

A Thousand Asian Tigers: Contested Modernity and the Image of History

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“Becoming is involutory, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations.”¹

“[T]he unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization.”²

— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Becoming-Tiger

The tiger is a recurring figure in the narratives of many Asian traditions. In Korea, for example, “tiger stories” were popular to the extent that the great Chinese Modernist writer Lu Xun was said to have begged for them from every Korean person he met. In these stories, the figure of the tiger is as dynamic and varied as the Asian nations to which the creature and the narrative are endemic: sometimes a ferocious beast, the tiger assumes cultural, human, and even supernatural qualities; the tiger smokes tobacco; the tiger casts spells; the tiger tricks humans; the tiger longs to become human and ends up a monk; the tiger becomes a brother or sister; the tiger is loyal; the tiger trades. Common narrative devices can reveal cultural differences; metamorphosis (from the human to the tiger, and vice versa), for example, is common in Chinese and Korean folk tales, but while in Chinese folk tales it often expresses the *wu wei* (to seek union with nature: 無爲自然) and other influences of Tao, in Korean counterparts, one is more likely to see it used as a device to convey Confucian lessons on maternalism, filial affection, and brotherliness.³ The weretiger (whether a person who changes into a tiger, a half-tiger, or possessed by the tiger spirit) is more widespread, and can be found in China, Korea, Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula, and India, to name a few. According to Kevin Chua, in the stories from fifteenth-century Malacca the



Kim Soo-Nam, A Tiger Biting a Chicken during the Gangsari Beom-gut (Gangsari shamanic ritual in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Korea), 1981. Photograph by Kim Soo-Nam ©KIMSOONAM Photo

weretiger is often a vagrant or an outsider figure operating on the fringes of civilization, portrayed by the hawker, the wage earner, the beggar, etc., with glimpses into urban and mercantile aspects as well.⁴ In a prevailing Korean tradition, the tiger is strikingly ambivalent, both a man-eating beast and a mountain god, an object of worship; a hunter is rewarded silk for killing a tiger, for lessening the threat to the village, but at the same time is punished for desecrating the sacred.⁵ Such ambivalence, as it were, demonstrates liminality. The tiger occupies and embodies the spaces in between the human and the beast, between conquering and venerating nature, between mountains and villages: tigers, seen “as mythic reality, played a powerful role in boundary maintenance. They were transitional creatures, spiritual in-betweens who variously cautioned, cajoled and assisted humans in relating to the life-world.”⁶

The tiger, if considered an embodiment of liminality, is in a perpetual state of becoming. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the becoming-animal is not regressive but rather involutionary, and generates the becoming-non-human that produces manifold differences. It opens up the potential for the human to become something else or other; becoming-animal is not a museological taxonomy or classification, and is not an analogy, mimesis, or identification.

Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not ‘really’ become something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. [...] What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.⁷

In *One or Several Tigers* (2016) by Ho Tzu Nyen, two characters, a human and a tiger, engage in a fantastical standoff; transforming into a Western-clad hunter, the tiger appears, and moves to switch positions with Western man. Imagined and rendered as essentially a transformative figure, a sacred performer-in-translation, translated into both the human and the animal, the tiger itself is in a transitory, becoming-state; it is always the borderland and the threshold. The exhibition *2 or 3 Tigers*, deriving its title from the work by Ho Tzu Nyen, pursues this “becoming-tiger.” As a performative and epistemological process, the work, made in digitally-rendered animation, aims to forge and to understand the regional history through the tiger; that is, the ghostly being drifting on the digital-matrix screen, but ultimately the generative figure between hundreds of intriguing cases of marginality, liminality, and flux.

Much as tigers had become territorialized and subjected to colonial conquests, nonetheless they often became fused with the image of resistance, valor, and nationalistic spirituality by the colonized people. In contrast to the variegated figure of wit personified in Asian pre-modern folk tales, the tiger invoked by the subjugated states became charged with chauvinistic impulses, and was held up as uniformly total, static, and determinative by imperialists as well as by nationalists during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial period. The more the spirit of the nation and its identity pervaded the tiger, so the tiger became more and more the object of conquest for the colonial rulers. This in turn sustained imperialism, making greater the tribulations and exploitation, and continuing on to stages even bleaker—that is, subjecting tigers to mass killings and driving them to near extinction.

The conquest of Korea by the Empire of Japan did not stop with their annexation of the Korean Peninsula. With the indigenous tiger in their native land almost extinct, now the Japanese rulers set about indiscriminately hunting down Korean tigers, enlisting the Korean military and riflemen in this endeavor. Tigers were seen by the Japanese as exotic and spectacular just as they had to the previous colonizers (and the tiger population in the Malay Peninsula plummeted equally under the British). The campaign of November 1917 is a well-documented example of Japan’s imperial exploits. This was conducted by a Japanese entrepreneur, Tadasaburo Yamamoto, who assembled eight corps, with around one hundred and fifty soldiers and hunters, for the sole purpose of hunting tigers, on the pretext of enacting the Governor-General of Korea’s policy to protect the Korean people from wild beasts. This extensive tiger-killing campaign far exceeded and was incomparable with any of the recreational hunting enjoyed by the Western capitalists. The glaring backdrop of imperialist propaganda was compounded by Yamamoto’s extravagant pageantry: a nascent capitalist who accumulated great wealth in the shipping industry during the First World War, Yamamoto brought compatriot journalists from his homeland to the expeditions, which yielded wide newspaper coverage, and later himself chronicled the hunting expeditions in the book *Memories of Tiger Conquest* (征虎記). His massive tiger-hunting campaign was not only performed with a proclamation of the civil protection of the colonized Korean people, but was also used as a measure to stir up and stimulate the morale of Japan’s militarism and the proliferation of Japanese Imperial Ideology.⁸

Colonial forces in Asia and their will to achieve modernity are deeply implicated in the creation and dissemination of the negative image of the tiger as vermin. The tiger was seen as an object to be tamed by colonial modern society,



A Tiger-meat tasting event held at the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan, 1917. Photographer unknown.
Digital image courtesy of Eidos Publishing House, Seoul

a society in which the mode of civilization was strongly affiliated with acts of violence. *Memories of Tiger Conquest* is illustrated with commemorative photographs from a tiger-meat tasting event held at the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo. The photographs reveal the sheer grandeur of these events. The photo seen here shows some of Japan's top officials at a Western-style banquet, where the tiger has been reduced to a conspicuous souvenir for imperial capitalists, an affirmative trophy of conquest, showcased as a mere consumable by the colonial power.

Such a mode of rule during the twentieth-century colonial period can be seen later transposed into the Vietnam War, when South Korean veterans take a group portrait with their kill, embodying what the Japanese rulers had once done on their land. In the exhibition *2 or 3 Tigers*, the artist IM Heungsoon repurposes a photograph from the Vietnam War Archive in South Korea. A trophy photograph of Korean veterans posing with their tiger trophy is projected onto a bas-relief, fading in and out in gradual alternations between emergence and disappearance of the image. In this work, one witnesses an instance in which "the nation state, the form of modern sovereignty that possesses a monopoly on the use of violence, has both been an agent of emancipation from colonialism and heir to it."⁹ The violence of colonialism, once perpetrated as a military morale boost and as a materialistic conquest, reappears.

Perhaps the proximity of the Asian peoples to wild tigers was never strictly rooted in the real world anyway. After all, tigers are generally known to keep their distance from human beings, yet since the onset of modernity tigers have been driven to the brink of extinction, and instances of contact between wild tigers and humans have declined as a result. The ghost of the tiger, however, continues to leap into the imaginary: throughout the rapid changes of history, it has been carried as many shifting signs and symbols, of both nation-states and of a territory known as Asia.

Nationalism, Andromodernity, and Tradition in East Asia

The economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—referred to as the “Four Asian Tigers” in the European context—are examples of andromodernity. This is where Westernization is synonymous with modernization; and a good example of this is seen in South Korea, known as an “economic miracle,” which achieved its rapid and accelerated economic development through laying its roots in so-called “heavy-industrial infrastructure.” According to Okwui Enwezor, in his article “Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence,”¹⁰ this development is designated as andromodernity, meaning a hybrid form of modernity, found especially in countries like China, India, and South Korea, where the development has adopted the Western model of modernization, so-called supermodernity, the sole category of the developed and advanced. The high-speed transformation South Korea underwent also combined the models of its neighbors, with the hard-line, utilitarian policies of military dictatorship throughout the 1960s and 1970s. South Korea envisioned Western influence as the way to modernity, as Japan had done during the Meiji Restoration, constructing railways and key industries. Influenced by the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo’s attempt to build a highly modern industrial nation-state, the dictatorial regime of Park Chung-hee, who had been a military officer of the Manchukuo state in around 1945, propelled South Korea into a brutal economic ascent,¹¹ bringing into relief masculinity—demolition, construction, and advancement. And such a marshaled, nationalistic order conjoined with the patriarchal instrumentalization of Confucianism, a vital thread of the so-called Korean tradition, has created a modernized society whose mainstream narrative continues to subject individuals, women, and gender diversity to oppression and injustice. In fact, women experienced a lot more than oppression, as the film *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger* (2010) by Jane Jin Kaisen and Guston Sondin-Kung demonstrates. The severe (in)direct violence that was committed against women and children in Korean society under brutal war-time states has not yet been properly recognized. The trauma of exploited women under militarism and the overseas exportation



Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung, *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger*, 2010, 72 min. (film still)
© Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung

of orphans are subjects still very much kept silent until recently and still to this day largely ignored nationally. Kaisen and Sondin-Kung deliberately connect old footage, oral testimonies, poetry, public statements, and interviews to create three “portraits” that confront the yet-to-heal trauma of three victims. The former “comfort” women subjected to sex slavery by the Japanese military during the Second World War; the sex-workers who worked around United States military bases in South Korea from the 1950s and continue to work to the present; and the portrayal of transnational women “adoptees” sent as children from South Korea mostly to the West during the Korean War. The narrative witnesses and remembers the unresolved pain of the women and children, but the filmmaker’s critical awareness of the issues is reinforced by the patriarchic discourse of East Asian society under militarization and nationalization which endures into the twentieth century.

For the East Asian countries that sought modernization through the economic developmental model of the West, hosting the Olympic Games became an important opportunity for urban infrastructural renewal, and represented their great economic leap into global capitalism. Taking the Tokyo 1964 Summer Olympics and its role in Japan’s economic boom as a precedent, the South Korean government sought and succeeded in hosting the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympics, which eventually led China to follow suit twenty years later. For South Korea, the decision to host the 1988 Summer Olympic Games was based on nationalism, and growth, of course, but the event also accompanied a historic transition of democratization from military dictatorship. The Olympics facilitated the liberalization of international travel and open-door policies, and, along with the effects of the nationwide Democracy Movement of June 1987, Korean society ushered in a total governmental reformation, putting an end to the military junta. By the beginning of the 1990s, the spread of consumerism had led South Korea to become a bubble economy, and eventually to become an economic and a cultural powerhouse.

In these East Asian countries, where the process of rapid urbanization and modernization was seen as synonymous with Westernization, upholding “tradition” was a notable part of the modernization process. The same can be said in the West too: the notion of tradition was more or less *invented* in Western society, Eric Hobsbawm argued, where nostalgia for the past evoked a time before the modern.¹² Tradition is an important apparatus in the formation of nation-states, because it can forge a sense of *community* to pledge allegiance, despite historical, ethnic, or religious differences.¹³ In comparison to the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of most other Southeast Asian nations, the Korean Peninsula, by virtue of its geography, had managed to maintain a relatively settled agricultural economy over thousands of years, which had yielded a rather homogenous conception of Korean ethnicity. Whether among the heterogeneous countries or relatively homogeneous countries, equally, tradition is still seen as a useful tool for nationalism for most East Asian countries. The difference, however, is that the problem of tradition can often be reflected as a matter of recalling in the regional, national context of Asia, rather than as an invention, as Hobsbawm argued from the context of modern Western society.

The 1960s and 1970s can be described as a period when the liberalist South Korea and Taiwan and the communist North Korea and China had each selected different memories of history and culture

and revived them as 'tradition' to justify their authoritarianism with an aim to long term dictatorship, and attempted to establish an identity that was insecure and incomplete as a nation state. This was a process of formulating tradition in a reverse fashion by a selective choice of recalling that has a different meaning than 'invention.' Thus, the Cold War era was marked by 'recalling' or 'summoning' in reverse; that is, while pre-modern tradition was claimed on one side, the other would instead claim modern tradition.¹⁴

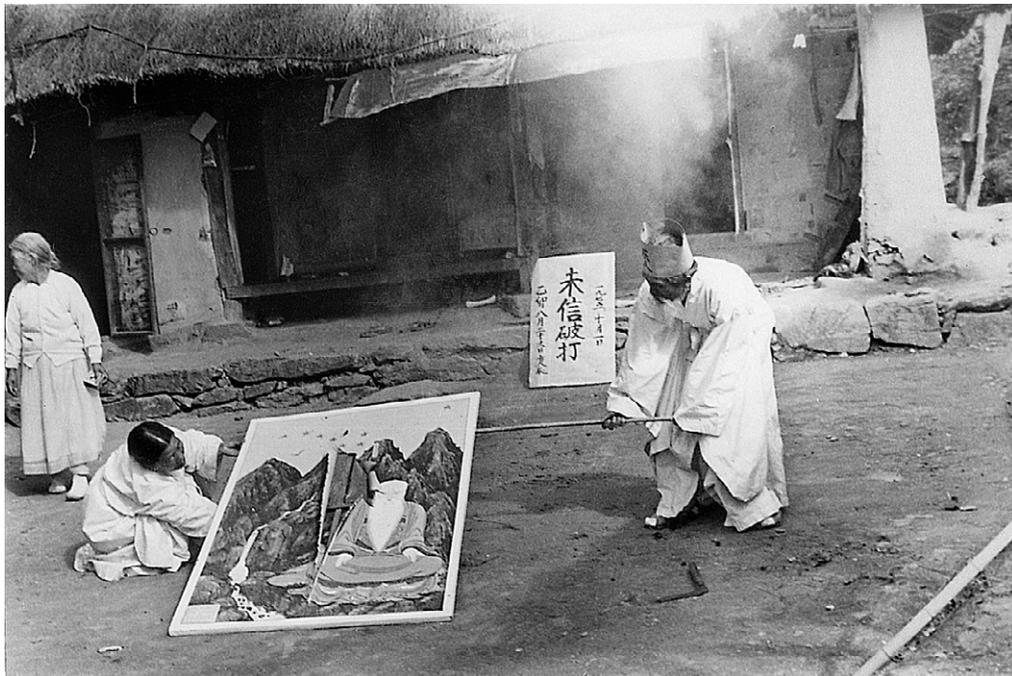
South Korea and Taiwan, which were both under Japanese occupation for a long period, were both then liberated and gained their independence. While South Korea had the Korean War, China had a civil war between the nationalist government party, the Kuomintang (KMT), and the Communist Party of China (CPC). In the similar historic context of South Korea and Taiwan, an incomplete half-baked nation-state construction necessitated the potent imaginary of tradition as an apparatus to help make it conceive of itself as a solid nation-state, rather than the split identity it had become. Accordingly, the Taiwanese people experienced the dogmatic, Han ethnic-centered "Cultural Reunification" of the KMT government from 1945 to 1965, which was an extremely oppressive, totalitarian standardization inflicted on 80 percent of the native population.¹⁵ Ironically, only a year later, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CPC, responded in a reverse-mirroring movement with the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), insisting on preserving the "true" communist ideology of the country by removing any remnants of capitalism and denying traditional elements of Chinese society.

The South Korean government also enacted the 1962 Cultural Properties Protection Law, in effect systematizing certain cultural traditions by designating two categories: "Tangible Cultural Property" and "Intangible Cultural Property." Due to the controversial nature and particular difficulty of determining the "originals" of "Intangible Cultural Property," the masters or the holders of arcane traditional techniques were converted into national assets, and only through institutional apprenticeships were the "original" techniques preserved. Through these procedures, private and regional traditions were merged into one authoritarian national system, and were given ill-defined neologisms of nationalistic character; musical traditions become *Gugak*, literally meaning "National music," and traditional dances become "Korean dance." While cultures in the traditional realm were subjected to evolution and extinction, like organisms, the institution of the 1962 Cultural Properties Protection Law imposed authority and ownership over traditional heritage, in effect rendering it arcane and estranged from the people. The elite, on the other hand, who were beneficiaries of a modern education, became disinterested in traditional culture, since "tradition" was seen to be associated with the realms of not only the obsolete, but also with an orientalist and nationalistic culture about which the modern intellectuals were very skeptical. Certain folk customs such as shamanism had already been degraded by the clearance projects of the national New Town campaigns in the 1960s. The dictator Park Chung-hee military government's modernization project, on the other hand, was simultaneously sustained and driven by the tempestuous culture of capitalism and by mainstream society's ambilateral relationship with it. Once again, the 1980s dictator Chun Doo-hwan's government brought traditional folk culture back to light, including shamanism under the National Wave (國風) campaign,

which summoned tradition once more as an apparatus used for governing the people.

In a rather ironic twist, artist Park Chan-kyong, who has been investigating traditional Korean religious culture in the Cold War era, suggests that the very measures to preserve certain remnants of the past, as initiated by the government's national campaign, become a double-edged sword. Park sees it as a negative by-product of modernization as well as nationalism, since its generative nature and ecology of traditional culture from below was subordinated to the rigid economy of the national system. On the other hand, this policy became a possible tenuous thread to hold onto through times of radical change marked by fervent interruptions of history, such as colonialism, war, the dictatorial regime, cultural removal, and importation of Westernization. This relates to what Park has called the "transvaluation of values in orientalism." Indeed, while tradition can be seen as a discourse formed for the purpose of remembering and recounting the past, it is simultaneously performed as the very *apparatus* with which to re-question what of the past is neglected or yet to be revisited. In his essay, "The Phantom of 'Minjok Art,'" Park quotes a poem by Kim Soo-young (1921–68), titled "Colossal Roots":

Traditions, no matter how filthy, are good. I pass
Kwanghwamun, recall the mud there used to be by the wall,
[...],
[...] to put up with Korea, rotten country though it is.
Rather, I am awed by it. History, no matter how filthy, is good.
Mud, no matter how filthy, is good.
[...],
[...] but chamber-pots,
head-bands, long pipes, nursery stores, furniture shops,



Destroying images associated with superstition (未信打破) in Sindoan during the New Town campaign of the 1960s. Sindoan is a famous shaman and religious village in South Korea. The two photographs are by an unknown photographer of the 1960s. Digital images are courtesy of artist Park Chan-kyong

drug stores, shoe shops, leather stores, pock-marked folk, one-eyed people, barren women, ignorant folk: all reactions are good [...]¹⁶

By pointing to the paradoxical effects of orientalism and its potential by-products, and by questioning whether the criticism of orientalism on the part of Asians can be seen as an internalization of Western-centered critical discourse, Park questions the possibility of subverting the limit and self-censorship rendered by criticism of orientalism through deliberate use of orientalism.¹⁷ Tradition, then, can be understood as an apparatus used in relation to the process of de-subjectification according to Giorgio Agamben's exploration of the notion of apparatus; it is perhaps related to situations where the more docile subjects submit to it, the better to escape the grasp of the ruler; where it is able to "bring to light the Ungovernable."¹⁸ Kim Soo-young finds tradition in the subaltern's physicality, that is, in the demystification of the everyday body from the dirt, the marginal, the real, the unruly, and in the "Colossal Roots."

The Fall of an Empire

The term "Asia" has never been a naturally perceptible one for the peoples of the region. This is not only because the borders of Asia are broad and imprecise, but also that its peoples have very different religious roots according to the regions they inhabit within the Asian continent. No matter how many Asian countries have promoted this term as a concept of the region recently, still its peoples are rather separated from a sense of the united and integrated realm the term suggests. South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, sharing a common foundation that can be characterized as "Confucian modernity," developed similar economic modalities inspired by an individual national perception of Western modernity. For the East Asian peoples, therefore, the more syncretic Asian regions of the southeast and the southwest appeared disparate, though religious aspects of Confucianism and Buddhism, in part, offset these differences. Through shared history, experience, ideology, and fragmented similarities in structures of both sentiment as well as everyday concerns, the subjects of the region attempt to share a certain cultural proximity. As we seek some common ground between the different Asian cultures, however, at the same time, the distinctive characteristics and cultural specificity of each is made more visible.

Likewise, the Chinese scholar Sun Ge speaks of her own estrangement, of the impossibility of feeling attached when she thinks about China as the sole place to which she belongs with any sense of integrity. Born and raised in the Manchurian city of Changchun, Sun Ge's experience of her hometown endowed her with a lingering sense of skepticism. The city has an absurd history: it was built by the Empire of Japan, in the colonial period during the Pacific War, as the capital of their puppet-state Manchukuo with the ethnic Han subverted into one of minorities there. For Sun Ge, her hometown is a place to be pondered, and reflected this kind of absurdity and precariousness, rather than somewhere she comported herself as a birthplace; *home* is a trigger of epistemological experience, as well as an ontological place that existed in self-scrutiny. She also finds a home in Beijing, in the capital that was established by three Chinese dynasties, and where, together with its peoples, she finds a proximity to her imagined hometown via its multiplex history, a home

of one's own, where the city becomes a place of emancipation, born out of the impossibility of national integrity. Cultural belonging as such, according to Sun Ge, cannot be executed through a monotonous agenda. Belonging would be generated as a state of becoming in which deterritorialization is innate and a multitude of strata and sections are conjoined; or as metonymic relations where each individual part becomes a home-state in a bricolage-like existence. Like her affective and self-reflective experiences of the "home" endowed by her deconstructive and microcosmic approach to Chinese nationalism in the vast place called China, Sun Ge also speaks of Asia as a cluster of questions, and its implications as a fractal aggregate of questions stemming from a much larger extent.¹⁹

"The occurrence of cultural integration relies on a global dimension known as modernization. However, it is difficult to confront the deep folds of cultural integration only with the viewpoint of discourses of modernity, and to osmose and confront the cultural capacity which the folds hold is even more difficult. For they are without form. They appear and disappear in momentary flashes, leaving clear traces onto no surface. As the dictum of post-structuralism utters: 'Like splashes on the stern of a fast moving ship.'"²⁰

For its inhabitants in Asia, the geopolitical conception of Asia was discursively constructed by the time the West began to invade. Compared to Edward Said's arguments centering on the problems of Western Orientalism, which he saw as something that originated in the critical veins of Western self-centrism, the critically arguable points for Asian thinkers are how Asia itself has absurdly propelled (promoted) Western-centrism over the past twenty centuries and possibly to this very day. What becomes the antipode of Asia is not the West, but the *figure of the West*, which Asia itself generated in order to promote the discursive cultivation of "Asia"; Asianism, for example in Japanese history, has been constructed on a base called Asia—reinforced by Western-centrism. Sun Ge also points out, indeed, that the discourse of Asianism and the projection of the West found in East Asia, arose rather from the complicated inner-historical relations, competitions, and hegemonic struggles endemic to the region.²¹

In the twentieth century, discourses on Asia, or on Asian ideological thinking was led predominantly by certain theorists, scholars, political leaders, as well as by state organizations. However, not every country in Asia held the same interest in or desire to lay claim to Asianism, which was a rather uncorroborated and inconsistent notion. In China, such discourses were left unpronounced, because China and its history were always considered to be at the center of the region as one of the old Empires. However, in Japan—a newly propelled Empire that emerged out of a complicated international situation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—several major interrogations around the notion of Asia after the Meiji Restoration were developed. These include the well-known intellectual arguments for "Datsu-A Ron," or de-Asianization, by Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Okakura Tenshin's theory of pan-Asianism.

Fukuzawa's de-Asianization, which was first presented in 1885, was developed with evolutionary theory as its point of departure, seeking to break away from what was considered by him to be an inferior Asia and to enter

the echelons of the other World Powers. Okakura, having studied art history in the United States, introduced pan-Asianism in his book, *The Ideals of the East* (1903). He proposed that Asia was the locus of an aesthetic culture that Western civilization could not provide, and suggested not only that Japan had the potential to be at the absolute center but also that it was the “museum of Asia” with its extensive collection of Asian artifacts. According to Sun Ge, both ideas reduced the vast region into dubious signs: de-Asianization propelled Asia to signify the “savage” and pan-Asianism to signify “love” and the place of origin of three religions. Both, however, were profoundly detached from the geopolitical realities of the region and the specificities of individual places, which in effect rendered the West once again as a nebulous and abstract background.²² Regardless of the intentions of these Japanese thinkers, however, these discourses were adopted, and mobilized by the fascistic militarism of the Empire of Japan, and were then used as a hegemonic tool to be wielded by the public. “Overcoming modernity” (the core thought of the Kyoto School,²³ which was representative of the Japanese intellectual sphere at the height of the empire) was also co-opted by Japanese militarism, and led Japan to brazenly honor the Pacific War. The scholarly investigation of the Kyoto School is obscure. It reveals the ambivalence between cosmopolitanism and nationalism as well as a metaphorically ambiguous visualization of Japanese spirituality that alludes to a possibility not only to be appropriated by the nationalists, but which would also encourage Japan’s overseas aggression toward her neighbors such as Korea, China, Taiwan, and then finally toward the West, i.e. the United States. At the symposium “Overcoming Modernity,” held the year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a peculiar affectation was made regarding the conception of “overcoming modernity” (to overcome Asia’s supposed inferiority against the West) by the officiant of the event, Kawakami Tetsutarou, who described it as an immense feeling of awe, “ineffable and crystal-like.”²⁴ Tetsutarou’s attempt to express a subjective emotion eventually looked to the locale and geology of its locus, conjuring up the sublime image of nature, a powerful device with which to concretize nameless thought. And just as Okakura Tenshin had invoked the Himalayas to stress the integrity of what he considered the two supreme pillars of Asia—Chinese Confucianism in the north and Indian civilization in the south²⁵—so the proponents of the Kyoto School invoked the Kegon Falls as a political emblem to symbolize the spirit of Japan.

“Koyama: ‘More like the Kegon Falls. Thinking about ways to join the individual and the absolute, it would be better if the content of the historical world came to resemble that magnificent waterfall. Yes, it would be a good thing if we could leap from the highest rock of the Japanese spirit into the falls, taking the history of the world with us.’”²⁶

On November 26, 1941, the Kyoto School introduced the Kegon Falls as the towering symbol of Japan, at the symposium “The Standpoint of World History and Imperial Japan,” organized by Japan’s foremost literary monthly *Chūōkōron*. (The Kegon Falls was already a potent symbol known as the “Suicide Falls,” after a well-publicized suicide of an eighteen-year-old philosophy student and poet in 1903, which had inspired many copycat suicides). For the Kyoto School, the Kegon Falls represented the sublime, and symbolized their idea of assimilating the world into the spirit of Japan, as well as



"The Kego Falls," Still from Park Chan-kyong, *Kyoto School* (2017), 35mm multi-slide projection. Image courtesy Park Chan-kyong

the manifold of what they believed to be the essences of Eastern philosophy, such as resoluteness, sacrifice, the absolute, and the solemnity and resplendence of Buddhist thought *Avatamska*, or, in Japanese, *Kegon*. The symposium emboldened the Kyoto School, such that it blatantly pronounced that the Pacific War as well as the colonial invasions of various Asian territories were honorable, which in turn inspired the Japanese youth to offer their services as Kamikaze pilots.

The artist Park Chan-kyong's *Kyoto School* (2017) comprises an installation of two double projections on adjacent walls. While on the right a variety of slides of the Kego Falls, Nikko, and Tochigi Prefecture are shown in portrait format, another series of projections in landscape format on the left usher the viewer to the private journals of the young Kamikaze pilots. In Park's work, the viewer is invited to consider the imperialist youth of Japanese militarism in a new light, and to rediscover them as subjects of the cosmopolitan; the personal notes are numerous, with quotations from renowned poets, thinkers, and philosophers, and original poems written by Kamikaze fighters in action. Thus, while the quotes appear mostly partialized with a strong sense of the influence of Western thinkers and literary writers, we still find much of the exaltations of the creative act of writing poetry, as well as a profound depth that enabled these young men to engage with foreign modern ideas. In this way, despite the critical role the kamikaze pilots played in Japan's hegemonic machinery of war, the content of the private papers substitute the pre-assumption of the kamikaze's brutal nationalism for their complex, ambivalent, antinomical desire for reciprocity with the world. What is revealed here is the subverted influence of an abstruse metaphysics imposed by scholarly purity far from the battlefield. The complex and less articulated cosmology of the spirit of Japan, which the Kyoto School strived to realize with the symbolism of the Kego Falls, is more obscure. For when it comes to thinking about the relationship of the Kyoto School with the rest of the world—the sublime connotation of the Kego Falls, where the Japanese spirit meets the grandeur

of world history—the image is distorted by high-spirited patriotism. The splendid mists from the gushing waters of the Kegon Falls, which the Kyoto School imagined as the struggling particles of world history, foretold the extreme sacrifices, the shattered lives that faded into Japanese militarism, and finally, ultimately, the fall of an empire. Moreover, the internal paradoxes of the kamikaze fighters, the collisions of reason, the conflicted world-views, and the troubling gaps between morality and the brutal demands of totalitarianism, are all converging in an image of a whirling watery vortex. Finally, the Kegon Falls ironically represents a synthesis of all kinds of anomalous appropriation by the scholars of the Kyoto School or the students or Japanese militarism.

Un/doing Asia—Utterly Involuntary, Utterly Creative

The Japanese sinologist Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910–77), a Lu Xun scholar and contemporary with the ideologues of Japanese imperialism, understood de-Asianization and pan-Asianism as mere identity-driven instruments, and criticized their instrumentalization by Japanese-supremacists in order to advance a fascistic belief system and an ideology of superiority over the rest of Asia. While admitting to the conception of Asia as a by-product of reckoning with Western influence and modernization, Takeuchi rejects the facile boundary between East and West and the binary conflicts that occur between them. Instead, he argues for internalizations of reflection and a renewal via a perpetual state of fluidity and transformation. For Takeuchi, “Asia as a Method,” so to speak, is a means by which the East is able to continue to provoke the momentum of resistance in the second stage of its relations with Western modernity and world history.²⁷ Since Lu Xun was the absolute—the most interesting modern intellectual figure, refined by his personal rigorous engagement with the Asian pre-modern—in Takeuchi’s investigation and understanding, Lu Xun invoked a notion of *Zhengzha*. Takeuchi demonstrates this difficult concept of *Zhengzha*—a word comparable to a notion of *resistance*, but much complicated on the basis of the defeated. Takeuchi argued that Asia was defeated since it already resisted. The East, namely Asia, retreated because it was lost, while the winner, the West, was seen as advanced. Nonetheless, Takeuchi argued, the sense of defeat accompanies a sense of resistance: the concept of *Zhengzha* involves a secondary resistance, an aftermath to the experience of defeat. In defeat, one must remember one’s own failure as an implication of the constant state of resistance: it is the internal process of retreating, reflection, and involution, in which “the subject enters [a] becoming-state through self-selection in the Other,”²⁸ such as the lost, the weak, and those in the clutches of slavery.

Zhengzha, according to Sun Ge, who is also a significant Takeuchi scholar, is a simultaneous and immanent process whereby both the subject’s negation in the Other and the Other’s negation in the subject occur at the same time. Negation here is not a notional act, but a concrete one, which tears down the established order: it is an act of *involution*. Here, interestingly, what is implicated in Takeuchi’s *Zhengzha* is also encountered in the philosophical exploration of “becoming” by Deleuze and Guattari: “becoming is involuntary.”²⁹ The involution is utterly creative and this, finally, is what disturbs the determined Western mythology of the advanced.

Takeuchi's argument never accommodates a typical dialectical approach between the West and the East, and his unwieldy thinking complicates the understanding of the internalization of becoming. Sun Ge writes of her formative experience of "homecoming," where she achieves a sense of union with the cities that she once resented, and this arrival is possible not because the cities endowed her with the empowerment of nationalistic sentiment, but because she realized her resentment for the cities had been complicated by past failures. This provoked vital reflections for her, and ultimately became a place to exercise, to think through unconformity; the city in which she lived was alive in her engagement with resistance and reflection. Takeuchi's thought, despite innate contradictions and convoluted arguments, stimulates a pathway to bypass the Western-centric conception of modernity. For Takeuchi, Asia as a signifier is still in the progress of being written, being re-written, pulled backwards, and it constantly oscillates between self-negation and self-esteem; despair and resistance; close involvement with the international situation, yet unwilling to yield to it. This is what Takeuchi claims in "Asia as a Method," which again is Asia as a medium, and deviates from the order dictated by a dominant grid-based modernity. Here, the conception of Asia obtains the possibility to become a space of liminality, a borderland far from the affirmative, and therefore a tiger sphere, where ideological inquiries with regard to modernity are in contestation.

For the exhibition *2 or 3 Tigers*, Ho Tzu Nyen, James T. Hong, Chia-Wei Hsu, IM Heung-Soon, Jane Jin Kaisen with Guston Sondin-Kung, Lieko Shiga, Minouk Lim, Park Chan-kyong, and Yuichiro Tamura observe and excavate unarticulated modern and contemporary realities that pervade the (East) Asian region today, revealing radical interventions in the process strata of history. They have been aware of complicated modalities of multifaceted Asian modernity, dramatically undergone and intertwined with colonization, exploitation, self-denial, self-censoring, liberalization, violence, abandonment, historical trauma, nationalization, Westernization, dictatorship, development, re-assessment, and democratization in the last hundred years. The works engage the viewer to disturb any outdated concepts of modernity, and to infiltrate these through the histories, politics, and societies of contemporary East Asian states, sparking the regions' particular unruly stories and spirits with new insights. The exhibition *2 or 3 Tigers* reconsiders Asia in the inspiring, radical, spiritual figure of the *tiger* transformed, and seeks to render itself as a space of anomalous events, of rupture, of brittle and crystalline transformation, transgression, discord, and accord. It presents itself as a threshold and an ambivalent sphere, and sets forth modernity as essentially synthetic or as something constantly *interrupted* in the very mode of a becoming-tiger. Through the artists' persistent engagement with the intriguing anomalies in Asian modernity and its plural state, and Takeuchi's exertion on *Zhengzha* that practices a significant resistance of Other, becoming-tiger finally transmits a substantial signal of *becoming-woman, becoming-child*.

Translated from the Korean by Dan Kwon

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum, 2008, p. 263.
2. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 269.
3. Academy of Korean Culture, *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* [online](http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0063732).
4. Kevin Chua, "The Tiger and the Theodolite: George Coleman's Dream of Extinction," in *FOCAS 6: Forum on Contemporary Art and Society*. Singapore: Substation, 2007, p. 137; and [online](https://www.academia.edu/1157304/The_Tiger_and_the_Theodolite_George_Colemans_Dream_of_Extinction).
5. 이어령, "호랑이의 한중일 문화코드", 김강산 등 지음, 이어령 책임편집, 심이지신 호랑이, 생각의나무 출판, 2009, p. 9. / Lee O Young, "Cultural Codes of Korea, China, and Japan in the Tiger," in Lee O Young (ed.), *Zodiac Tiger*, with Gang-san Kim et al. Seoul: Saengkaknamu Publications, 2009, p. 9.
6. Anselm Franke, *Interrupted Survey: Fractured Modern Mythologies* (exhibition catalogue). Gwangju: Asia Culture Center, 2015. The original text is from Chua, "The Tiger and the Theodolite," p. 136.
7. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 262.
8. 야마모토 다다사부로 지음, 정호기(征虎記), 이은옥 옮김, 이항, 엔도 기미오, 이은옥, 김동진 해제, 에이도스, 서울, 2014, pp. 18-20. / Yamamoto Tadasaburo, *Memories of Tiger Conquest*, trans. Eun-ohk Lee, Lee Hang, Endo Kimio, and Eun-ohk Lee, Introduction by Dong-jin Kim. Seoul: Eidos Publishing House, 2014, pp. 18-20.
9. Franke, *Interrupted Survey: Fractured Modern Mythologies*, p. 20.
10. Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," in Nicolas Bourriaud (ed.), *Altermodern* (exhibition catalogue). London: Tate Britain, 2009, p. 35.
11. 한석정, 만주 모던, 문학과지성사, 2016 서울 / Han Suk-jung, *Manchuria Modern*. Seoul: Munhakgwajisungsa Publishing, 2016.
12. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Terence O. Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
13. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.
14. Yun Young Do, "Nationalization Project and 'Tradition Culture' Discourse in Taiwan and South Korea in Cold War Era," in Hyunjin Kim and Hyo Gyoung Jeon (eds.), *Tradition (Un) Realized*. Seoul: Arko Art Center, 2015, p. 71.
15. Yun Young Do, "Nationalization Project and 'Tradition Culture' Discourse in Taiwan and South Korea in Cold War Era," p. 69.
16. Park Chan-kyong, "The Phantom of 'Minjok Art,'" in Hyunjin Kim and Hyo Gyoung Jeon (eds), *Tradition (Un)Realized*. Seoul: Arko Art Center, 2015, p. 108. Original excerpt of "Colossal Roots" from Kim Su-young, Shin Kyong-Nim, and Lee Si-Young, *Variations: Three Korean Poets*, trans. Brother Anthony of Taizé and Kim Young-Moo. Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2001 (bilingual edition), pp. 87-89. An edited version of this essay is reprinted in this publication.
17. Park Chan-kyong, "The Phantom of 'Minjok Art,'" pp. 106-12.
18. Giorgio Agamben, "*What is Apparatus*" and other Essays, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.
19. 쏜 꺼, 아시아라는 사유공간, 류준필 외 옮김, 창비, 서울, 2003, pp. 31-58. / Sun Ge, *Asia as Speculative Space*, trans. June-pil Ryu et al. Seoul: Changbi Publishers, 2003, pp. 31-58.
20. Sun Ge, *Asia as Speculative Space*, trans. June-pil Ryu et al. Seoul: Changbi Publishers, 2003, p. 41.
21. Sun Ge, *Asia as Speculative Space*, p. 61.
22. Sun Ge, *Asia as Speculative Space*, p. 82.
23. The Kyoto School is a Japanese philosophical movement centered at Kyoto University. It seeks to assimilate Western philosophy and religious ideas, and use them to reformulate religious and moral insights unique to the East Asian cultural tradition. Beginning roughly in 1913 with Kitarō Nishida, it survived early accusations of fascism and controversies after the Second World War, and remains active.
24. 나카무라 미츠오, 니시타니 게이치 외 지음, 태평양 전쟁의 사상, 이경훈 송태욱 외 옮김, 이매진, 서울, 2007, p. 12. / Nakamura Mitsuo and Nishitani Keichi et al., *Ideations of Pacific War*, trans. Kyoung-hoon Lee and Tae-wook Lee. Seoul: Imagine, 2007, p. 12.
25. "Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life." Kakuzo Tenshin (Okakura Tenshin), "The Range of Ideals," in *The Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1904; New York: Dover Publications, 2005, p. 1.

26. David Williams, *The Philosophy of Japanese Wartime Resistance: A reading, with commentary, of the complete texts of the Kyoto School discussions of "the Standpoint of World History and Japan."* London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
27. Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Asia as Method," in *What is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans., ed., and Introduction by Richard F. Calichman. NY: Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 149–65.
28. 썬 거, 다케우치 요시미라는 물음, 윤여일 옮김, 그린비, 2007, p. 133. / Sun Ge, *Questions on Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans. Yeo-il Yoon. New Orleans, LA: Green Bee, 2007, p. 133.
29. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 263.

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