

**TOWARD THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF NEW  
RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS  
ASIA: THE ACTIVITIES OF  
THE JAPAN FOUNDATION  
ASIA CENTER**

(2005)

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## INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> The Japan Foundation Asia Center was dissolved in accordance with the organizational restructuring of the Japan Foundation on April 30, 2004, but the programs have since been carried on by the various departments within the new structure. The visual art projects have been transferred to the Visual Arts Division of the Arts Department.

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION ASEAN CULTURE CENTER was founded on a cold winter day, just days into the New Year, in January 1990. By a curious coincidence, the Showa era had come to its final stage by the end of the previous year, and the new Heisei era had just begun. Japan was at the peak of a financial bubble, and at the cusp of entering the ensuing “lost decade” marked by recession and economic stagnation. Five years later, in October 1995, the ASEAN Culture Center became the Asia Center, at which time our office was moved from the third floor of a multi-tenant building in Shibuya to the first floor of the Twin Tower Building in Akasaka-Tameike (in Minato Ward, Tokyo), and the areas of research and the scope of our projects were also expanded. Finally, in April 2004, in accordance with the organizational restructuring of the Japan Foundation, the Asia Center as an operating department was dissolved and ceased to exist as part of the Japan Foundation structure.<sup>1</sup> Initially, I had reservations about contributing this text because I wasn’t sure if writing about the Japan Foundation, which is not a museum, would be adequate for a feature on museum issues, let alone writing about the projects of the Asia Center that no longer exists. However, I came to think that this would be a meaningful opportunity for me, having been engaged in the activities of the ASEAN Culture Center since its founding, to reflect on the past fourteen years and four months. I also think that the Asia Center is not completely unrelated to museums because its art projects have always been operated in close connection with the circumstances surrounding the arts of Japan. And so, I decided to accept the request with the hope that I can share

something with my readers. My introduction is getting long now, so I'd like to move on to discuss and analyze the mission, activities, and development of the art projects of the Japan Foundation Asia Center. In doing so, I certainly hope not to offer a personal, biased view.

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## I: PROJECTS OF THE JAPAN FOUNDATION ASIA CENTER

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THE ASEAN CULTURE CENTER, the predecessor organization of the Asia Center, was established within the Japan Foundation in response to a proposal by the Large-scale Southeast Asia Cultural Mission, which was a group of cultural and economic experts dispatched to countries across Southeast Asia at the request of the Japanese government in the mid-1980s, and to materialize the ideas addressed on this occasion. As the name suggests, the ASEAN Culture Center's mission was to introduce the contemporary cultures of the six Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states at that time (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). Under this mission, the Center began sponsoring theatrical performances, movies, and art exhibitions, and set up a library open to the general public in order to foster the understanding of Asian culture. Up until this time, it was more the traditional cultures or the ethnic-oriented tastes of these countries that were being introduced in Japan, and so the image many people had of Asian culture was not reflective of the actual contemporary state of Southeast Asia, which had been undergoing rapid modernization since the region's economic growth from the late 1980s onward. To add, it wasn't unusual for people to talk about

Asia in a historical context in connection with memories of war. Hence, aiming to introduce the actual contemporary Southeast Asia was synonymous to changing the Japanese people's perception of Asia, and simultaneously an effort to create through this process a future-oriented and friendly relationship between Asian countries and Japan. Subsequently in 1995, the year marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the ASEAN Culture Center was reorganized as the Asia Center, expanding its geographical range to the larger Asian region beyond the ASEAN member countries and incorporating the fostering of intellectual exchange and support of cultural promotion as new areas of activity. According to the brochure of the Asia Center, the following are the two project objectives, supporting the purpose of the Center's establishment:

- (1) Promotion of mutual understanding through dialogues and exchange among all social strata of the Asian countries.
- (2) Promotion of joint operations beyond the borders to resolve common issues in the Asian countries.

To carry out its mission, the Asia Center established two divisions—the Intellectual Exchange Division, in charge of intellectual exchange and cultural promotion in the Asian region, and the Culture and Information Division (which took over the activities of the ASEAN Culture Center), mainly in charge of promoting the understanding of Asian culture and supporting grassroots exchange. I myself continued on with my role as the exhibition coordinator of art projects in the Culture and Information Division.

Now I would like to give an overview of the art projects that have been carried out over a period of roughly fifteen years. As you can see from the list of projects at the end of this text, during this course of time, there have been twenty-seven exhibitions, four international symposia, and one publication. The reason why there were many exhibitions in the early stage is because during the ASEAN Culture Center years (1990–95), there was a multipurpose room of about 130 square meters where we held solo exhibitions and small group exhibitions. Though modest in scale, we were able to show quite a number of exhibitions in this space. When the Japan Foundation moved to the Akasaka-Tameike building in

the summer of 1994, we came to possess a midsize multipurpose room of about seven hundred square meters, which enabled us to organize larger exhibitions with greater impact. As exhibitions grew larger in scale, however, the number of exhibitions decreased owing to the amount of work and expense involved. In addition to the exhibitions that were curated in-house, we also co-organized exhibitions with other museums in Japan, some of which traveled overseas. In addition, we hosted international symposia addressing timely issues with foreign guests as our panelists. Starting in 1994 and held consecutively thereafter in 1997, 1999, and 2002, these symposia were well received by art professionals both in and outside Japan. At the end of 2001, we published *Alternatives*, a guidebook of art spaces in countries across Asia. Although it was not for sale, the bilingual (Japanese and English) publication was very much appreciated among specialists not only in art, but also in various other fields.

As far as the art projects are concerned, I think we can categorize them into the following three time periods.

### **1) Early 1990s:**

#### **Acknowledging Southeast Asian art in Japan**

THIS WAS A TIME when people would ask, “Is there such a thing as contemporary art in Asia?” During this period, we organized exhibitions hoping that people, the general public and specialists alike, would first and foremost acknowledge the presence of contemporary Asian art. In conjunction with the exhibitions, we invited artists and critics to give lectures and engage in small-scale symposia that would help people understand the cultural background of the art we were introducing. In order to offer exhibitions that were reflective of the actual circumstances across Asia to viewers in Japan, it was paramount that we understood for ourselves the current state of affairs in these countries. Therefore, we always conducted field research and incorporated the fruits of our research in the exhibitions. One of the most important exhibitions from this period was *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*. The exhibition comprised fifty-four works by seventeen of the most active artists of the time from six Southeast Asian countries and kicked off in Tokyo, before traveling to Fukuoka,

Hiroshima, and Osaka, and left a fresh impact on people in the Japanese art world.

## **2) Late 1990s:**

### **Promoting the understanding of Asian art in Japan and the building of a critical platform**

FOLLOWING THE CRAZE over Asian art in the late 1990s, people came to rethink modernity in the context of postcolonialism of the late twentieth century and much debate also unfolded in Japan. It was also during this time when contemporary Asian artists came to be acknowledged and discussed by their individual names. The period when Asian art was a rarity in itself had passed, and the art of this region had become the subject of critique. *Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand* (1995) and *Fang Lijun: Human Images in an Uncertain Age* (1996) were exhibitions held during this period, to name a few. Meanwhile, as the areas of research had expanded from Southeast Asia to the wider Asian region since the inception of the Asia Center, exhibitions of specific Asian countries outside of Southeast Asia also came to be held on a continual basis, such as *Private Mythology: Contemporary Art from India* (1998). In order for the “Asian art boom” to take root, it was essential to keep Japanese audiences interested, which also called for the building of a critical platform. When viewed in hindsight, the international symposia we held in 1994, 1997, and 1999, seem to have been instrumental in promoting the building of a critical platform for Asian art in Japan.

## **3) 2000 and beyond:**

### **Promoting exchange in Asia and the formation of discourse**

THIS PERIOD MARKED a shift in our project development from a binary Japan-versus-Asia perspective to a clearer Japan-within-Asia stance. In the aim to create a shared platform in countries across Asia through collaborative efforts, we gathered young curators in the Asian region to co-curate exhibitions, which prompted active exchange

among them. For our first project, nine young curators from seven Asian countries came together and engaged in extensive dialogue to organize the exhibition *Under Construction* (2000–03) (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Aside from materializing the network among the young role-players in the field of art—curators, critics, and artists—in Japan and other Asian countries in the form of an exhibition, we also published *Alternatives*, a guidebook of art spaces in nine Asian countries/regions.<sup>3</sup> Underlying this publication was the understanding that in times of the so-called IT revolution, promoting the sharing of information becomes a crucial factor and prerequisite for individual and community networking. In the meantime, we also held solo exhibitions of individual artists with distinguished careers (fig. 2).

The above outline is based on my personal view, but to be honest, these projects were not carried out along a preestablished plan. They were the results of developing projects by considering the varying circumstances surrounding the arts at the time both in and outside Japan, under the founding missions and philosophies of the ASEAN Culture Center and the Asia Center. The Asia Center as an organization had the capability to respond quickly and proactively to given situations and organize projects accordingly, and was able to try out multiple ways and means to enhance the effectiveness of its projects. In other words, the Asia Center was able to introduce the art of Asia comprehensively and enhance the effectiveness of such efforts in a way that was almost like a scaled-down version of the larger activities of the Japan Foundation—exhibitions, symposia, publications, and the dispatch and acceptance of individuals—while reflecting on the state of affairs in the Asian region.

Next, I would like to look back on the circumstances surrounding the arts of Asia at the respective times, which served as the background for these projects.

**2** *Under Construction*, held between April 2000 and March 2003, was a collaborative curatorial project among nine young curators in their twenties and thirties, from seven Asian countries—China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. The exhibition was largely comprised of seven local exhibitions in various places across Asia and a collective exhibition in Tokyo. Exhibitions with a similar aim of fostering the next generation of curators and artists include *Out the Window—Spaces of Distraction* of fiscal year 2003 and *Have We Met?* of fiscal year 2004. Meanwhile, as an effort to rethink modernity in Asia, plans are now underway for a co-organized exhibition titled *Cubism in Asia* among the three national museums of Japan, Singapore, and South Korea and the Japan Foundation, scheduled to be held from 2005 to 2006 in the three countries.

**3** In December 2001, the Asia Center published *Alternatives: Contemporary Art Spaces in Asia*, a guidebook introducing a total of seventy-six groups and alternative spaces working at the forefront of contemporary art in nine countries/regions across Asia. In November 2004, an improved version of *Alternatives* was published by Tankōsha as *Alternatives 2005: Contemporary Art Spaces in Asia*, which covered 170 places in sixteen countries/regions across Asia-Pacific.





fig. 1

*Under Construction—New Dimensions of Asian Art*, Installation view at the Japan Foundation Forum, December 6, 2002–March 2, 2003, Organizers: The Japan Foundation Asia Center, Tokyo Opera City Cultural Foundation

Photo by Kioku Keizō

Image courtesy of the Japan Foundation



fig. 2

*Asian Contemporary Artist Solo Exhibition Series I, Heri Dono: Dancing Demons and Drunken Deities*, Installation view at the Japan Foundation Forum, October 14–November 18, 2000, Organizer: The Japan Foundation Asia Center

Photo by Ueno Norihiro

Image courtesy of the Japan Foundation



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## II: THE ART ENVIRONMENT IN ASIA—FROM THE 1990s TO THE PRESENT

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FOR A LONG TIME since the influx of Western modernism into the Asian region between the late nineteenth century and the 1940s, in the world of Asian art there had been keen interest in the artistic trends of the United States and Europe due to the strong connections between the individual Asian countries and the West, which was in part influenced by the history of colonial rule, but almost no knowledge of each other's art among the neighboring Asian countries. However, after the first stage of the formation of postwar nation-states had been completed across Asia, in the midst of economic development from the mid-1980s onward and the postcolonial state of affairs that arose after the collapse of the Cold War paradigm, Asian countries, which had until then been connected to each other with the West as their intermediary, began to turn their attention to neighboring countries and seek direct connections. One of the direct triggers for this was the active entry of Japanese and Australian art experts into the art world of the Asian region and the start of introducing the contemporary art of this region in their countries. Exhibitions held in the region provided increased opportunities for Asian artists and critics to meet face-to-face, which naturally deepened exchanges among them. To give a few examples, in Japan, the Asian Art Show series and other exhibitions and symposia held at the Fukuoka Art Museum (currently the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum), and in Australia, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) hosted by the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane provided such opportunities. While the Fukuoka Art Museum

deserves recognition for having made progressive achievements in the Asian region from the early 1980s onward, the phenomenon of Asian art garnering attention and gaining momentum in the early 1990s was directly triggered by and resulted from, as mentioned earlier, the active involvement of multiple Japanese and Australian organizations in the arts of the Asian region, which happened concurrently as part of their cultural policies in the context of their respective political and economic circumstances.

By the late 1990s, activities in the Asian region became increasingly self-reliant and various changes have come to be seen since.

First, there was the enhancement of the so-called modern art system subsidized with public funding, that is to say museums, exhibitions, and collections. As many are aware, there was a boom in the construction of modern museums showing modern and contemporary art in South Korea and Taiwan. This was followed by the establishment of the Singapore Art Museum (1996), which, being the only institution in the region complete with contemporary facilities, aimed to become Southeast Asia's art center, and entering the twenty-first century, the new building of the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, in association with the opening-up of the market and cultural liberation in East Asia, in China, museums began to be built in metropolises apart from Beijing, such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. I think the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou would come across as a surprisingly comfortable organization to work with, especially for a Japanese museum professional who has had experience working with staff of a Chinese museum with a traditional bureaucratic system.

Second, the Asian region came to see a surge of large-scale international exhibitions. Though a global trend, the first of these exhibitions in the 1990s was the Gwangju Biennale of 1995, which marked its fifth exhibition this year. This was followed by the Taipei Biennial, the Shanghai Biennale, and the Yokohama Triennale. Subsequently, international exhibitions came to be held in multiple cities in the same country such as the Busan Biennale and the Seoul Mediacity Biennale in South Korea, and the Beijing International Art Biennale and the Guangzhou Triennial in China. Although the principle of competition does come into play, these exhibitions have managed to

coexist. Similar to the World Expos and the Olympic Games, large-scale international exhibitions are held in the contexts of boosting national prestige (nationalism) and, on a smaller scale, promoting regional development (localism). Although the biennale/triennale in itself is a Western framework and value perspective that has been imported into Asia and not a particularly new art system, it seems to be an ongoing trend; for instance, a plan for a biennale in Singapore is apparently underway for 2007. Meanwhile, international exhibitions that are focused on a particular region such as the APT of the Queensland Art Gallery and the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum are held on a continual basis, based on the fundamental principles of the respective museums.

Third, there has been a noticeable increase in the opportunities for Asian artists to participate in international exhibitions outside of the Asian region, as well as in the number of contemporary Asian art exhibitions in the West. With regard to country-specific introductions for the Western audience, first there were exhibitions of Japan starting in the mid-1980s, and later, China, India, and South Korea in the 1990s. The series of exhibitions organized by the Asia Society in New York during the 1990s was carried out in strategic order—first, there were exhibitions of artists of Asian descent living in the United States, which were followed by exhibitions of artists of India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, and finally, exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art. This lineup seems to be strongly motivated by a political consideration of the United States' stance vis-à-vis Asia. Meanwhile, exhibitions of contemporary Asian art have been curated by European art professionals from the mid-1980s onward, not as a means for international exchange between countries but as independent museum projects. They have introduced the arts of Japan, China, India, and Korea one after another, which bespeaks once again the strong appetite they have for culture and the progressiveness of their curatorial direction. The first director of the Mori Art Museum, David Elliott, is an exemplary curator in this sense. Having said that, the growing exposure of Asian artists in the international art scene undeniably owes to the proliferation of international exhibitions across the world. It's fair to say that international exhibitions today cannot happen without artists from Asia, although their numbers may vary. In

addition to the growing number of the aforementioned international exhibitions in the Asian region, Asian artists have also gained exposure by actively entering an existing art authority framework, for example, the Venice Biennale, in the form of building national pavilions (South Korea) or borrowing spaces as pavilions (Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, etc.).

Looking at this list of occurrences, one is tempted to think that the circumstances surrounding the arts of Asia have developed dramatically. This seems a matter of course now that Asia is regarded an important growth force in the global economy. In reality, however, each country has its own problems and the disparity in terms of art facilities and art systems between countries that are economically developed and those that are not seems to have become greater than before.

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### **III: CHANGES IN ART EXCHANGE**

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THE AFOREMENTIONED CHANGES in the art environment have also impacted the state of art exchange.

First, exhibitions based on equal partnerships have begun to emerge. In the past, it was not uncommon for conventional exhibitions (whether they be country-specific, region-specific, or theme-based) to be criticized for manifesting an imperialistic attitude within the art genre as they had been organized expediently by curators from economically advanced countries or regions through short-term research on artists. However, with the narrowing of economic

disparities, along with the enhancement of modern art systems and the increase of international art exhibitions, criticism as such has been toned down. Instead, exhibitions based on equal partnerships with shared work responsibilities and expenses have started to emerge. This tendency is especially apparent in the relationship between South Korea and Japan.

Second, the forms of exhibition partnerships have started to change, from exchanges between two specific countries, such as Japan and Thailand, or Australia and Indonesia, to exchanges among multiple nations in broader regions, namely Asia including Japan and Australia, or the Asia-Pacific region.

Third, the concepts, quality, and forms of exhibitions in themselves have started to change as a result of the accord between the acknowledgment of diversity of artistic expression—namely the diversification of art mediums in exhibitions in association with the increasing number of photographic and video works, and the flourishing of heterogeneous exhibitions in the West showing experimental, cross-genre works—and the postmodernist situation in Asia. Exhibition-making has become less dependent on conventional methods such as collecting, packing, and transporting artworks, and is now pursuing newer methods, such as having artists travel to venues and work on-site, or screening the DVDs they have sent in.

Fourth, the arrival and ongoing development of the information age from the late 1990s to the present has accelerated further change. This is related to the fact that a generational change is steadily occurring among the participants in the arts of the Asian region. The young curators and artists born around 1970 have been exposed to a great amount of information throughout their lives and it is not uncommon for them to have studied abroad. These individuals aim not to espouse and import the modern art systems of the West in their own countries but to create an art environment that suits their local needs. More and more people of this generation are seeking possibilities of art exchange in alternative and genre-crossing methods that are different from conventional exhibitions. They have advanced regional networking by making full use of information technology and have no trouble reaching out to or putting themselves in international environments to access information. In this respect, international

information no longer belongs exclusively to a small group of privileged curators. In addition, the use of the English language as a common means for communication and the shared experience of being exposed to American and Japanese mass consumption culture have facilitated exchange among the young generations. The sense of contemporaneity they have of growing up while undergoing the baptism of media globalization can be counted among the important factors for this change. These young individuals are not dependent on the museum system but engage with artists and curators across the world who are involved in similar activities on a project basis. There are also art spaces that are managed by artist-led initiatives where artists come together to work. Artists-in-residence have also steadily grown in number. Efforts to support artists by coordinating various activities as such through the Internet are also being seen in a new light as counteractions against so-called “mainstream” art. To give a few examples: a group based in Delhi, India, that aims to connect groups in South and Southeast Asia; the RAIN International Network (Rain Artists’ Initiatives Network) comprised of former participants of the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in the Netherlands, which aims to create a network among initiatives from countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; a network among alternative spaces mainly in Hong Kong, Seoul, Taipei, Shanghai, Japan; and though different in nature, the Asian Art Archive (AAA) in Hong Kong, which aims to collect literature and documents for the purpose of information exchange. Although the alliances that have begun to emerge in various places through information communication are grassroots efforts, connections made in such ways are likely to gain more importance as alternative forms of art forums in Asia, all the more so because the presence or absence of the modern art system does not come into question, let alone national borders.

Incidentally, the circumstances surrounding these artist-run spaces seem similar to the circumstances in Japan. In recent years, given the stagnation of museum activities, young artists are coming together to organize exhibitions and events on their own in the hopes of creating places to show their art, and independent curators and coordinators are launching nonprofit organizations and organizing projects through negotiations with the administrative side. In addition to the notable increase of such activities, Arts NPO Forum, a series of forums

conducted by the Arts NPO Link, also began in 2003. Earlier I used the expression “counteractions against so-called ‘mainstream’ art,” but perhaps it would be more realistic to consider these movements not as deliberate counteractions but as means of survival for art activities in Japan and the entire Asian region. In fact, we are beginning to see several alliances between art spaces in Japan and in places across Asia. In any case, it seems certain that places for artistic expression, including international exhibitions, are becoming more diversified than ever before.

As just described, although the art environment of Asia has not been uniformly nor entirely globalized, it has become complex and dynamic. Cultural policies need to cater to the demands of global, regional, national, and local levels, and the efforts to connect these levels according to the intended purpose are also becoming very important.

As I am sure it is apparent by now, the art projects of the Japan Foundation Asia Center have been developed in close connection to the art environment in Asia as just described. For the past five years in particular, we have developed projects that deliberately intervene with the state of affairs in the respective countries in order to accomplish the goal of promoting exchanges within the Asian region. We could even say that these were the strategies employed to materialize the vision of the Asia Center. In this respect, we need to remind ourselves that cultural exchange programs are in fact highly political in nature.

The fact that the ASEAN Culture Center was established within a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the Japan Foundation (currently an incorporated administrative agency), that the name ASEAN referred to a political framework, and that the Asia Center was established in the year marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, all point to the fact that the Asia Center was a political entity from its inception. As we are all aware, in the context of modern history, “Asia” in itself has always been a politically charged concept. Speaking of genres alone, insofar as art itself is a visual form of representation, it cannot avoid being political either. What this means is that the people involved with arts administration are capable of possessing power in that particular genre. As an individual engaged in cultural exchange, I know I must always



be conscious of the gravity and risk of this possibility. At the same time, however, I cannot be bound too much by the thought and restrict myself when engaging with different cultures, and relinquish the joy of creating something new that we have never experienced before—be it a sense of connectedness, or an atmosphere of trust, or even new possibilities for art. Our work is about believing in the power of culture and art. We have the capability of becoming a catalyst to induce a chemical reaction in cultures. In that sense, I think what we do has a lot in common with the work of curators at museums.

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## IN CLOSING

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THE CULTURES OF ASIA have always been positioned as something “special” in contraposition to the “universal” paradigm and cultures of the West that have been shaped by modern values. This is based on the binary opposition of the West and Asia as the residual counterpart of the West. Hence, admittedly, at times we had to create an “Asian art” in contradistinction to Western art, which was virtually an insubstantial illusion. In Japan in the mid-1990s, there was the so-called “Asian art boom,” at which time people talked about Asian art as if it were a special, substantive something, whereas in actuality, it was just that each country possessed its own culture. There was a time when “Asian art,” a label conjoining the words “Asia” and “art,” was already in itself a “special” position taken against the “mainstream” West, which would function as a certain strategy.

At the fourth international symposium *Asia in Transition*:

*Representation and Identity* held in December 2002, one of the panelists, Professor Sakai Naoki of Cornell University, asked a very inspiring and suggestive question: If Asia identifies itself by way of “co-figuration” with the West, how can “we” possibly subjectively construct our identity as Asians within this problematic schematism?<sup>4</sup>

While “Asia” contains negative connotations as having been exploited at times as an intellectual concept in international politics involving war as with the Pan-Asianism of the twentieth century, and correlated to ideas of poverty or authoritarian regimes, it can also give a bright and positive impression for its abundant resources or as a symbol of contemporary mass culture with ethnic and pop tastes. In this current transitory world, Asia, among other things, is by no means bound to a fixed stereotypical image. Its identity is continuously built and transformed through the various relationships it cultivates with others.

With the breakdown of relational identities that were once built during the colonial past, the current Asian society is now at the threshold of rebuilding itself on the basis of new relationships. With this current state as our premise, we must mutually acknowledge the diverse cultural environment of Asia and build cooperative relationships with fellow Asian countries, both to avoid narrow-minded regionalism and to pursue effective and alternative ways for the future of this region. Seen from a broader perspective, Asia must also objectively reexamine its position within the various relationships it has built with other regions across the globe. This not only applies to the world of art, but also holds true for other fields, and already we are beginning to see the activities by individuals in various fields who embrace this sort of consciousness. In my view, Japan’s position in the art genre of the Asian region is at a relatively lower position than where it used to be in the 1990s. Or, put another way, we could say that now is the perfect timing for Japan to stand on an equal footing with its neighboring countries.

In closing, allow me to reflect once again on the objectives of the projects of the Asia Center.

For the past fourteen years and four months, how have we been able to deepen mutual understanding among the Asian countries

<sup>4</sup> Sakai Naoki, “Asia: Co-figurative Identification,” *The Japan Foundation 30th Anniversary International Symposium 2002, Asia in Transition: Representation and Identity Report* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2003), 222–231.

through dialogues and exchange? To what extent have we been able to promote joint operations to resolve common issues? When I ask myself these questions, ultimately, I come to the realization that we just have to address the mounting challenges, take each step forward, and continue on with our endeavor.

5 The exhibitions are listed in order of name and venue (city). In the case of traveling exhibitions, the show may have continued into the next year.

## LIST OF ART PROJECTS ORGANIZED BY THE JAPAN FOUNDATION ASEAN CULTURE CENTER (1990– 1995) AND THE JAPAN FOUNDATION ASIA CENTER (1995–2004)

(In order of exhibition titles, venues)<sup>5</sup>

[Exhibition titles are written in English without indication of the Japanese titles in romaji, as these are the official English titles chosen by the Japan Foundation. For the Japanese titles, refer to the complete list of Asia-related art projects organized by the Japan Foundation (1990–2020), accessible through this link.]

[https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/publish/asia\\_exhibition\\_history/index.html](https://www.jpf.go.jp/j/publish/asia_exhibition_history/index.html)

1990

1. *Narrative Visions in Contemporary ASEAN Art*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
2. *Thawan Duchanee: Thailand—In Quest of the Ultimate Sacredness*, Fukuoka Art Museum, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
3. *Tradition, the Source of Inspiration: From the First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, Workshops and Exhibition*, Fukuoka Art Museum, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery

4. *The New Generation in Contemporary Singaporean Art*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery

1991

1. *Contemporary Indonesian Prints*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery, Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Hokkaido Hakodate Museum of Art
2. *Tan Chin-Kuan: Malaysia—"Stage-art of Tragedy,"* Fukuoka Art Museum, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
3. *Edgar Talusan Fernandez: Contemporary Art of the Philippines*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
4. *Contemporary Thai Artist—Montien Boonma: The Pagoda & Cosmos Drawn with Earth*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery, Mitsubishi-Jisho ARTIUM

1992

1. *Today's Malaysia Seen Through Art: Contemporary Malaysian Art*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
2. *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space Exhibition Gallery, Fukuoka Art Museum, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Kirin Plaza Osaka
3. *Floral Cosmology: Traditions in Dyeing, Weaving, and Ornaments*, Fukuoka City Museum, Laforet Museum Harajuku, Alpark Tenmaya Hiroshima, Kirin Plaza Osaka

1993

1. *Facing the Infinite Space: Contemporary Paintings from Singapore and Japan*, The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center Gallery
2. *Beyond the Border: Contemporary Thai/Japanese Art Exhibition*, P3 art and environment, Silpakorn University Art Gallery (Bangkok)

1994

1. *Contemporary Art Symposium 1994: The Potential of Asian Thought*, The Japan Foundation Conference Hall \*Report (Japanese)

1995

1. *Visions of Happiness—Ten Asian Contemporary Artists*, The Japan

## Foundation Forum<sup>6</sup>

2. *Asian Modernism: Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand*, The Japan Foundation Forum; Metropolitan Museum of Manila; The National Gallery, Bangkok; Gedung Pameran Seni Rupa, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Jakarta)

<sup>6</sup> The Japan Foundation Forum, which opened in 1995, was initially called the Kokusai Kōryū Fōramu but was renamed the Kokusai Kōryū Kikin Fōramu in January 2000. The English name has remained the same.

## 1996

1. *Fang Lijun: Human Images in an Uncertain Age*, The Japan Foundation Forum

## 1997

1. *Art in Southeast Asia 1997: Glimpses into the Future*, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
2. *The Mutation, Painstaking Realism in Indonesian Contemporary Painting*, The Japan Foundation Forum
3. *Symposium, Asian Contemporary Art Reconsidered*, The Japan Foundation Forum \*Report (Japanese and English)

## 1998

1. *Private Mythology: Contemporary Art from India*, The Japan Foundation Forum

## 1999

1. *International Symposium 1999, Asian Art: Prospects for the Future*, The Japan Foundation Forum \*Report (Japanese and English)

## 2000

1. *Serendipity: Photography, Video, Experimental Film and Multimedia Installation from Asia*, The Japan Foundation Forum
2. *Asian Contemporary Artist Solo Exhibition Series I, Heri Dono: Dancing Demons and Drunken Deities*, The Japan Foundation Forum

## 2001

1. *Asian Contemporary Artist Solo Exhibition Series II, Atul Dodiya: Bombay—Labyrinth/Laboratory*, The Japan Foundation Forum
2. *Under Construction*, Local Exhibitions in Ashiya (Hyogo), Seoul, Mumbai, Bangkok, Manila, Bandung, Beijing

3. *Alternatives: Contemporary Art Spaces in Asia*, guidebook publication

2002

1. *Under Construction—New Dimensions of Asian Art*, Collective Exhibition, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery/The Japan Foundation Forum
2. *The Japan Foundation 30th Anniversary International Symposium 2002, Asia in Transition: Representation and Identity*, The Japan Foundation Conference Hall \*Report (Japanese and English)

2003

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