

How Asia Becomes a Method to exemplify the Western Theory: a Rereading of Takeuchi Yoshimi

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Cultural critic and China scholar, Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977) has advocated for “Asia as method” which is commonly grasped as a (China-centered) form of resistance in the occupied Japan of the 1960s when the U.S. power fully monitored its Asian allies for its Cold War strategic concerns in order to maintain the hegemony and legitimacy of postwar order in Asia by containing the contesting communist movements. Takeuchi’s tantalizing idea of “Asia as method” might not be fully comprehended and decoded, but his call for resistance and alternative model through a different understanding of Asia did provoke a lot of responses from the Asian intellectuals both in the public arena and the academy. This paper attempts to interpret the meanings of what Takeuchi means by “Asia as method” and its relation to the hegemonic West. While the word “method” is inserted in the title of Takeuchi’s famous essay that has induced a lot of imitations in the later decades, there is seemingly no specific methodology involved in relation to how he understands and anticipates to “Asia.”

When many critics take Takeuchi’s formula “x as method” by filling it with various terms for different discursive-political purposes and engage in serious debates on the ontological status and epistemological functions of that “x,” there is relatively little analysis focusing on the meanings of the term “method” in all those discourses. “Asia” is a matter of method rather than a matter of content probably because we cannot count on having this “object” deduced from the previous understandings, perceptions and articulations from either Europe or imperialist Japan as a “result.” But did Takeuchi provide us any method to realize his “Asia”? With what method can his “Asia” be understood in relation to the West implied as some kind of universal theory? Can the generic definition of method as some kind of procedure, practice or practical application in accordance with the principles of epistemological exposition be pertinent to Takeuchi’s “Asia”?