

PROGRAMS

Home > Programs > A Presentation by Qiu Zhijie, in conjunction with CHINA IN ASIA/ASIA IN CHINA

A PRESENTATION BY QIU ZHIJIE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH CHINA IN ASIA/ASIA IN CHINA

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Transcribed by Daisley Kramer and Xiaofei Mo, edited by Jane DeBevoise

This presentation by Qiu Zhijie 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: Qiu Zhijie is a man of manifold talent, and he wears many hats. First and foremost, he is an artist. But he is also a teacher, critic and curator, and all that is part of his practice, which he sees as a totality. He holds a teaching position at the School of Inter-media at the Art Academy in Hangzhou, but he is also curating the upcoming Shanghai Biennale. Zhijie has come from Hangzhou via Taipei just last night. We are delighted to have you here.

Qiu Zhijie: Thank you, Jane. What I want to start with is this map. I did not make it especially for this talk, but [for a talk that took place] one month ago at the Shanghai MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art). A Korean curator named Kim Sunhee organized a show called [Nostalgia: East Asia Contemporary Art Exhibition, February 18-May 1, 2012] which talked about the idea of East Asia as one, and proposed they [China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan] have the same ideas about art and esthetics. I was not included in the show but they invited me to talk there, so I felt I would resist the idea of so-called East Asia as one.

First, I Googled 'Asia map' and got completely different ideas of what Asia is. Sometimes the maps cut out all of Russia and sometimes Russia is cut in half. But sometimes all of Russia is included. Sometimes, the maps leave out Arabia, like The Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, which always includes India and Pakistan but never Iran or Iraq. For the Japanese, the idea of Dongyang [东洋 East Asia] has never included Arabia. And this has a long history.



Here is a map of Asia from 1804.

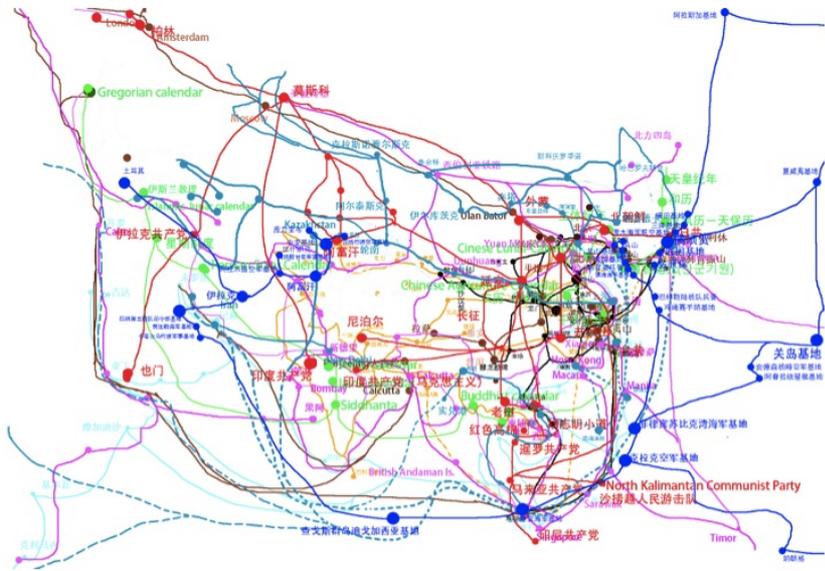
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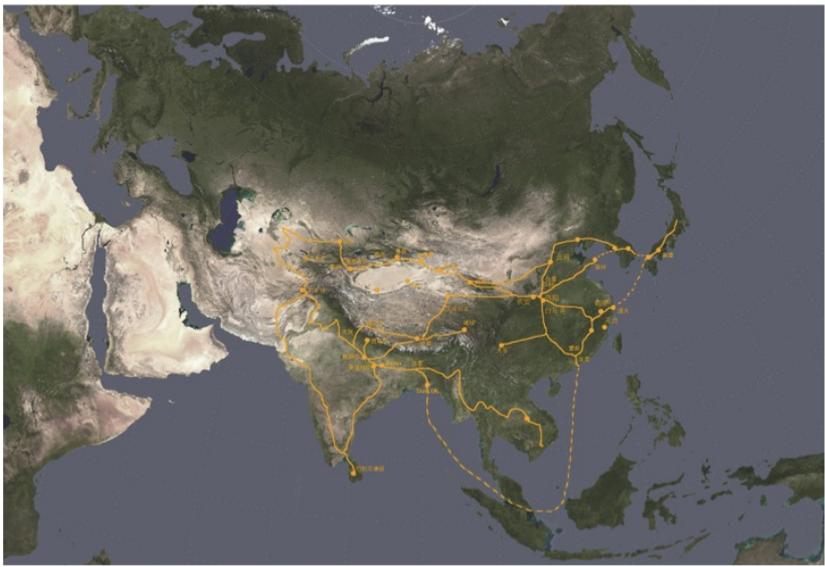
20th century, abstract, abstract art, Abstraction, Access, acrylic, acrylic painting, aesthetics, Afghanistan, Africa, AIDS, Alternative Space, American History, american revolution, Animation, Anthology, anthropology, Architecture, Archive, art, Art Administration, art and society, art criticism, art history, Art Schools, art space, art writing, Artificial Intelligence, artist book, Artist Books, artist monograph, artist writing, artist's book, Artist-run Space, Artists Books, asia, Asia Art Archive, Asia-Pacific Triennale, Asian, Asian American, asian politics, Auction, Auctions, Australia,

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 Behbahani, 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



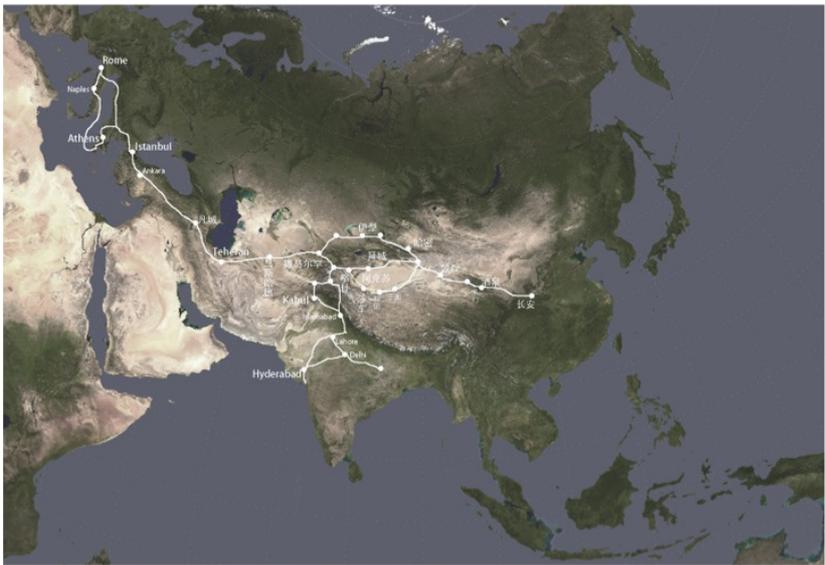
Now, we go to this map, one that I made with a pen. I will explain how I made it.



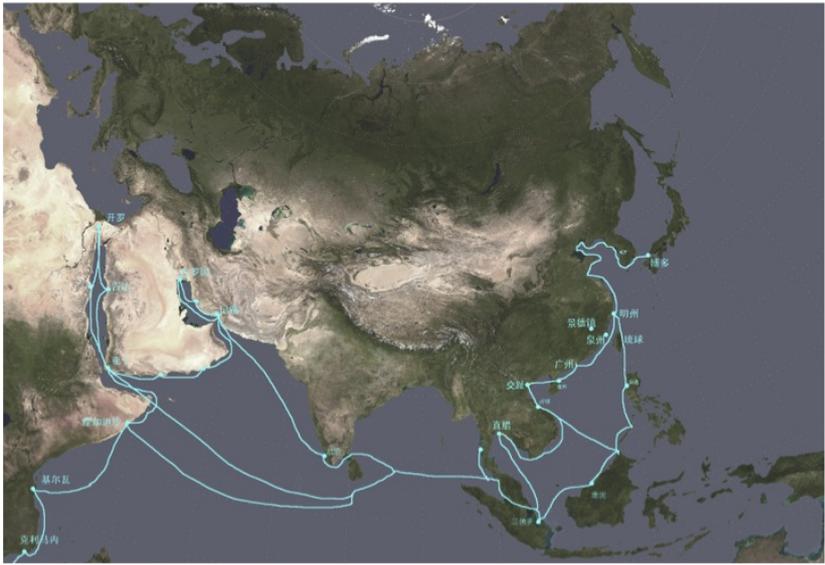
I followed historical timelines. Here is the first image. I refer to the road of Buddhist propagation which dates back 2600 years. This road starts in India, goes through the Western part of Asia to China and to Japan. But there is another route which goes to Thailand and Cambodia.



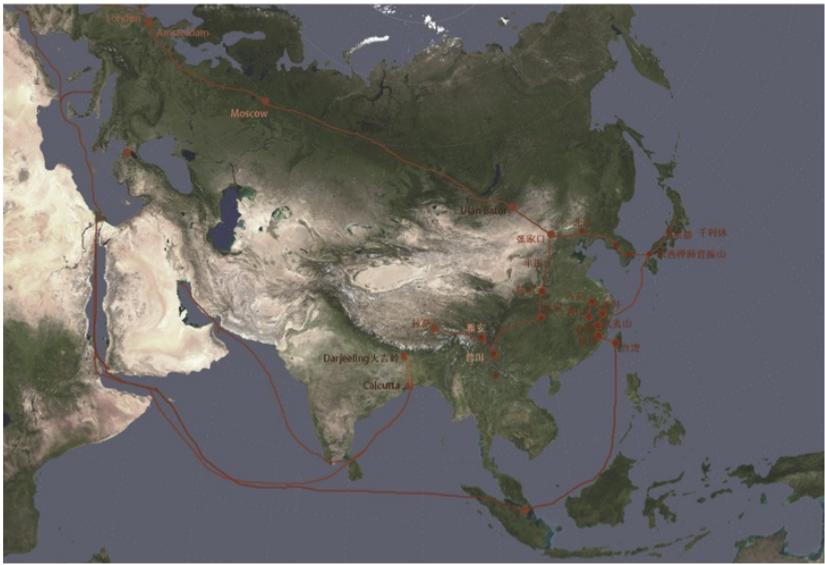
The second image shows the triumph of the Chinese written language. It starts in Anyang [安阳] China and then goes to Singapore, to Japan, and to Vietnam.



And here is a map of the beautiful and famous Silk Road.

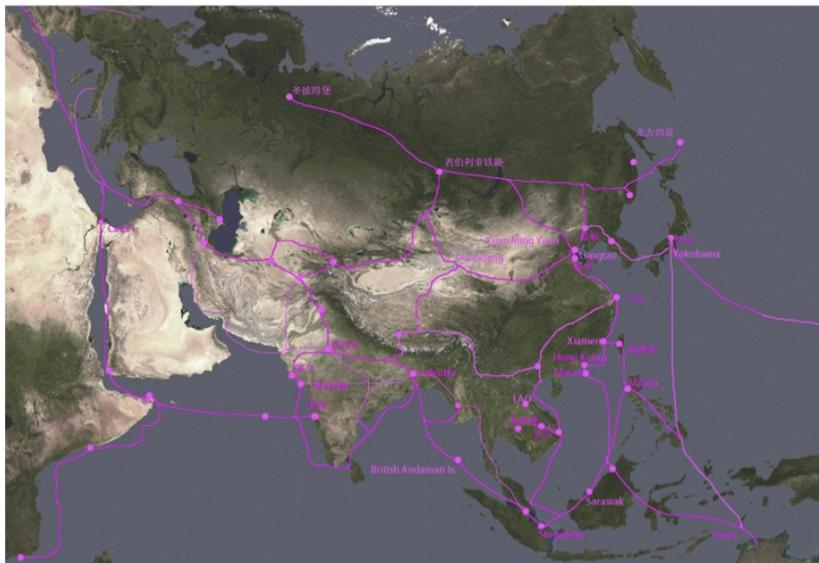


And here is the road of that [Chinese] ceramics took. Ceramics were used as a form of currency [for purpose of trade] since the Song Dynasty.

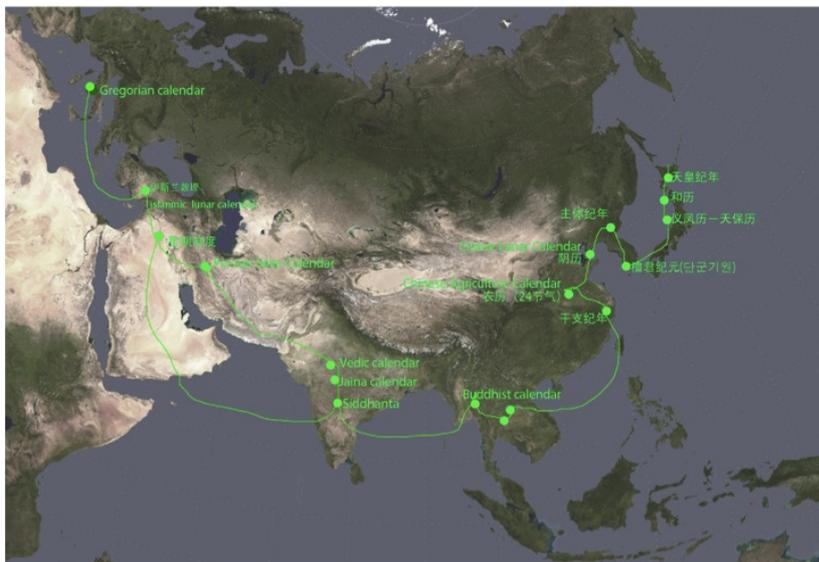


And this is the multiple roads of tea. One of the roads is from Yunnan and Guangdong, to Wuhan and Zhangjiakou, then to Mongolia and from there to Russia and Japan. For this reason, people in Japan and Russia call tea *cha*, which was the Cantonese pronunciation. The other road goes from Fukien and then to Taiwan, Singapore, and finally to Darjeeling. This path then leads to Western Europe. Actually people from the Netherlands, the Dutch, controlled Taiwan took some of the Fukien tea, transported it to UK, and made it really expensive. But the British people didn't want to buy from the Dutch, so they took some Fukienese tea and found a place in the Himalayas with

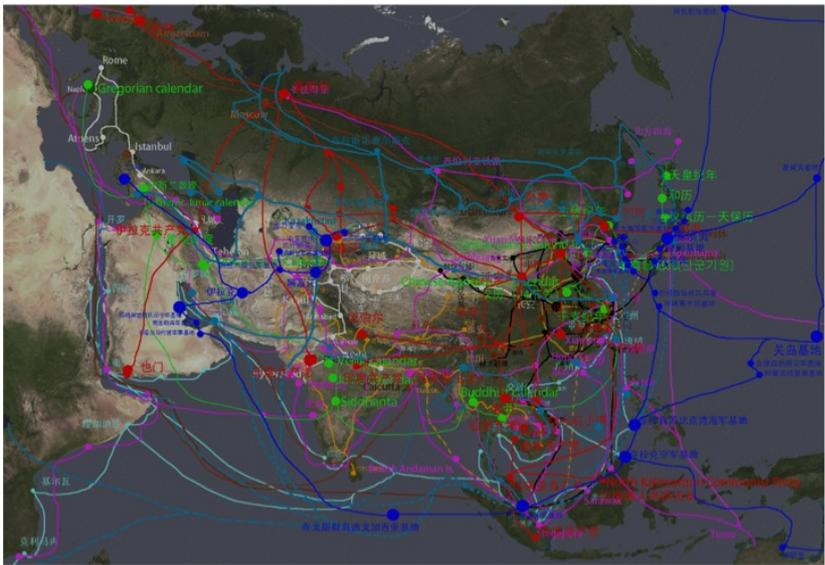
almost the same climate as Fukien. The Fukienese tea was planted in Darjeeling, and that is why the Western pronunciation of tea is based on the Fukienese *Te*.



And here we have the map of colonialism, or maybe we can say it is the map of Christianity. Christianity first arrived in Goa, and then went to Macao. Macao is the base in East Asia. And then it goes through Japan, through Korea, and through other places in China.



Now I would like to talk about the double calendar system. Asian countries all have a traditional calendar. For example, in China we have quite a quite complicated calendar system. We have a lunar system and an agricultural calendar and we use these two systems at the same time. But nowadays in China, everyone makes mistakes. They say that the nong li [农历] or the farmer's calendar is a Lunar calendar, but it is not. [It is a lunisolar.] The farmers follow the sun; fishermen on the other hand follow the moon. So in China we actually have two systems, but now when you ask people, they get it wrong. That happens in India too. They have much more complicated calendar systems. When I visited Iran, I found that they also have different calendars. They have a traditional Persian system and they have an Islamic lunar system, and then they have a modern solar-based calendar, so it is like three systems at the same time, and this also happens in Japan and in Thailand where they have a Confucian and Buddhist calendar.



So when all these maps are mixed together, they become this map [laughter].

I say I am Chinese, and you say you are Japanese. But somebody else comes along and says 'you, you, and you are all Asian.' So for me, Asia is more a given identity rather than nature [an intrinsic characteristic]. It is not a reality but more like an invitation. It is a project that maybe will be realized in the future, and as a project, it can be successful, or dangerous, or it can also fail.



Now here is a map of all the biennales in Asia. Asia has the richest biennales in the world. Gwangju Biennale has the biggest budget, 20 millions dollars, which is more than the Venice Biennale. And then we have several biennales that focus on the topic of Asia. For example, the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial, and in Nanjing last year, the Nanjing Biennale focused on Asian art; and also now in Taichung, a city in Taiwan, there is an Asian art Biennale. And also in Bangladesh, they had an Asian art Biennale. Actually, most biennales in Asia take Asia as their theme.



And now I will turn to the upcoming Shanghai Biennale. This year the Biennale will move to this huge building. It was power station, like the Tate Modern but it may be twice its size. It is also by a river bank. It is huge and the highest ceiling height is 26 meters. Previously used to produce the first light-bulbs in China, it then became a power plant for Jiangnan Shipyard. Most recently it became the pavilion of the Shanghai World Expo. So when I was appointed to curate this huge space, I realized the Biennale could be 5 or 6 times bigger than before. The title [of the upcoming Biennale] is 'Re-activation', and there are some subtitles, like Resources, Revisit, Reform, and Republic. If we put all of them together, it was like "revisit and reform public resources". There is a sentence in it.

As part of the Biennale, we will organize some special projects. In collaboration with the China Art Academy, we will have a series of workshops on different topics, including the workshops on Asian thought, Total Art, curatorial studies, etc. and then the most important gift to the Shanghai Biennale is the city pavilions. We have invited some cities whose pavilions will be linked to the public. The pavilions will be situated all over Shanghai. This will then become the Shanghai Biennale map, which will expand the Shanghai Biennale beyond what people expect.



So as Jane says, I become an enabler for China's ambitions. [laughter] But my goal is to make Shanghai lose control, because it's impossible for the propaganda department to go to all these places. So, that is what I am doing. I hope I will succeed in losing control. Thank you very much.

All images courtesy of the artist

QIU ZHIJIE Born 1969 in Zhangzhou, China, Qiu Zhijie lives and works in Beijing. He graduated from China Academy of Art, Hangzhou in 1992. He works in a variety of media, including calligraphy, painting, photography, video, installation, and theater. He has had solo exhibitions at numerous institutions, including Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai (2008); Haus of World Culture, Berlin (2009); and Ullens Contemporary Art Center, Beijing (2009). He has participated in exhibitions such as the 53rd Venice Biennale and the 25th Sao Paulo Biennale. He curated 'Phenomena and Image' (1996), 'Post-sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion' (1999), 'Long March, A Walking Visual Display' (2002), and 'Archeology of the Future: The Second Triennial of Chinese Art' (2005). He is currently Chief Curator of the 9th Shanghai Biennale (2012), as well as professor and Director of Total Art Studio at China Academy of Art.

For more information about Qiu Zhijie and 2012 Shanghai Biennale, please [click here](#).

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