



# Orientalism

## Yoshioka Norihiko

Orientalism is a term that refers to the taste and way of thinking inclined towards the East (the Orient) as viewed from the West. In his work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said pointed out that in the Western perception of Eastern society and culture lies an unconscious conviction of the backwardness of these countries. However, in the Asian region, there are cases where countries that have become the objects of Orientalism are conversely influenced by the Western way of thinking and expose the worshipping of the West that inheres in their values and ways of thinking. Additionally, it is often pointed out that there may be an Orientalist unconsciousness in the way Japan views Asia, particularly in international cultural events held in Asia where Japan is the main organizer. How to open up new horizons for post-Orientalism continues to be a challenging issue for us all.

Meanwhile, exoticism, which touches upon the issue of Orientalism, is apparent in, for example, the Japan-“esque” performances held at Japan-events in Thailand, presented by and for the Thai people. Performances with many tradition-“like” or Japan-“esque” elements are presented in front of seated representatives and VIPs from the Japanese embassy or institutions affiliated with the Japanese government. No matter how hard the Japanese people explain to the Thai people that these performances deviate from “authentic” Japanese culture and legitimate traditions, the efforts are of no use, and the Japan-events remain fixated on a kind of stylized “model.” One wonders how this sort of situation will be perceived if it happened between two other countries. The very fact that the Japanese people can dismiss something like this with a forced smile,

perhaps implies that there is an Orientalist framework of mind at work in this relationship.



Eugène Delacroix, *Women of Algiers*, 1834

The painting is considered to reflect the Westerners' image of the East (including northern Africa).

Source: [https://www.freeart.com/artwork/art-print/women-of-algiers-in-their-apartment\\_fan16716968.html](https://www.freeart.com/artwork/art-print/women-of-algiers-in-their-apartment_fan16716968.html)





Felix Bacolor, *Stormy Weather*, 2009/17, Wind chime, Dimensions variable  
 Installation view of "SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now," Mori Art Museum, 2017  
 Photo: Kioku Keizo Photo courtesy: Mori Art Museum, Tokyo



A Western style image seen in a Thai advertisement for home sales  
 Source: (Above) <https://www.checkraka.com/house/อินดี้-รังสิต-คลอง-2-Indy-Rangsit-Klong-2-1451070/>  
 (Below) <https://park.co.th/tag/คอนโดหรู-สไตล์อังกฤษ/>



A Japan-"esque" performance by Thai people for a Thai audience at a shopping mall.  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/themallshoppingcenter/photos/3756961994322470>

### Related Links

- "SUNSHOWER—Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia, 1980s to Now"  
<http://sunshower2017.jp/>
- The Mall Japan Discovery 2020 (video · Thai)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdJjQFj90Zw>