Society for Social Studies of Science Annual Meeting in New Orleans. And produced by Laura Foster

[18:08] **Timothy Neale:** and Timothy Neale in association with the Society and with support from Alison Kenner, Teresa Hoard-Jackson, Aadita Chaudhury, Konstantin Georgiev, Juan Francisco Salazar, and Duygu Kasdogan. The intro and outro music is by the Young Fellaz Brass Band from New Orleans, Louisiana. Find them on Instagram and gmail @youngfellazbrassband. That's Fellaz with a Z.

[18:31] **Laura Foster:** Thanks for listening and catch you soon for the next episode.

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