

PROGRAMS

Home > Programs > A Presentation by Doryun Chong, in conjunction with CHINA IN ASIA/ASIA IN CHINA

A PRESENTATION BY DORYUN CHONG, IN CONJUNCTION WITH CHINA IN ASIA/ASIA IN CHINA

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Transcribed and edited by Daisley Kramer and Jane DeBevoise

This presentation by Doryun Chong was delivered in conjunction with a panel CHINA IN ASIA/ASIA IN CHINA: Imagining Asia in Contemporary Chinese Art, organized by Columbia University and Asia Art Archive in America. From the perspective of contemporary visual art practice, this panel interrogate the role of China in Asia and Asia in China from multiple perspectives. Acknowledging that the concept of Asia itself is a construct which has been put to multiple purposes in the 20th century, this panel looked at how projects in this Asian space have begun to emerge in the imaginary of contemporary practice in China, particularly in the last five years. This panel also explored how China figures in the imaginary of artists today, and in particular artists working in India, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

Jane DeBevoise: We have two speakers now who will change the focus slightly –Doryun Chong and Alexandra Munroe. The first is Doryun Chong who is Associate Curator at MoMA and now working as an upcoming exhibition on post-war Japanese art [*Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, November 18, 2012 - February 25, 2013]. For this panel, Doryun will speak about the imaginary of China in Japan and also in Korea.

Dorun Chong: Thank you. I am pleased that I am number four in the line-up because listening to other people's very well prepared presentations, I have a better sense of how my talk can fit, but at the same time it's tough because the bar has been set so high. I was actually at quite a loss about this topic when I got it. I really racked my brain to try to come up with these connections. What are these imaginaries? Chinese imaginaries and Asian imaginaries, what the relationship is between those two? I have to confess that I might be slow and maybe I am not paying enough attention but I was not able to come up with many examples in contemporary practices in China or other surrounding countries - China, Japan, and Korea are the countries that I am most familiar with.



Tateishi Koichi (Tiger Tateishi), *Samurai, the Watcher, (Koya no Yojinbo)*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 130.3 x 162 cm. Courtesy of the artist and the National Museum of Art, Osaka

Print this Page

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ARTISTS, CRITICS, CURATORS, AND OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Aisha Khalid, Aki Onda, Aki Sasamoto, Alexander Keefe, Alexandra Chang, Alexandra Munroe, Alf Chang, Ali Van, Amy Lien, Amy WOOD, Annysa Ng, Anthony Tino, Anthony Yung, Arin Rungjang, art history, art institutions, artist interviews, Ashley Billingsley, Ashok Sukumaran, Bahar Behbahani, Bahar Behbani, Bani Abadi, Bani Abidi, Barbara London, Beatrix Pang, Belinda Q. He, Benjamin Moskowitz, Beth Citron, Betsy Damon, Bing Lee, Birgit DONKER, Boon Hui Tan, Boris Groys, Brinda Kumar, Cai Guoqiang, CAMP, Cao Fei, Casey Tang, Chang Chao Tang, Chang

However, I happened to be looking at this painting – a very strange painting – from 1965 by an artist named Tateishi Koichi, also known as Tiger Tateishi. I was looking at this painting as part of the preparation for an exhibition I am doing, which will focus on artistic practices in Tokyo from the mid 1950s through the 1960s. It will open at MoMA in November later this year. This is one of the paintings that will be included in the show. I had always liked this painting from the moment I saw it but I didn't really know why. It was such a strange painting so I started looking at it more carefully. The English title is *Samurai, the Watcher*, but when I looked at the Japanese title, I realized it was quite different from the English title, which is more like *Yojimbo in the Wilderness*, which is much more specific.

Going to the next slide, many of you know who Yojimbo is, one of the important characters in the oeuvre of Akira Kurosawa, so you can now guess who the samurai is. He is standing on top of a bluff, in an un-Japanese looking landscape, a landscape that is closer to home for us, [here in America.] The painting is a fairly good size, but not huge, but the artist managed to include some very strange details. Just below him, far off in the distance is a group of men who are dressed all in white and wearing white hoods, so you can easily guess that these are Ku Klux Klan members holding torches and a banner that is also burning. So you start thinking 'what is going on here?' Far off in the distance near another outcropping is another band of fighters, and if you look very close, they to be turn out tigers, actually green tigers that are holding swords and banners with Mao's face emblazoned on them. And then there is a strange cartoon-ish character [on the left] – another observer in this painting. So there I am looking at this painting, finally and seriously, and asking myself what was this artist thinking when he painted this painting in 1965, in Tokyo? On a side note, Tateishi is a very interesting artist because soon after (he paints this work) he departs for Italy, goes to Milan and becomes one of the draftsmen and illustrators in Ettore Sottsass's studio. So many of those futuristic drawings, if you are familiar with Sottsass's work, were done by this man who clearly was a very accomplished draftsman.

But [back to the painting] how does one figure out what this Japanese artist in 1965 is painting? You might expect that he would paint Yojimbo, but he is also painting Klu Klux Klan and Chinese Maoists. So I started thinking about the relations between Japan and China in the 1960s and I think many of you are aware, there wasn't that much [contact at that time]. There was some contact soon after the war in 1950s. There was trade happening, but by the 1960s things had gotten much more complicated with the Sino-Soviet split and the Cultural Revolution about to start (in 1966). And it wasn't until 1972 that the two countries made a joint statement and it was also a few years afterwards that they officially normalized diplomatic relations. So that is to say that there wasn't that much going on between these two countries [in the 1960s]. Of course another large factor here is what happened to Japan after the war when it became so clearly aligned with the US in the Cold War Order. All you have to look the maps that we just saw that shows all the US bases, especially the ones [facing] the east coast of China, forming something called the Great Crescent, a term that was used at the time to [describe the military] bulwark against the spread of communism, to see what I mean.

I think I can safely say that there wasn't that much interest in or discourse with regards to China in the 1960s in Japan but there were exceptions and these exceptions were scholars, Sinologists. There is a very respected Sinologist by the name of Takeuchi Yoshimi who is a translator of the complete works of Lu Xun [a seminal Chinese writer] who spent time in Japan. Takeuchi delivered a lecture in 1960 entitled 'Asia as Method.' In it he talks about how we, the Japanese, have put down China and the rest of Asia as being backward, by not being modernized, but we actually have to change our view, because we have become too Western-centric. He asked what other countries like China, India, and Korea have in common and why they were so different from Japanese modernity, and pointed out the Japanese have dealt with the imposition of modernity from the outside, while maintaining Japan's inherent cultural endowments. That was his argument. But then he went one step further and – he was very pessimistic about Japanese modernity – he predicted its collapse and put a lot of hope in Chinese modernity. I will come back to Takeuchi...

Then I was thinking about the relationship between Korea and China. I could probably go back further, but I got stuck around 1985 and 1987 with this agitprop that was produced by protesters at a university. This side is one of the well-known wood cut prints by Oh Yoon. These are good examples of the so-called Minjung art, translated often as the 'people's art' that really represented and encapsulated Minjung period that was the avant-garde in Korean art in the 1980s.

As I was looking at these, I was thinking about what were the more formal official relations between China and South Korea. Obviously, because of Korea's even more precarious situation within the Cold War Order – we are talking about the front line here – and China's close relationship to North Korea, there wasn't any formal contact between South Korea and China until 1983 when a Chinese civilian aircraft was hijacked and it landed in Seoul which forced Chinese negotiators to come to Korea. That opened the door to normalizing diplomatic relations. In 1986 China participated the Asian Games [in Seoul] and in 1988 in the Seoul Olympics. But it wasn't until 20 years later, in 1992, that Korean and Chinese relations were normalized. That is the background.

And now I am looking at those 1980s Minjung art wood block prints – they are in a very nativist folk-art language – and thinking about the 1930s Chinese woodblock print movement and this well-known artist, Li Hua's 1935 print *China Roar* and one 12 years later entitled *After the Grain-collectors Leave*. Obviously the situation in China was quite different but there are clear resonances between them [and the Minjung prints]. I am not suggesting that there is a direct relation, between 1930s Shanghai and 1980s Korea. It wasn't until 1987 that the military dictatorship was finally dissolved in Korea, so in the [early and mid] 1980s, nothing communist-related was available [to

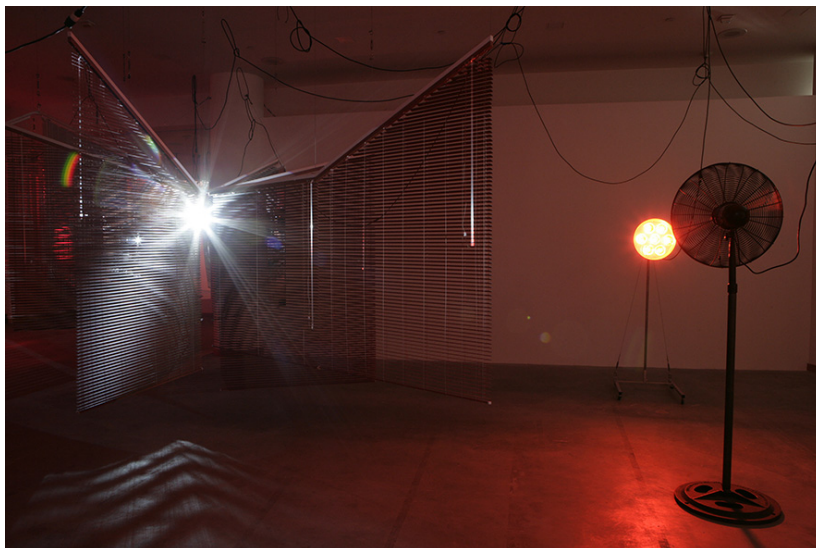
artists and students] in Korea. Marx's writings were not available except through underground channels. So how much of a relationship was there? What were the sources of their visual styles and iconography? I am not really able to say.

But going back to Takeuchi just very quickly, I said that he delivered this lecture 'Asia as Method' in 1960. What is really interesting about the lecture is that he talks about how his inspiration is John Dewey the American philosopher. Dewey went to Japan in February 1919 and stayed for a few months, leaving in April 1920 and 3 days later, arrived in Shanghai on May 1. Three days later, the May 4th Movement broke out. In Korea, two months before, there was something called the March 1st Nationwide Protest that broke out against the Japanese rule because Korea had by that time been annexed for about a decade, so there are these interesting triangular relationships happening here. But John Dewey spent about two months in Japan and then went to China, intending to stay there for a year but ended up staying for two years. He then came back and wrote a book about his experience and to summarize it very quickly what he was essentially saying was that he was in Japan during the period of Taishō democracy. The Taishō period was from 1912 to 1926 and is often considered to be a liberal international democratic period. But [Dewey] was disappointed; he was disenchanted with Japanese modernity. He saw democracy [in Japan] being discussed in classrooms but he considered it as a kind of learned thing. Then he went to China and the May 4th movement broke out and he saw modernity germinating from the people itself. So he made the same kind of prediction that Takeuchi would echo almost 40 years later, that Japanese modernity would collapse and Chinese modernity would rise and become strong.

On the next slide, artistically speaking, I am also thinking of this Taishō period when Dewey was in Japan and China, especially in Japan in 1919. By that point Japan has had modern art for almost half a century starting from the 1870s. So now we have 2 or 3 generations of modernists working in Japan and artists, like Yorozu Tetsugorō [on the left] and Kishida Ryusei [on the right] who are through and through modernists. If I just think of a quick characterization of these paintings, this is a modern consciousness that is very much rooted [in Japan] by this point, very much naturalized, even though these paintings have been often described as Fauvist or Impressionist. This is also a way of showing that Japan, as several people have already mentioned, is indeed the place where many Chinese and Korean artists went to learn about modernism.

The next slide here is a 1915 portrait by an artist named Ko Hee-dong, who was Korea's first bona fide modernist painter. He studied at Tokyo Art School which is the same school where Yorozu, the artist on the left side [of the last slide], studied. So this was a place that a lot of Korean and Chinese painters studied although I don't have that much information about which Chinese painters were trained here and what their influences were.

So my point is really a simple one: by jumping between 1965, 1960, 1919, and 1985 and 1987, between these three countries - I am talking about a very small swath of the map that Qiu Zhijie was showing...[laughter] I am trying to show temporal crossings that were clearly happening and are now a century old and really need to be thought of more seriously to see these connections or trends or comparisons as a part of a much longer history. Perhaps these exchanges were much more vibrant and frequent about a century ago.



Haegue Yang, *Yearning Melancholy Red*, 2008. Aluminum Venetian blinds, mirror, moving spotlight, infrared heater, timer, fan, drum kit, trigger, MIDI converter, cable. Installation timer at Asymmetric Equality, REDCAT, Los Angeles, USA, 2008. Photo: Scott Groller. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Wien Lukatsch, Berlin

In closing, I would just describe one project that I worked on which is not perhaps visually or stylistically obvious. This is a work by a Korean artist called Haegue Yang, a Korean artist based in Seoul and Berlin. This was the last exhibition I made at the Walker Art Center in 2009. We made this installation, which consists of custom-made blinds and commercially available electric appliances like fans and heat lamps. All these red intense lights are coming from those moving

lights that you see in nightclubs, which she rented and installed and computer-programmed. [The viewer] stands in this space of intense shadows and light, a space of abstraction.



Left: Kim San, Right: Nym Wales (Helen Foster Snow). Courtesy of Korean Arirang Association (www.arirangsong.com)

When the artist talks about her inspiration for this work, the relationship between her inspiration and the work, she is thinking about a trio of people but especially two people. The [one on the] far left is a Korean communist anarchist freedom fighter from the early 20th century. He lived during the Japanese colonial time and was named Kim San, which was his nom de guerre. The middle [figure] is an American writer named Nym Wales, the nom de plume of Helen Foster Snow. Helen Foster arrived in Shanghai in 1931 when she soon meets Edward Snow, the author of *Red Star over China*, the first book on the progress of the Chinese communist party. Both of them spent about a decade in China during the 1930s. Nym Wales meets Kim San in 1937 in Yan'an. Kim San had traveled from Korea to Tokyo in 1919, where he became radicalized and then joined the Korean freedom fighters against the Japanese imperialists. Many of these Korean freedom fighters had to travel around China, essentially fleeing from the law, since China was being invaded by Japan as well. He finally gets arrested and executed by the Chinese communist party under the charge that he was a Trotskyite and a Japanese spy. This happens in 1938. Nym Wales meets him just before he dies in Yan'an in 1937 and writes his biography, which comes out posthumously in 1941. This is [not widely read] English language book was translated in Japan in the 1950s, and then revised and republished in the 1960s to become a bestseller. In Korea, however, because Kim San was communist and an anarchist, people at the time weren't allowed to read it. The Japanese translation circulated widely but underground from the 1960s through the 1980s. [As a result of] the democratization process, the Korean translation is finally published in the late 1980s.

So this is an example of an expansive, creative imaginary in operation, which encompasses not only China but also Korea and Japan—a kind of territory crisscrossed by an obscure historical figure who was also a critical inspiration for activists for democracy decades later, and a territory where an idealist from a small colonized country could meet from another idealist from a powerful Western nation. This is the kind of imaginary that elicited such strong emotional and political resonances in an artist's mind. What I am ultimately interested in are these kinds of resonances that can be so meaningful and generative even when there are no concrete connections.

Doryun Chong began his curatorial career at the Asian Art Museum and the Walker Art Center where he (co-) organised exhibitions including "Haegue Yang: Integrity of the Insider" (2009), "Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis" (2008), "Brave New Worlds" (2007) and "House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective" (2005) as Assistant Curator of Visual Arts. At MoMA, Chong has organised "Bruce Nauman: Days" (2010) and "Projects 94: Henrik Olesen" (2011), and most recently "Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde", and co-edited *From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan, 1945-1989: Primary Documents*. He studied art history, anthropology, and comparative literature, and completed his doctoral studies in art history, at the University of California, Berkeley.