

Dutch school and continued his higher education in Holland and Vienna.

Kartini's correspondence lays bare an unreserved eagerness for modernity as a narrative of progress. As such, it assumes the presence of human design and a notion of freedom, often in its most furious expression. It also involves a humanist subject, often in an articulation so salient that it frees itself from the world in which it creates things. 'There is a restlessness in our native civilization, the spirit of progress is moving among us,' she says in a letter of August 19, 1901. 'It is strongly combated by the inherent love which the Javanese has for the ancient "laws." There will be a hard fight before these hoary ideas and customs shall be deeply buried in the ground, never again to rise.'

But another hard fight took place, in an arena quite different. Here, the opponent was not those 'hoary ideas and customs'; it was, instead, the repressive modus operandi of the Dutch colonial administration, shaped by the very impetus of modernity that brought into the world, among others, the bureaucratization of differences. Thus, the dream of emancipation as the fruit of 'progress' brought by the idea of 'Europe' turned out to be that of Tantalus.<sup>2</sup> In Greek mythology, Tantalus was condemned by the gods to hang forever from a tree in Tartarus, the lowest region of the underworld. Under the tree was a pool of water, but when Tantalus stooped to drink, the pool dried. The branches above him were laden with fruit, but when he reached up, the wind blew the branches away. In the story of Kartini, her frustration stemmed from the way the Dutch colonial administration set down its policy of cultivating, in Ann Stoler's words, 'bourgeois bodies and racial selves,' by reducing the colonial society into entities wrapped up and segregated by categories decided by the authority.<sup>2</sup>

In one of her letters, Kartini described the way the creation of categories took place in Java. 'In many subtle ways they make us feel their dislike,' she wrote about the Dutch. 'I am a European, you are a Javanese,' they seem to say, or 'I am the master, you the governed.' For the native, the learned wisdom was that 'one cannot serve a European official better than by creeping in the dust before him, and by never speaking a single word of Dutch in his presence.'

In this context, it came as no surprise that by the end of 1902, Kartini began to see things differently. She no longer spoke of Europe as 'the centre of civilization, and of enlightenment,' as she did in a

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Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Duke University Press, Durham and London: 1995), pp. 95-136.

letter to a German couple in mid-1901. She had already cancelled her plan and cast off her dream of going to study in Europe. She conspicuously distanced herself from the 'European world' she encountered in the colony. 'We do not expect the European world to make us any happier', she wrote in October 1902. 'The time has long since gone by when we seriously believed that the European is the only true civilization, supreme and unsurpassed.'

[II]

And yet Kartini's pain did not produce an alternative image of eminence to 'Europe.' To her, 'Europe's other' was 'Java.' The word 'Asia' never entered her lexicon. She died before the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, in which Japanese victory offered Indonesian nationalists a much-needed myth of a non-'European' awakening. In 1923, Mohammad Hatta (1902-1980), one of the leading figures in the pro-independence movement who in 1945 became Indonesia's first Vice President, wrote an ebullient piece about it, further promulgating the myth of Japan as a representative of 'Asia's' new force. 'The victory of Japan over Russia has stirred the world,' he wrote, 'Especially in Asia, the heart of humanity has been set into motion. Russia's defeat generated revolts (armed uprising) at home, and its fire has heated up the political climate in Asia. Since then...euphoria has been ferociously on the increase among patriots in Asia.'<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in his essay, addressed to the members of *Indonesische Vereniging*, the radical Indonesian student organization based in the Netherlands, Hatta spoke of the 'dawn of humanity,' followed by 'the rising sun' of which 'the golden splendor shines over a group islands ruled by a Mikado.'<sup>4</sup> In his view, Japan was *the* country in which the initial desire for freedom was born in the mind of 'Asian peoples' after so many centuries of 'white men's' domination.

It is obvious that Hatta's 'Asia,' as a concept by which he measures the pain inflicted by 'white men's' colonialism, is built on the idea of change. His description of Japan betrays a normative paradigm defined by modernity. His 'Asia' is performative; it is justified not by what it is (or what it expresses), but by what it achieves. As such, it tacitly recognizes itself as part of the universalizing élan of the Enlightenment. And yet, setting itself

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In Mohammad Hatta, *Kumpulan Karangan* (Collected Works), Vol. I (Penerbit Bulan Bintang, Jakarta: 1976), p. 29.

4  
*Ibid.*, p. 26.

against the 'European,' it is trapped in the logic of identity, its idea of self marked out by two different, sometimes even contradictory, features: race and revolt. Hence Hatta's 'Asia': a triumphant Japan against an imperial Russia, a restless India during Gandhi's non-violent revolution, a proud Turkey after Mustafa Kemal's victory over the Greeks. Yet, while maintaining that it is to such an anti-European 'Asia' Indonesia naturally belongs, he too speaks of 'the dawn' (*fajar*) and 'the seed' (*benih*) of 'humanity' (*kemanusiaan*). These metaphors suggest that humanity begins with the insistence on particularity before it ends up in a new form of universality. Correspondingly, 'Asia' as defined by race and revolt would ultimately disappear.

There is a large dose of the Marxist view of history to be found in Hatta's thinking; at any rate, it fails to resolve the problem arising from his, (to use Gayatri Spivak's words), 'strategic essentialism.' Can one really move from 'race,' through 'revolt,' to the end of history? By and large, the bias of Indonesian political thinking, hatched and tempered during the struggle against the Dutch colonialist order, is for 'revolt' rather than 'race.' In any case, not long after Hatta wrote the essay, another kind of 'Asia' — one more expressive in nature — entered the Indonesian nationalist dream.

In 1927, Rabindranath Tagore, the revered Indian poet, toured Java and Bali. His idea on education as applied in his Shanti Niketan University has been influential among Indonesian nationalists since the 1910s. After his visit, Tagore wrote in his magazine that 'the Javanese' particularly responded to his idea 'about the need of Asia becoming conscious of her own cultural inheritance.'<sup>5</sup> Around this time, an idea of 'Asia' that gained ground among Indonesia's new political elites was one forged by the Theosophical Society. In India and Ceylon, the Society was not only involved in Hindu and Buddhist revivals but also in pro-independence politics. In Indonesia, the picture was quite different. While the Society had a very significant presence in Indonesia — its membership was substantial among the Dutch population in the colony, and it enjoyed staunch support from both local aristocracy and native public intellectuals<sup>6</sup> — it had a visibly conservative leaning on the issue of Indonesian independence. Its leader, Van Hinloopen Labberton, believed that 'Java and the Netherlands should be one' and that '... that True Freedom may only manifest itself as the tie of law exists and people act according to its limits.' He also stressed that 'for the country, only

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Quoted in David Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia, an alternative to the party system* (Oxford University Press, Singapore: 1985), p. 7. For this paper, I am indebted to his research on the Asia-based Indonesian political thinking.

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See H.A.O. de Tollenaere, 'The Theosophical Society and Labour and National Movements in Indonesia, 1913-1918,' paper for the first European Social Sciences History Conference, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands: 9-11 May 1996. De Tollenaere examines the Theosophical Society (TS)'s support in Indonesia in the first decade of the 20th century: 'Among Dutch in the East Indies colony, the TS had the highest proportion of members anywhere in the world. It also had quite some support among the Javanese nobility (*priyayi*). Theosophical supporters put the names of their leaders literally on the map of cities in Java: in Batavia (Jakarta), there was Blavatsky Park; in Bandung, Olcott Park; in Semarang, Annie Besant Square.' Additionally, five of the thirty-nine members of the Dutch-created 'parliament' for the colony were Theosophists.

Government authority has the right to wield the club of punishment.<sup>7</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Society's direct influence began to wane towards 1930s, following the upsurge of radical politics for Indonesia's independence. However, the Society's concept of a 'universal brotherhood of humanity' — one that transcends race, gender, religion, and caste distinction — remained attractive to many Indonesians, and understandably so; after all, they desperately wanted to escape from the colonialist order with its authorized versions of otherness. Besides, the Society's bias towards 'affirmative Orientalism,' propagated among others by Anne Besant, the most prominent figure of 20th century of the Theosophical Society, practically washed off the image of an inferior 'native land' and restored their greatly damaged self-esteem. This kind of Orientalism perpetuated the myth of the native as the mirror-opposite of 'Europe' or 'the West,' but with 'a view that proclaimed the spiritual superiority of Indian civilization.'<sup>8</sup> Members of the Society proudly put the 'D.I' initials behind their names, signifying their commitment as 'the Servants of India.'

In the early 20th century, 'India' was, of course, as ambiguous a word as any. Even Kartini used words like 'our Indian life' to describe her immediate background. It is possible that later-day Indonesian nationalists who stayed on as members of the Society deliberately maintained this ambiguity; 'India' could be 'Dutch East India,' while simultaneously intimating the idea of the 'Orient' or 'Asia.'

This idea of 'Asia' is, however, different from the one conceived by political leaders such as Mohammad Hatta. It has a different normative paradigm. It is not built on the idea of change. One does not get the impression that it has a temporary role of being a particular; it is not something that will ultimately dissolve into a humanity unconfined by either a racial or a geographic perspective of civilization. More expressive than performative, it tends to accord privilege to identity, or 'being,' over 'becoming.' The pain of colonialism was such that the imagined community called 'Asia' — sometimes hypostasized in the notions of 'Japan' or 'India' — had increasingly become part of a self-shrouding ideology, an ideology that refused to admit that it was quintessentially a political agenda, riddled with incoherence and contradictions. The main thrust of this agenda was to split the Janus faces of modernity, adopting its

7  
Ibid.

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On 'affirmative Orientalism' see Richard G. Fox, *Gandhi Utopia: Experiments with Culture* (Beacon Press, Boston: 1989), pp. 111, 113, 118, 119 and 128.

emancipatory élan and rejecting its drive for conquest. To the mainstream of modern Indonesian intellectual discourse, this appeared to be the best way to respond to the conquering 'West.'

The great illusion of the 1940s was the belief that Japan, an 'Asian' nation-state equipped with impressive paraphernalia of modernity, would do the job. On January 10, 1942, the Japanese military invaded Indonesia (the archipelago was then known as Dutch East India). On March 9, the widely-despised Dutch colonial administration surrendered; many Indonesians, including leaders of the nationalist movement, took no time in welcoming the victor. They believed that the Japanese were their liberators, whose mission was to create a greater, more prosperous, new Asia. They acquiesced to calling them their *saudara tua* ('elder brothers'), or, even, in more laudatory terms, 'the light of Asia.'

### [III]

'Search for Asia in your heart!' — said Usmar Ismail (1921-1972), Indonesian poet and playwright, in one of his poems written during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-1945).

Like many other writers, painters, musicians and stage directors, Usmar Ismail had his works published and recognized under the aegis of *Keimin Bunka Sidosho*, an office created by the Japanese military government to give 'guidance' to cultural activities and to 'enlighten' the minds of Indonesian people.<sup>9</sup> The *Keimin*, generally known as a 'cultural center,' was actually part of *Sendenbu*, an 'information' agency founded to propagate Japanese policy in the 'Great East Asian War.' This does not mean, however, that works of that period are necessarily the product of false enthusiasm. Most of them are in fact eulogies to patriotism; while they are, superficially at least, generally in line with the Japanese war propaganda, they often betray different levels of meaning. The 'nation' (*bangsa*) and 'homeland' (*tanahair*) they exalt, the 'struggle' or 'battle' they exhort, are all obviously related to the dream of Indonesian independence. As in Usmar Ismail's poem, 'Asia' is neither a geographical entity nor an amalgam of political power; it seems more like a mystical Being, a luminous Whole, an enshrined Promise, to which Indonesia belongs eternally.

Like 'the East,' 'Asia' is also a signifier of a rediscovered self. In 1943, Sanusi Pane (1905-1968), one of the leading poets of 1930s

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For more detailed documentation of this period, and the role of the Japanese propaganda machine, see H.B. Jassin, *Kesusastraan Indonesia Dimasa Jepang* (Indonesian Literature Under the Japanese Occupation), (P.N. Balai Pustaka, Djakarta: 1969, 2nd printing) and Masaomi Tanaka, *Sikap Barisan Propaganda Militer Jepang Terhadap Sastra dan Budaya Indonesia 1942-1945* (The position of Japanese Military's Propaganda Team vis-à-vis Indonesian Literary and Artistic Expressions, 1942-1945), a post-graduate thesis in the humanities, the Dept. of Literature of the University of Indonesia, Jakarta: 2000.

and a member of the Theosophical Society known for his repugnance of the 'nihilism' of the 'West' and his passion for 'India,' applauded the 'Dai Nippon soldiers' for their success in overthrowing 'the Allied imperialists.' Following the Japanese victory, he wrote, 'our Indonesian-ness and our Eastern-ness have to shine again in our society and through our artistic expressions... Only by doing so can we take part in this Holy War whose ultimate victory is to overthrow the Allied imperialism for good.'<sup>10</sup>

This mindset, translated into an animated celebration of 'Eastern-ness,' was especially evident in articles written by Indonesian leading intellectuals in *Asia Raja* (Great Asia), a major Jakarta daily created by the *Sendenbu* on April 29, 1942, a date known as *tencho setsu* or the birthday of the Emperor. On its pages, 'Asia' is mostly represented by things 'Indian' as well as 'Japanese.' Tagore's work appeared in installments. A link between 'India,' 'Japan' and 'Java' was forged, using essays like the one written by Ki Hadjar Dewantara (1889-1959), the pioneer of Indonesian national education and an admirer of Tagore, who argued that the Japanese education system was essentially the same as Indonesian practices since the 'Hindu-Javanese era.' The main thrust of numerous articles was to immortalize the dichotomy between the spiritual 'East' and the 'nihilism' and 'egoism' of the West. As a matter of course, *Asia Raja* praised Indonesian intellectuals who had stood against the 'Western way of thinking.' 'The time has come,' the editorial insists, 'to fertilize our spiritual strength in Indonesia, using Eastern culture as the basis, while taking what is good from Western science.'<sup>11</sup>

Such a consciously selected method of synthesis assumes the presence of an immutable centre to decide 'what is good' in the dynamics of social change. Likewise, it starts with imagining of 'nation,' 'society,' or 'community' as a self-consistent corpus. It was only natural that the Japanese military government, in its systematic efforts to uproot cultural traces of the 'West' while consolidating its power in Java, found a ready and eager support among people who opposed the 'Western way of thinking.' Among the members of an advisory body set up by the Japanese administration to plan the future structure of government were such figures as Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Sukarno (1901-1970), who became the first president of the country, and Supomo (1903-1958), a nationalist law professor who was instrumental in the drafting of Indonesia's long-lasting constitution

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Quoted by Masaomi Tanaka, p.100.

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For further details see David Reeve, pp. 59-60.

12  
Ibid., pp. 63-67.

in 1945. Both Dewantara and Sukarno spoke for the idea of 'guided democracy,' or 'democracy guided with wisdom.' On one occasion during the first constitutional debates over the issue of the rights of citizens, Sukarno vehemently appealed to the meeting not to put human rights in the constitutional design. In support of Sukarno's ideas, Supomo, the lawyer, rejected the individualist, liberal view as well as the dictatorship of the proletariat, and proposed instead 'the idea of totality,' and the notion of 'an integralistic nation,' meaning 'a nation which unites with the entire of its people.'<sup>12</sup>

The notion of 'integralistic nation' was to remain unchallenged up to the end of the 20th century. It was forcefully upheld by Suharto's 'New Order' until its demise in 1998 — an end that paved the way for a number of fundamental changes in the Indonesian constitution. Suharto (1921-), however, was by no means a lone voice on this issue. Like Malaysia's Mahathir (1925-) and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew (1923-), he spoke, albeit more sparingly, for the legitimacy of 'Asian values.'

#### [IV]

The burning question, is, of course, whose belief? Whose values? Whose 'Asia'? Needless to say, both 'Europe' in Kartini's imagining and 'Asia' in the mainstream of Indonesian political discourse are arbitrary modes of representation. One can argue that, in Foucauldian fashion, they correspond neither to an external object, a reality, a subjectivity, nor an agenda, but rather to the discursive regularity reproduced in the very representation of 'Asia,' (or 'Europe' for that matter), in the above-mentioned texts.

Yet one can always point out that there are real people behind, inside, and beyond the discourse — people who can speak out but also whom nobody listens to. It is interesting to note, for example, that the idea of 'Asia' discussed above has almost no reference to Islam. One can easily discern the absence of powerful intellectual and institutional voices representing Islamic voice in the whole debate. Most of the advocates of the 'Asia' seem to have been speaking of a specific world-view — a cultural expression shaped by an imagined continuity with the Indonesian Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms before the advent of Islam in the 14th century. This world-view, mainly shared by members of Javanese aristocracy and European-educated

elites marginalized by the colonial society, was manifestly on the defensive. It had to deal not only with intruding technologies and ideas from the 'West,' but also with the aggressive promotion of Marxism and reformist Islam that spread like fire among the lower classes since the beginning of the 1920s.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the idea of 'Asia,' as a survival kit, begins and ends by reproducing an exclusionary, if not coercive, subject not unlike that of 'European' modernity.

On that very basis, the 'moral double book-keeping' as described by Geertz in his essays on societies in transition like Indonesia and Morocco<sup>14</sup> — a general desire to appropriate, in the words of *Asia Raja's* editorial writer, 'what is good from Western science,' while flaunting the very symbols modernity comes to invalidate — is not as incongruous as it may seem. In *Kalah dan Menang* (Victory and Defeat), a novel by S. Takdir Alisjahbana (1905-1994), the foremost advocate for modernity in the 1930s literary movement, one of the leading characters is a Japanese officer stationed in Java in the 1940s by the name of Major Katsuhiko Okura. Okura represents the modern man who is simultaneously a master of the technology of war and repression and an eloquent advocate of the Japanese identity. To Elizabeth, his Swiss mistress, he insists that 'it is impossible to think of mankind as one.' Every nation is unique, he says. To be sure, the Japanese utilize science, technology and economy from the 'West,' while remaining heedful of ideas like 'individualism, rationalism, and liberalism' that may 'destroy the cohesive nature of their society.'

But ultimately, his story is a case of identity steeling itself, unsuccessfully, against the ecstatic, inexhaustible motions of difference. What Okura and others like him fails to foresee is the defeat of the Japanese forces and the disgrace of the Japanese ideals. Thereupon, the freewheeling energies of modernity he fears most, often in its ugly and violent expressions, inevitably change his monolithic, monochromatic world forever. In this sense, *Kalah dan Menang*, in all its lumbering narrative, stands as an allegory of Indonesian intellectual history, in which the emancipatory promise of 'Asia' ends up becoming its own nemesis.

13  
Ibid., p. 8.

14  
Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed*  
(University of Chicago Press,  
Chicago: 1968), p.117.

## Discussion

Moderator (T. Mizusawa): We have now finished the three presentations which followed Professor Sakai's keynote speech.

In the first presentation, Professor Koizumi spoke about Okakura's self-representation and what sort of person he actually was. I do not think we have previously looked at Okakura in this way. Professor Koizumi has spoken in a very interesting way about how Okakura's philosophy was expressed through his use of fashion. Professor Koizumi, I wonder if you would like to add to your presentation, or if you have any questions related to other presentations?

5. Koizumi: There is a book called *Color-ban Nihon Bijutsushi* (Japanese Art History in Color) published by Bijutsu Shuppansha that costs 1,900 yen — I know the price because I use it as textbook. The preface is written by Tsuji Nobuo, and he begins his paragraph with a quote from Okakura's *Ideals of the East*. He describes Japanese art as “the beach where each successive wave of Eastern thought has left its sand-ripple as it beat against the national consciousness.” I always try to explain to my students why Okakura made such a statement, and what he was thinking as he wrote these words. Okakura once drew a diagram, which obviously made references to European art history. In this diagram, he placed China in the middle, India on one side, and Japan on the other.

Professor Sakai mentioned that Asia is not a fixed entity, but a concept forcibly created by Europe, and therefore, is one of a pair of concepts. Okakura also understood that Asia relies on some sort of “countering” — I would call it a “counter relief” — to define itself. The title of his last lecture at Tokyo University was “*Taito Kogeishi* (The History of Aesthetic Works in the

East),” instead of “Japanese Art History.” He did not use the word “art” and focused on the history of aesthetic works and craftsmanship, that is, skill and technique. The definition of “aesthetic works (*kogei*)” is not clear, but he uses this expression anyway. Okakura dismantled the history of Japanese art and reassembled its parts in an Asian context, by positioning Japanese art in the discourse of “aesthetic works in the East.”

I suspect Okakura had developed a concept of Asia, which is different from our concept of Asia consisting of Japan, Indonesia, China, and other countries. I have not been able to resolve this issue yet, but Okakura’s choice of his lecture title, “The History of Aesthetic Works in the East,” instead of “Japanese Art History” gives us a hint of the kind of idea he had of Asia. I wanted to add this comment to my presentation.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Professor Wang Hui, could I ask you to comment?

H. Wang: I would like to go back to the question I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, and to which I did not give an answer in my presentation: why China has not had a real discussion on the topic of Asia. I have tried to think about this question, even though I could not find a comprehensible answer. I can follow up on this question by giving several reasons.

First of all, in the first wave between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, none of the Chinese revolutionaries and intellectuals talked about Asia. The word “Asia” was translated; it was actually translated from Japanese. With the rise of nationalism, the nationalists tried to translate this Japanese idea into a Chinese idea, and closely align it with the nationalist movement. However, they acted too late. There was a war between the Qing dynasty in China and Japan during 1894-1895. Then, there was the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, in which the Allied powers betrayed and sacrificed China in the interest of Japan. The Japanese invasion into China followed in the early 1930s. By then, the ground for a narrative on Asian history was based on a narrow East Asian issue, which was dominated by Japanese Imperialism.

In this historical context and process, most Chinese, even the revolutionaries and nationalists, gave up on thinking about Asia. So, one of the reasons is that throughout our historical experience, the term "Asia" has made no sense to the Chinese.

Another reason may be rooted in the Chinese intellectuals' centralism, which some people criticize. I believe the criticism is correct. In the early period of the 20th century, when Chinese intellectuals used the concept of the East or Asia, in most cases they were talking about China. This could be seen in the discursive dichotomy of East/West and China/West. However, the dichotomy itself shows us the illusive nature of Chinese-centrism for the fact that the sense of center was constructed against the only reference — the West. Hence, the so-called Chinese-centrism is another version of Western-centrism. In last two decades after the Cultural Revolution, China launched a reform, which has also been called "opening." The historical meaning of this "opening" is China opening its doors to the West, or the advanced capitalist countries, including Japan and, especially, America. Therefore, we did not pursue a concrete dialogue in the form of China-Japan, China-Indonesia, China-the Philippines, or China-India relationships.

I mentioned the last two decades because the discursive framework has greatly changed from that of earlier times during the Chinese revolution which was so closely related to the international alliance with Russia and other socialist countries or the third world. After the disagreement between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, Mao Zedong treated China as a center of world revolution. Surrounded by the Eastern bloc and the Western bloc, China re-established its worldview with the focus on Africa, Asia and Latin America. When I was a child, I saw many visitors from Vietnam, North Korea, the Philippines, and African countries and we were familiar with social movements, wars against American invasions, and even literature from the Third World countries. After the Cultural Revolution, we gave up this kind of worldview. Then the dichotomy of China and the West came back again and dominated our imagination for a long time.

Finally, I would like to say, it's time to re-examine our perspective and re-launch the discussion on Asia.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Now Mr. Goenawan Mohamad would you like to add any comment?

G. Mohamad: Yes. In my paper, I mentioned a novel written by Takdir Alisjahbana. He was a writer who was the foremost advocate of modernity in the Indonesian literary movements of the 1930s. He wrote *Kalah dan Menang* (Victory and Defeat). It is about Japanese occupation in Indonesia as seen by several characters. One of them is a Japanese officer called Major Katsuhiko Okura. Okura represents the modern man who is simultaneously a master of the technology of war and repression, and an eloquent advocate of Japanese identity. He says to his Swiss mistress that "it is impossible to think of mankind as one." Every nation is unique, he says. To be sure, the Japanese utilize science, technology, and economy from the "West," while remaining wary of ideas like "individualism, rationalism, and liberalism" that may "destroy the cohesive nature of their society." This is a typical fascist idea. But curiously you can also find these kinds of ideas in Islamic ideology, for example, the propaganda of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. I would like to say that



modernity would equal rationalism and, especially, liberalism. The other thing I would like to add to this is that the Japanese person, Major Okura, a fictive character, speaks also of modernity against modernism. These people believed in modernization, technology, science, and everything. But on the other hand, there were various free expressions being produced or created by modern artists like Picasso, Samuel Beckett, and James Joyce.

A similar contradiction can be found, I think, in the Russian revolutionaries who wanted to impose socialist realism. There was a debate between György Lukács and other socialist thinkers about expressionism in Europe in the 1930s. And Lukács, like the Stalinist ideologues, of course subscribed to the idea of modernization: believing in science, technology, rationality, and all. In exhibitions like "Under Construction," you feel the modernist temper in the air. Precisely because it implies a stance against dark side of modernization — the control and conquest of space and time, the push of instrumental reason — it inherits this modernist temper. And as you may recall, modernism is not always in line with modernity. Modernism in the arts (Duchamp, Picasso, Kandinsky, etc.) tends to undo the rationality-driven performance of modernity.

**Moderator (T. Mizusawa):** There is a question from the audience about Takeuchi Yoshimi. Professor Sakai, you mentioned Takeuchi in your previous publication. He continued to think about modernity until his later years. Could you pick up on our previous discussion and comment on the issue of modernity with reference to Takeuchi?

**N. Sakai:** Takeuchi Yoshimi is a figure who thought seriously about the issue of Asia during the decade after Japan's defeat in the Second World War.

First of all, as suggested by the words of John Lennon, Asia is "a concept by which we measure our pain." We must understand that the reason why Asia has to talk about Asia is rooted in the issue of colonialism. It became inevitable for people who were wounded by colonialism to use the word "Asia." This is one of

the most important points in this discussion.

In this context, as seen in the case of Okakura Kakuzo, discussed in Professor Koziumi's paper, the idea of Asia emerged from resisting European colonialism, or protesting against colonialism.

But there is a kind of trick embedded in the apparatus of "Asia." That is, the word Asia is often used in the context of the victims protesting their pain and experience of humiliation. Yet, it concomitantly becomes an apparatus which enables people to forget that it is multi-faceted and contains perpetrators as well as victims.

Therefore, the point Professor Wang touched upon is very interesting. There is a strong proclivity among scholars who specializes in China, particularly, those who are now in North America, to construct a discussion that divides the world into China and the West, or China and North America. This is very similar to the mentality prevalent between the 1940s and the 1970s; the world was divided into Japan and America or Japan and Europe, or Euro-America. Asia was discussed in relative terms, not taken as a real agenda. The relationship with America, in this context, was extremely comfortable although Japan was victimized under the American occupation.

So, when we construct a relationship with Asia, we must eventually confront the fact that in our multilateral relationship, it is not always easy to distinguish the victim and the victimizer.

Consequently, this brings us to the problem of modernization and modernity, as pointed out by Mr. Mohamad in his last comment. Although there was modernity in the economic modernization of Japan, there was strong resistance against the unpredictability of modernity itself and extremely alien elements or subversive elements that would destroy homogeneity.

This was also true of the Fascist period of the 1930s, but it seems to me that it was even more so in the forcibly uniform Japan that emerged after the loss of the empire. While pursuing economic modernization, Japan may have been the nation among the old empires or colonialist powers that did not permit

immigration from its colonies or completely shut them out. It carried out its modernization in a thoroughgoing way with no countering forces. Inevitably, this is why Japan has not yet been able to solve the problem of ethnic Koreans in Japan, and other similar problems.

Hence, whenever Japanese claims its membership in the Asia community, our neighboring countries say, "Hey, wait a minute." We must recognize this kind of trick embedded in the concept of Asia.

Moderator (T. Mizusawa): Thank you. I think you have spoken about the issue of modernization and modernity — the spiritual side of modernity and modernization as a consequence of industrial society — and how there is a gap between the two. Mr. Mohamad had pointed to the problems that emerge from this gap.

I would suspect that until very recently in the 20th century, the Japanese have been living with this contradiction. However, I suspect that the same problem can be found in European modernity as well, and it extends beyond the problem of Asia to which we must return.

Let us keep our focus. How was modernism and modernity understood by Okakura?

5. Kōizumi: Okakura was a very "modern" person, who preferred beer to Japanese sake. He was one of the first Japanese people to read Sherlock Holmes. He essentially understood that "us" is an imaginative projection of "them," as mentioned in our earlier discussion.

Mr. Mohamad mentioned that Asia is placed at one pole and Europe at other, and then there is the problem of modernity. I think Okakura had a strategy of creating an Asia that is distinctly different from both Europe and modernity.

For example, when he explained the policy of Nihon Bijutsuin (Japan Art Institute) in English, he described Japanese art as distinct and different from modern art and European realism. But he also maintained that he did not believe in reviving traditional art. He asserted that Japan is placed in a very

ambivalent position. I feel that his position is Asian, in a sense that it does not have a fixed recognizable location.

Okakura gave a lecture at the World Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 in which he took the side of Asia and severely criticized the uniformity and modernization of Europe, as described by Mr. Mohamed just now. On the other hand, he tried to take Asia inside the West, as demonstrated by his activities in building the Asian art collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Sato Michinobu suggests that Okakura's strategy was to take advantage of Asia and use it as a tool to infiltrate Europe. There are others who assert that, therefore, Okakura's grand strategy was to establish *nihonga* as a new and modern form of Japanese art at the Nihon Bijutsuin.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Our discussion is now becoming complex. Okakura's closest apprentice, Hishida Shunso, writes that the distinction between *nihonga* (Japanese art) and *yoga* (Western art) is irrelevant. Yokoyama Taikan, another apprentice, also shared this view but I suspect they did so with full understanding of Okakura's ideas.

5. Koizumi: I think so, too. But *nihonga* has survived. In China, this category is called *guohua* (*kokuga* in Japanese). But I doubt there is any concept similar to *nihonga* in Indonesia.

*Yoga*, of course, in another context means American films (*yo* is a generic adjective which means western, and the term *yoga* is used to describe western-style painting as well as film). But we do not call Japanese film *nihonga*. *Nihonga* is strictly applied to Japanese painting. We call Japanese films *houga*.

The concept of *nihonga* is as ambivalent as the concept of Asia. I cannot explain what it is. If Okakura were here today, things would have been different. The members of the Nihon Bijutsuin are still doing the same thing today. The modernity we have been discussing was homogenized, found a place for itself. They seem to be oblivious to what is going on around them.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: The issue of *kokuga* has been raised.

Does anyone have further comments about about modernity, or the contradictions in modernization?

H. Wang: Yes. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, there was a whole set of knowledge, which we called “national knowledge,” including art. In Chinese, we have *guohua* (national arts), *guoyue* (national music), *guoxue* (national scholarship) and so on so forth, which indicates this new knowledge as national. It was part of the process of building national knowledge.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Modernism flourished in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s; more than in Tokyo at the time. I wonder if there was any conflict or contradiction between the fundamental mentality of the Chinese and modernity?

H. Wang: Art, novels, and poetry flourished in the first decade of 20th century. Many overseas Chinese students came back from Japan, Europe, and America, and produced much of the art and literature of that period. They called their work “modern art” and “new literature.”

In late Qing period, “national scholarship” and other forms of “national knowledge” were produced as part of the movement of Han Chinese nationalism against Manchu rule. The May 4th movement was an anti-Western movement with the aim of reviving traditional culture, but a counter-movement arose in the sphere of culture and art. Even within the circle that carried out the “new culture movement,” there was a program to develop “national knowledge” led by Hu Shi and his followers. This was consistent with the overall tendency of modernization, which combined nationalism and cosmopolitanism. You could see the difference between the two: national versus modern. After 1927, especially in the 1930s, much Chinese literature, art, and popular culture of all kinds was influenced by Japanese art and literature, including Neo-Sensual novels, revolutionary art, and so on.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: There was a sort of international network of modernity that transcended nationality. Many new

developments were modeled on the examples of Tokyo and Shanghai. Let us get back to Professor Sakai's reference to Mr. Mohamad's comment. The word Asia seems to be associated with some sort of pain. This pain is closely related to the problems of modernization. Moreover, the person who suffers this pain could potentially become a victimizer who imposes pain on others, as demonstrated by the example of Japan, whose cultural sphere was modernized at a relatively early stage.

N. Sakai: It was very interesting to listen to Mr. Mohamad's presentation and also to understand that Okakura Kakuzo — although he was active before the age of modernism — and contributors or key persons in the modernist movement were part of a similar network. We can see this from the kind of influences that they had on each other.

Becoming aware of this context makes it easier for us to understand why Okakura played a certain role in the 1930s during the modernization of Japan. Also, as Mr. Mohamad said, in Japanese modernism, and I think this was also true of Europe, there was a type of modernism that was close to fascism and that could turn into fascism at any time.

At the same time, Mr. Mohamad described how Japanese modernism also moved toward cosmopolitanism. One reason for this the West. As long modernism was understood as something coming from the West, it was comparatively safe, but when, as in Europe, it developed as a movement that criticized modernity itself, it had the potential to turn into fascism given the right opportunity. We have examples of Japanese modernist writers such as Yokomitsu Riichi, who influenced China, who suddenly changed into fascists.

This means that we should discuss modernism in particular contexts and not generalize about it any longer. I am interested in Mr. Mohamad's opinion on this issue.

G. Mohamad: Yes. What I can understand from the discussion about Okakura and "Asia as one," is that he resists the impulse of unity rooted in European modernity, on the one hand. On the

other hand, he creates a unity in Asian modernity. This goes hand in hand with the impulse of control that modernity can be open to. Bureaucratization and uniformity — these are all part of modernity, and it is very easy to link them with fascism. When you try to create a strong unity and, at the same time, put yourself against another type of unity, you become very repressive inside. Such circumstances, with the help of technology and other factors, are very conducive to fascism.

The best way to look at this is in the context of identity politics. Identity politics culminated in the 1960s in the United States, when women and blacks stood up to affirm their identity. Identity politics can be dangerous because it attempts to fix what should always be a process. As Julia Kristeva once put it, the subject is always “subject-in-process”. The idea of identity assumes that the border of the self is solid and impermeable. The best way to deal with the question of “Asian” identity is to deconstruct European identity. Europe always claims to be very unified, with its link to Greek and Judeo-Christian tradition. They always claim that the Greek legacy is a natural property of Europe, but this is a mistake. During the Dark Age, the Europeans did not know about Greek antiquity. In fact, they learned about the Greek legacy from the Arabs in the 9th century. The Greek legacy was assimilated by the Arabs from the 9th century to the 12th century. For example, in Baghdad in the 9th century, all books by Aristotle, except for those on politics, were already translated. Three hundred years later, Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, wrote a famous commentary on Aristotle’s thought — which was a major influence on the theological works of Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, the claim for Europe as one, taking the legacy from the Greeks, is false. There was a German historian who said that the idea of Greek as being untainted by the Orient was a creation of historians in the 19th century, when Jews became recognized as equal citizens. The Germans were afraid of them, so they tried to shield themselves by creating this image of the pure identity of the Greek legacy. This is why I think we should deconstruct the European identity.

Moderator (T. Mizusawa): The drive for racial purity as epitomized by the Nazis is a kind of illusionary identity. Using Mr.

Mohamad's expression, it is a kind of solidified or fixed identity. Professor Sakai in his keynote speech asserted that Asia should not bear a fixed identity, because it is in transition. There may be a linguistic contradiction in phrasing this, but we cannot share an Asian identity all together. The individual differences that can only be found by examining particular cases are very important.

The story of Kartini is about an Indonesian woman who desired Europe, and who failed to construct a strong Javanese identity although she had the chance to do so. The more you try to fix your identity, the more you become aggressive toward the other and in the end destroy yourself. This is a vicious cycle.

Okakura seems to have defined the identity of Asian art rather loosely. He seems to have formed it in a flexible way through his interactions with other people.

5. Koizumi: I think that pain or weakness is actually an important aspect when speaking of Asia. In addition, I feel that there is a very weak ego on the other side of a mechanical and uniform modernity.

Okakura wrote a series of love letters to a married Indian woman just before his death. I am not sure if we could call these letters literature, but a scholar on modern literature has written a paper on these documents.<sup>1</sup>

According to this paper, there are only two male writers in modern Japanese literature of the Meiji period who ever knelt down before a woman. One was Okakura Kakuzo and the other was Kitamura Toukoku. Their relationships with women were central to their identity. They left writings in which they knelt down to women and asked for forgiveness. Because of this, I think that Okakura had what would be taken as a weakness in the fascist context.

Natsume Soseki is another literary figure of the same period who also expressed his anxiety towards modernity. Some scholars say that all of Natsume's novels express the writer's anxiety about modernity. In the last pages of his novel, *The Three-Cornered*

1  
Hashiura Hiroshi, "Tenshin no Shi Seishin — Kukan no Shigaku (The Poetic Imagination of Okakura Tenshin — Poetry of Space)," *Izura Ronso*, no. 3, 1996.

*World*, the protagonist snaps out of his dream-like world to reality when he takes a soldier, heading to Manchuria to fight in the Russo-Japanese War, to the train station. The train is the real world “for there is nothing more typical of twentieth-century.” This idea resonates with Okakura’s description of a train as “a time-devouring locomotion” in *The Ideals of the East*.

But there are some people who cannot get on board of modernity. Asia seems to be one of the destinations for such people who missed the train. We may need to touch on the issue of women in tomorrow’s discussion.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Thank you. Professor Koizumi’s comment touched on Okakura’s creativity. We may be expanding our discussion too much if we touch on feminism, but Professor Sakai, do you have any comment?

N. Sakai: I think Professor Koizumi’s point is very important. But I am concerned that the structure in which a man worships a woman is facilitated by an acute distinction between the two sexes — a system that was established during the process of modernization.

Moderator [T. Mizusawa]: Thank you. From the start, I had no intention of leading this discussion into any conclusion.

In the final stage of our discussion, I understood that it is a rather peculiar way of thinking to see identity as something fixed and established, something that needs to be sought as the basis of the self before anything can be accomplished. Identity is always in a flux. When one’s identity is too strong, it may result in aggression toward others. That is because identity may arise through an experience of pain. Asia may be described as a child who was hurt at birth. This means that there is a possibility of becoming caught in a chain reaction in which someone who becomes strong through painful experiences turns around and hurts someone else. But if we take a flexible approach, we can see from history that people in different cultural regions are looking for something, seeking for something. Okakura Kakuzo’s idea of

Asia is usually understood as very assertive, but he also seems to have had a vulnerable side as pointed out in the episode introduced by Professor Koizumi.

If all of these facets are considered together in a flexible but careful examination of what Asian identity might consist of in history, we may come up with results that are more definite. This might sound a little rhetorical, but I would like to end here. This is the conclusion of Session I. Thank you.

## Session II

### “Asia that is Exhibited / Asia that is not Exhibited”

The role of museums and galleries, which have developed as cultural apparatus in the modern age, is constantly changing in response to the different needs of the age and society. Also, exhibitions, which are organized as a cultural representation, cannot be discussed without touching on their historical background. When thinking about “Asia” based on visual arts’ experiences, the examination cannot elude the political aspects of art, since it is mediated through modern institutions, such as museums, galleries, and exhibitions. When discussing exhibitions of Asian art, the selective process that determines which Asia to exhibit and, consequently, not to exhibit, is a manifestation of the politics of a specific organization or community, as well as the ideology of an individual.

In Session II, we will discuss the sociopolitical aspects of representing Asia in exhibitions, particularly with a focus on international exhibitions such as biennials and triennials, which, in recent years, have increased in number across the world.

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Moderator: Yoshimi Shunya

1. Lee Yong Woo  
“Globalism and the Vanity of its System”
2. Tachata Akira  
“A Trojan Horse?: Multiculturalism in International Art Exhibitions”
3. Tony Bennett  
“The Rules of Culture: Exhibition and the Politics of Knowledge”

Discussion

## Opening Comment for Session II

Yoshimi Shunya

Professor, Institute of Socio-Information and Communication Studies,  
University of Tokyo

Good morning. It is very a fine day. But we are going to have a very long day. I think today's program may be challenging physically as well as intellectually.

Yesterday, we had four presentations, including the keynote speech by Professor Sakai, on the idea of Asia and modernity. The discussion was very profound and touched on issues that need to be dealt with over the long term. I do not think I can summarize yesterday's session well, but I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of what we covered by pointing to three things.

First, there is an issue of desire when speaking of Asia, identifying with Asia, or representing Asia. This desire is embedded in the structure of modernism.

Mr. Mohamad gave an example in his extremely stimulating and imaginative presentation regarding this issue of desire. He introduced us to Kartini, an Indonesian woman, who initially had a desire to identify with Europeans, but eventually reverted back to her native Java, and spoke of Java in this context. He also presented a case in which Japan's desire for colonial rule in Asia fell in tune with the emotions of people who considered Japan desirable as they were oppressed by an imperialistic or European colonial system. There was also a group of Indonesian nationalists who similarly desired India.

Also, in a different context, Professor Koizumi took the example of Okakura Kakuzo, and described how Asia was imagined or desired under a modernist conscience. Professor Koizumi suggested that to Okakura, Asia was a tentative name given to an empty space in transition. These various forms of desire toward Asia were one of the themes in yesterday's discussion.

Secondly, as pointed out in Professor Wang's presentation,



Yoshimi Shunya

there is an issue of Asia that does not speak about itself — Asia that is not represented. This leads to the issue of China, as suggested in Professor Wang's presentation. His discussion reminded me of an article, "Asia's Chinese Name" by Pekka Korhonen in the recent issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 3, Number 2, August 2002. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* is a cultural studies journal in which I participate as a member of the editing committee and work with my Asian colleagues. She writes about how the concept of Asia was constructed by the 17th century Jesuits, particularly, by Matheo Ricci.

According to her analysis, when "Asia" is written in *kanji* (Chinese characters), it has a very negative connotation. Particularly, because the *kanji* for "A(亜)" in "Asia(亜細亜)" means "inferior," and the *kanji* that describes "si(細)" in "Asia" has a negative overtone because it means small. This is how "Asia" has been represented to begin with. Professor Wang discussed how an Asia with negative connotation has been discussed or not discussed, particularly in the Chinese context.

The third point, which is very important, is an issue raised by Professor Sakai, whether it is possible to represent Asia beyond the framework of modernism or of colonial discourse. To rephrase what Professor Sakai said yesterday, we tend to get stuck in a structure in which we project ourselves as "the other of 'others'," and look for our origins in functional relation to the "other." Is it possible to find a way to represent Asia beyond such structural restrictions? This problem could be understood as a common concern in presentations made by Mr. Mohamad, Professor Koizumi, and Professor Wang. Yesterday's discussion examined what it means to represent Asia from the long-range perspective of modernity.

In Sessions II and III, I would like to take yesterday's discussion as a starting point but bring it a little closer to the present day, relating it to the subjects of art and exhibitions, which have been discussed in previous symposiums organized by the Japan Foundation Asia Center, and continue the discussion in terms of specific issues.

I hope that today's discussion will revolve around three main

areas.

First, we talked yesterday about the representation of Asia during the historical period of modernity, but today we will take up the issue of what it means to represent Asia in the context of globalization.

In light of yesterday's discussion, Asia should not be understood as something that already exists and then expands into the global arena. Asia is a concept that is constructed, made, and multiplied within the process known as globalization, which contains contradiction, division, and repression. The first concern is how to think about this issue, the issue of globalization and representation.

Second, in contrast to yesterday's discussion that focused on ideas, today's three panelists will discuss institutions of art, such as art museums and biennial and triennial exhibitions, the places and the system in which art is represented.

Professor Tony Bennett, one of today's panelists, writes about an "exhibitionary complex," a complex set of places where exhibitions are carried out. These places may include a biennial or triennial or an art museum. Today, I hope that we can consider the issues related to these places with reference to yesterday's discussion.

Now for the third point. We went to see "Under Construction" yesterday. It was a very interesting exhibition. Although I am not an expert on art, I felt that many of the elements in art are now closer to the elements in such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, and fusing with them. In this symposium, many of the participants have a non-art background, like myself, a sociologist. I would like to see how people in the arts and people in other disciplines could communicate. I would like to see what sort of dialogue can be created between arts professionals and professionals in other areas, such as sociology, anthropology, and knowledges related to cultural studies.

I would like to move into the presentations now. We have made some changes in the program. We will have Professor Lee Yong Woo first, then Professor Tatehata Akira, and finally

Professor Tony Bennett as the third speaker.

## Globalism and the Vanity of its System

Lee Yong Woo

Executive Director, New York Center for Media Arts

[1]

My approach here to the subject of Asia will be through global cultural events such as the recent proliferation of biennials and triennials. I have chosen to present this area because, whether one looks East or looks West, it is rare to find another genre of cultural industry that is as popular and as expansive as the biennial or triennial. Moreover, when it comes to debate on globalism, the biennial is one of those rare cases that in both the East and the West meet with unanimous approval. In general, when it comes to things "global," there are different levels of adhesion and resistance to it, especially according to one's implication in the economy and polity. An exception to our suspicions about things global is the biennial, which is acclaimed by the general public for bridging the cultural and historical gap between the East and the West and viewed as the ultimate alternative global event. The term biennale here will be used liberally to include biennials, triennials, and other international events.

In Asia, the biennial has become an important event, one in which we can read structures of cultural production and consumption. In the Far East alone, comprising Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan, there are dozens of biennials, some of which, like the Gwangju Biennale in Korea and the Yokohama Triennale in Japan, have at their disposal mammoth budgets of around five million dollars. The number of biennials and triennials outside of the Far East but in and around Asia is also growing. There is, for instance, the Triennale India, the Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, the Biennale of Sydney, and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, to name but a few of the major ones. The Asian art scene is now definitively incorporated into the global cultural loop. What drives this art system and the municipalities and cultures behind it is the fear of finding



Lee Yong Woo

itself excluded from this loop. And so together they participate, as though they were part of a global cultural relay race.

There are two faces to globalism, and they are reflected in the two faces of the biennial. The biennial left behind it long ago the origins of its name: an art event that is held every two years. It has undergone a complete transformation that is now transforming art and culture. Now its production and consumption of art is big enough to coexist with the tourism industry. Now it entices us to visit far away cities to see art that has less to do with the artist's studio than with media information. The media is now essentially in control of the production and consumption of art. In fact, in the end, it manipulates art so that it becomes its message. The media is the element essential to multiplying entropy in the name of the biennial.

The biennial has also brought about an immense transformation in the technology of the exhibition. There is at once vanity and excitement to creating a spectacle, sometimes across an entire city, using new technology, gigantic exhibition spaces for huge installations, and striking visual content. By making the artist carry the economic burden of creating the works for the biennial, the organizers place the artist in a precarious post-biennial financial situation. The artist must create work that meets biennial exhibition spaces whose scale rivals that of the Roman Colosseum — we're back in the days of Roman Empire. By allowing or demanding or most likely needing to be sponsored by the local and/or the national government, the biennial becomes part of the local and/or national industry, one that is directed by the government and that has an obligation toward it. The days of a gallery discovering and supporting a young, unknown artist, a Paul Cezanne living in cold-water flat, are a part of the past.

The biennial is perhaps driving away art to a place that is so far off that it will never find its way back. Its arrogant strutting is like the global companies that dominate then absorb its medium and small competitors. Biennial art is like an art with motor. It makes new art every two years, which also means that every two years we have to throw away the old art. This cycle is no different than the life cycle of other consumer products such as computers, mobile phones, and cars. Biennial art has fallen prey to capitalism's genius for speedily planned obsolescence. This culture of speed has given birth to alienation in art. Past discourses stating that art and technology were sensitive to

speed and fashion and the eternity of the aesthetic of art are now out of place. A Marxist would be completely befuddled in front of a biennial. The biennial is a media circus whose rallying cry is global repentance.

Thanks to the speed of the biennial cycle, artists have lost their position at the center of the art scene and now are mere attendants called upon then dismissed from the cultural industry. In this role, perhaps it's better that they don't dream of controlling this speed. Marshall McLuhan wrote that the artist is an antenna; Andre Malraux said that artist is a beacon and a catalyzer that clarifies and predicts social changes. They were both wrong. At least now, artists are not alone in being wrong. Curators who sign their biennial contracts are concerned only with what's written in it. They are all used to this routine. As soon as their contract is fulfilled, they don't worry about the possible problems that happen in the biennial afterward.

The biennial has for a long time been at the source of a new common language with a new system of grammar that differs from and replaces regional language. It erases memories of the original language of each region and offers a linguistic foundation for a new language. In this way, the biennial presumes to present something like a new standard time that rectifies regional inaccuracies. This standard gives rise to a new standard and this new rectified time rectifies another rectified time. The biennial caravan goes, for instance, to Vietnam and Cambodia, raises the Asian banner, and then tries to practice the ways of Venice and Kassel. With the zeal of the newly proselytized, it tries to spread to the poor souls in the outback what it just learned. Regionalism sometimes resists it, but this effort leaves but trace of documentation in a faint history of the region.

Every two years, the world of art gets dizzy again as if it was catching a wave on a surfboard, riding it in to shore, then slowly paddling back out to sea to repeat this cycle of excitement followed by letdown. And, from its tidal source in Venice, Kassel, São Paulo, and Lyon, it now rides a tsunami that is crashing down upon Asia Pacific shores. All you can do is surfing, then wait for the next big wave. The only thing that counts in this game is that wave. The rest is just a sea of oil.

The biennial is under the charm of a promotional campaign that, in the name of art and culture, welcomes the isolated region as well as the global community and, in the process, explodes its budget. This

dilapidation means that the next historic creation will lack funds. The biennial is like the fun of surfing: once the thrill is over, fatigue and anxiety set in, for the investment and the expenses have been too great. In this sport there is a minority of winners and a majority of losers: the indifferent, the cynical, or the disgusted. Apart from the euphoric period of surfing the waves, the rest is depression, or a period of incubation and dissimulation, whose truth is difficult to reveal, for it remains an enigma. Daily life and struggle become distorted or disappear from our view. Felix Guattari warns us that "when fascism enters into our veins, it chemically changes our desire." The biennial is a new institution that has immediately become a dominant power, pushing aside other art institutions such as the museum, the gallery, art market and art criticism.

Let's take a look now at a completely different biennial, one whose face differs from the somber look of the biennial just mentioned. The biennial contributes to the deconstruction of the concept of the refined object as an archaeological document in the work of art. It is a system that has liberated the artwork by placing it in front of the public, in the town square, and in a new aesthetic discourse that changes continuously through its separation from the oppressive and categorical walls of the museum. The biennial creates an open-air environment by bringing art whose character is public or urban to alternative places such as the subway or abandoned buildings. It is the place where a hierarchy of art is established, where spectators from all walks of life come together, where pluralism is the overriding theme, and where a uniquely democratic aesthetic takes over.

The biennial, then, is like a contemporary bazaar. It is an international scene where information is readily available, and where race, culture, tradition, language, religion, and even art express themselves in total freedom. Just as one of the foundations of today's market economy is bazaar, the biennial is the cornerstone in the foundation of the avant-garde in artistic philosophy and aesthetic discourse. This is true, however, only if the biennial refuses to imitate the organized power of institutional systems, if it avoids the pitfalls of power-mongering that typifies it now, and if, instead, it uses its power to confront the power of the system.

Perhaps the biennial's most invaluable contribution is to the creation of a place for the popular education of art. It has also

inspired at once the creation of other art genres and a unified view of art. The growing number of biennials encourages artists to create work that bypasses the more conservative cultural politics of the powerful museums in the world. The biennial not only encourages the visual arts but the mutual relationships among each art, making possible innovative collaborations among artists.

Because of the promptness of its return — every two years — the biennial is for the moment where the most active exchanges of information occur on the international art scene. It is the place where people in the art world meet to brainstorm and trade information. As a result of this, since around 1990 the major art institutions — museums, galleries, and journals — have grown to accept in their own ways the aesthetic tendencies, curators, and young artists formed in the biennial system. It is especially this transfusion of young blood into the institutional system that is invigorating.

The biennial has not yet reached the popular acclaim of the Grand Tour of the 18th century, but it now plays a role in the global economy through its connections to the tourist industry. According to the city of Venice's estimates, every two years the opening of the Venice Biennale increases city revenues by 2.5 percent compared to a non-biennial year. The last Kassel Documenta calculated that among its 650,000 visitors, 200,000 were foreigners, whose expenditures on, for instance, restaurant meals and hotel stays played an important role in the economy of the city. The First Gwangju Biennale welcomed 1.6 million visitors who brought almost 100 million dollars to the city.

The biennial cultivates an aesthetic of populism, an image of a cultural event that represents the interests of the people, one that adds speed to an avant-garde visual art often accused of being boring. It succeeds in promoting this image because, with its relatively short life span, it meets with fewer restrictions and regulations on its exhibitions than permanent art institutions. This is not to say, of course, that the biennial is more entertaining or higher artistic quality than the museum or the gallery. Although I'm part of the biennial system, I have never heard someone around me say that the biennial is actually fun.

## [II]

This phenomenon — the biennial as a global and popular artistic

event — is only about a decade old. Although the first Tokyo Biennale was held in 1952, it was organized only sporadically. The Triennale India endured because of its small scale, which today seems to be the antithesis of what it means to be global. There is of course the Biennale of Sydney and the Istanbul Biennale, yet, geographically, these are on the edges of Asia. It is only since the 1990s that the biennial has become a fundamental global festival of culture, and since 1995 that, in this context, the Gwangju Biennale in particular has become a pivotal showcase. Since then, the Taipei Biennial and the Shanghai Biennale have followed in its path, and last year the Yokohama Triennale became the first global art festival of the 21st century.

The Gwangju Biennale's breath of fresh cultural air was merely the frontal system of the cultural whirlwinds that have blown across Korea and touched nearly a dozen other cities and venues, including the Busan International Film Festival, the Busan Biennale, the Jeonju Film Festival, the Seoul Media Art Biennale (media\_city seoul), the Jeonju International Craft Biennale, the Euiwang International Theater Biennale, and the Buchun International Experimental Music Festival. For all of these events to survive and thrive, they will each have to create and build on a unique identity. This will take much time. Today there are over one hundred and twenty biennials throughout the world, a scary number when it comes to the professional curator's job of considering each one's potential mother lode of fresh, new, and vital art — unless this is an impossible task. In Korea, the fact that there are so many events of the biennial type is beginning to seem abnormal.

Although all of the aforementioned biennials are situated in Asia, they are global events. This is, on the one hand, their quality, yet, on the other hand, their problem. They are geographically in Asia, yet they seek to transcend Asia. It is difficult to see them as culturally different and independently Asian, as events that only Asia could organize. In fact, in their determination to compete on the global cultural scene, they present a facade of Asianness, while hiding their true ideological agendas of un-Asianness and global homogeneity. They are packaged in a superficial cultural difference and Asian character that hides deeper contradictions.

Like all biennials around the world, although the Asian biennials have large budgets and attract large publics, it would be difficult to

say that they succeed in presenting art that is remarkable for its quality and unique identity. And in this, and according to each case, they more or less succeed in being but second best in comparison to Western biennials, in being but tepid, self-congratulatory festivals that decorate the framework of globalization. I don't think that those who organize the Asian biennials sin from a lack of experience or an absence of ideology, but, more correctly from an absence of self resulting from confused ideology and goals. Most of them demonstrate this by following faithfully the contradictions and experimentations of Western biennials.

I like to think that I've been invited to speak to you today because I created the Gwangju Biennale, which, historically, is the first true biennial in Asia. I also like to think that I'm here because of what you have perhaps heard through the biennial grapevine, which is that, yes, the Gwangju Biennale bases its organization on a political and social bedrock of citizens who participate conscientiously, and on the social ramifications of the biennial after it closes. And finally, I like to think that if we now define the biennial system as Western, I deserve perhaps to be seen as a globalist who accepted and put to use the most actively this Western system in Asia. This, I like to think, is antinomic to the superficial global political attitude that the Asian biennial commonly perpetuates.

I established my reputation on the rumor that the Gwangju Biennale tried to overthrow symbolically the global and perennial hegemony of the Western art system. That is, supposedly I upset the pioneers of globalism by inaugurating a global festival. It's amusing for me to hear this kind of rumor that is more appropriate in bold type on the cover of certain provocative magazines, but I have to admit that the truth is quite different.

One thing is certain, that my biennial methods were like guerrilla tactics: to covertly attack the political center and loud global themes and ideologies with, as an arm, a new Gwangju Biennale that was seemingly far from the center of the art world stage. Power and inflated ideology in the midst of this hegemonic system is usually safely ensconced in a position of undisguised vanity. It's safe to say that, historically, this vanity is always protected by the kitsch of imperialism, and that it is attacked from the outside. The Gwangju Biennale was this outsider.

I think the first reason for the Gwangju Biennale's success was