

change. However, what the artist wanted to show was the placeness where the body is looking at the object and to show the body as a structure while facing each other; that is, "the relationship" made at a place in an instant when one meets another. Kim Bokyoung said it was the realization of an "accident" in which men met and experienced the world in the most fundamental meaning. ¹¹ [fig. 08](#)

At the same exhibition, Kim Kulim sat with his legs crossed and naked on cut tree trunk, and tried to attain a state of perfect self-effacement (道). In *From Phenomenon to Traces*, he wrapped the whole museum where the 1st Korean Art Prize was held with white cloth and buried the cloth in the hole of the main gate and placed a rock on it. He burnt the grass on one side of the Han River with a series

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According to Kim, "accidents" open and show the real object (thing) without mediating images. It simply describes the "when," "where," "who," "what" and "how." Kim Bokyoung, "The World as Thing and Accident," *The 5th ST Exhibition*, exh. cat. (1976).

fig. 07
Lee Kunyong, *Corporal Term*, 1970,
tree trunk, root, soil, and gravel

fig. 08
Lee Kunyong, *Snail's Gallop*, 1979

fig. 09
Kim Kulim, *From Phenomenon to Trace*,
1970

¹² John Cage tried to overcome the negative reality constructed by material civilization with the transcendental prospect of “Zen (禪).”

¹³ Kim said Kwak Insik (1919–88) was a pioneer and quotes Kwak as saying, “there are lots of things in the universe. If we made them speak by themselves and listened to them, something far beyond our imaginations would happen. The words they would speak could bring a new dimension... I will stop every action of expression and listen to their words.” Kwak Insik, “*Mono no kotoba wo kiku* (I Listen to the Words of Things),” *Bijutsu Techō*, No. 315 (July 1969), p. 45. Quoted in Kim Bokyoung, “Languages of Things,” *Korean Historical Conceptual Art 1970–80s*, Kyungkido Museum of Art, ed. (Seoul: Noonbit, 2011), p. 37.

¹⁴ Lee Ufan received attention from the Japanese art world after he interpreted *Phase—Mother Earth* by Sekine Nobuo in the “First Open Air Contemporary Sculpture” exhibition at Kobe’s Suma Rikyū Park, not as a visual trick, but as “reality.” Sekine co-edited *Place Phase Time Open* with Honda Shingo and Koshimizu Susumu which they self-published in April 1970. Even though some articles in the early 1970s were introduced in Korea, ironically the works of Mono-ha were not introduced in print.

¹⁵ For Japanese eyes, Lee’s works looked very Korean. Compared to his works which felt natural and focused on the relation between things rather than the things themselves, Suga Kishio’s *Infinite Conditions* (1970) defamiliarized an ordinary window by putting a piece of wood artificially into its frame. Park Hyeri, “The Origin and Authenticity of Korean Monochrome in 1970s,” *Art History Forum*, No. 15 (2002), pp. 307–308.

¹⁶ Kwak Deokjoon (1937–), born in Kyoto, embodied another identity or diaspora different from that of Lee Ufan and Nam June Paik who had lived on the incompatible border of Korea and Japan. In the early stages, Kwak expressed difficulty in his primitive-styled works. However, from the 1970s, he started to cynically ridicule the formalized values made of the universal language which embraced conceptual art. Kwak’s journey to look for his own identity continued, and, from the 1980s, he advocated for the logic of difference, making his double identity meaningless and changeable.

of triangle shapes. ¹⁶ Most of his works transcended the common language of society, which made it impossible to communicate with the public. “Tao (道),” an Asian philosophical idea, can be read as a signifier of a transcendental prospect. ¹²

Kim Bokyoung called the works of Lee Seungtaek and Kim Kulim “the languages of things” instead of addressing them with the general term, conceptual art of the West, to draw distinction from the latter which was more concerned with (Foucauldian) “relation.” He said that they resisted any macro-subjects which conservative and authorized groups had desired in the process of modernization, and pursued their own micro-subject or anonymity of a subject, which made them realize things and themselves as one unit, not dealing with things in a manner that an object as macro-subject did. They touched things as matter and displaced them to nature in order to meet “the world as it is” and emphasized the action that made things possess and speak their own languages. Contrary to the logical languages of the West, their “languages of things” were different from what they showed as symbolical or hermeneutical understandings of the traditional languages. ¹³

At this point, we meet Lee Ufan (1936–). “Phenomenological Introduction to Encounter Meeting” was introduced in the 4th volume of *AG* magazine published in 1971. It was the turning point for setting a new direction of Korean contemporary art. In this article, he criticized and tried to overcome the modern philosophy of the West. He opposed the objectification that it demanded in separating beings from the world in which they belonged, and called for the attitude to present the world as it is “overcoming the modern.” He didn’t show the orientalism based on the colonial view with which the West and the East were separated clearly, nor did he repeat the ultra-nationalistic idea of the “great one Asia” of the 1940s. He told about the self-reflection beyond the geopolitical confrontation between the East and the West. Lee’s theory and practices should be understood in a broader context of process of self-reflection even by the West. Korean art society noticed his importance from the beginning stage of monochrome paintings after the mid-1970s. However, his theory and practices which had developed out of those in Mono-ha also influenced Korean performance art and conceptual art since the late 1960s. ¹⁴ His idea of “overcoming the modern” reached to “corporeal term.” He said “I am a corporeal term which is already located in the world before thinking about it, and it intuitively acts

at the same time... The world is a kind of extension of a body.” Realizing the notion of one’s body existing in the world just as one sees and is seen at the same time, he said that this is possible through the simultaneity of existence and consciousness. His works intermediated with the corporeal term were made for men to exist concretely in the real world, which meant his ideas of “relation term,” a structure of meeting of corporeal term and the world as it is, influenced Lee Kunyong’s *Corporeal Term* (1970) and *Relation Term* (1972).

Lee’s ideas and paintings played an influential role in the development of Korean monochrome paintings, but they have been interpreted not only as Korean, but also as Asian or even Western. ¹⁵ He was somebody that was alienated in Korea, Japan and the West and his identity of diaspora made it possible for him to overcome the modern. Similarly, Nam June Paik, who started as a Fluxus artist and finally pioneered the area of video art, sought for the coexistence of the local and global by intermixing high technology with Asian traditional philosophies such as Zen, Taoism and Shamanism and so on. ¹⁶

It was Park Hyunki (1942–2000), another pioneering video artist, who was near to the ideas and practices of Lee Ufan and the artists mentioned above. He changed video, a quintessence of material civilization and technology of the West, into a nature-friendly, meditative and spiritual media. ¹⁷ His videos sprouted at Daegu Contemporary Art Festival (1974–79) which was developed with the leadership of Lee Kangso. ¹⁸ He presented a series of *Video Pagoda*. ¹⁹ For him, stones were a part of nature that embraced ancient time and space, stone graves were sacred and were connected to the other world. Pagodas were a condensation of civilization made with human desire on the earth. The images of pagodas were still like ones reflected in the mirror. They were different from Paik’s videos which used technology aggressively and freely. His series of video pagodas were a connection/conflict between artificiality and nature, materiality and immateriality, and the real and the virtual, and had “a structure of contradiction that has unification and in-betweenness at the same time” told by Lee Ufan.

Conclusion

The isolation from the public which the aforementioned avant-garde artists sought for was ambivalent from its birth. Artists and critics of Minjung art in the 1980s who were called “political avant-garde” criticized them for their

elitism, indifference to communicate with the public, and their formalism which had lost its criticism against the absurd society. But I think the artists of Minjung art overlooked their open attitude towards other layers or realities of the world and their connection with daily-ness in the era of industrialization and modernization. Their works slipped on the binary boundaries such as life/art, art for art's sake/political art, abstract/figurative, West/East, elite/public, mind/matter, process/result, and universality/locality, and changed life and the system in their own way of cultural resistance which went beyond formal experimentation under the strict rule of nationalism. According to Jacques Rancière (1940–) who talked about “the possibility of political revolution through aesthetic revolution,” the arts obtain “political-ity” that can awaken “the distribution of the sensible” or discord even when they are heterogeneous or when they are defined by their own sensible way of existence to gain their own autonomy.¹⁹ The young Korean artists of the 1960s and '70s caused ruptures in various levels making distorted localities in the universal incidents of anti-genre, anti-art system and post-flatness, devaluing both hierarchy of the art system and ideology of nationalism and industrialism restricting the freedom of all members who shared the time and space in Korea of the 1960s and '70s.

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Kim Honghee, ex-director of Kyungkido Museum of Art, called Park's works “Korean minimalism installation video” which accepted both conceptual installation and spiritual minimalism of monochrome paintings. Furthermore, he added that his works were more similar to those of Art Povera than those of Mono-ha because they were not meditative or conceptual, but instead, related the arts with [everyday] life. Kim Honghee, “Park Hyunki's Korean-style Minimalist Video,” *Korean Historical Conceptual Art 1970-80*, Kyungkido Museum of Art, ed. (Seoul: Noonbit, 2011).

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Daegu was a conservative local city and a center of Southeast Confucian scholars but became the cradle of new art by accepting a new education system in the era of modernization. The Daegu Contemporary Art Festival served as a momentum to overcome the isolation of local areas from the cultural trend and to herald a new era of cultural localization.

19

Jacques Rancière defines “distribution of the sensible” as establishing “at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.” Ironically, this simultaneously relates to both the commonness and separation of a community. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York and London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p.12.

Fig. 111

Park Hyunki, *Video Pagoda*, 1978

Art into Action: Taiwanese Activists from 1960s to 1980s

Lai Ying-ying

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Introduction

The 1960s was a period of time when Mainland China suffered its Cultural Revolution while Taiwan had survived the 228 massacre after the KMT government moved into Taiwan. Politically, it was a time of international tension between a Free China and communism. Socially, White Terror overshadowed the minds of young artists. It was a time that Nihilism, *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, Fluxus, Neo Dada, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop art were whispered among the young, literati in Taiwan. Some of them left Taiwan for Europe and gained their reputation. More stayed home embracing new ideas introduced from friends abroad, reports of *Life* magazine, and the American Information Center. Artists grouped together to hold exhibitions, theater performances, and magazine publications.

Taiwanese "Avant-garde" from the 1960s

The "Complex Art" trend in the 1960s in Taiwan could be regarded as an important milestone in Taiwan avant-garde.¹ By stepping out of the conventional criteria and experimenting in a serious and yet delightful attitude, this type of art intended to break away from the long-existing limitations of creational genres as well as barriers between those creative forms and society or life.²

The emergence of Complex art in Taiwan acts not only as a pondering over the abstract paintings of the 1950s, but also as a response to contemporary Western mainstream philosophy and a retrospection toward local cultures and *zeitgeist* as well. The previous manifesto of abstract painting disappeared as

the environment changed. While re-thinking over the meaning of art, artists also introduced concepts on life and society and recognized an interactive relationship between art, time, and space. Such an approach, one that sought roots and a return-to-reality, became a crucial transition for the development of arts and culture in later Taiwan.

The *zeitgeist* led different developments in Taiwanese art in each period, respectively. It is divided into four periods: Modern Painting movement (1957–66), Complex art development (1966–70), Localization and Nativist Literary movement (1970–83), and Multi-expressionism (1983–89). The period from 1957 to 1966 could be considered as the beginning and root of avant-garde concepts in Taiwan. The tendency to seek "image-deconstruction" made abstract art a symbol of the avant-garde at that time. Several art groups were founded including the Fifth Moon Group by Liu Kuo-sung (1932–) and others as well as Ton-Fan Group by Ho Kan (1932–) and Hsiao Chin (1935–). The former became a major group that promoted abstract paintings while the latter further proposed a modern art manifesto. At the same time, as Taiwan joined the "Liberty World," many modern art trends which were already widely known in the West also became known here and thus pushed the relatively more conservative Taiwan art circles to the next step.

As the society evolved and thoughts like Dadaism and Pop art were brought in during 1966 to 1970, the local art circle began to question abstraction of the 1950s. Abstract painting was no longer the only method for art liberation. Complex art which adopted multi-media and presentations became a creative approach for avant-garde artists. During

¹ Hsiao Chong-ray, "Between Radical and Conservative – A Review on the Development of Taiwanese Modern Art Post WWII 1945–1983," *Contemporary Taiwanese Art in the Era of Contention*, Yen Chuan-ying et al. (Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2004), p.42.

² Lai Ying-ying, *Taiwanese Avant-Garde: Complex Art in the 1960s* (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing, 2003).

this period, Ecole de Great Taipei, its manifesto by Huang Hua-chen (1935–96) and the exhibition,¹³ the establishment of the Painting-Exclusive Art Group by Lee Charng-jiunn, the “Modern Poem” exhibition in 1966, and the experimental performances and movies developed by *Theatre* magazine, all indicated arts’ gradual release from “schools” as a complex and free presentation for many Taiwan artists.

In the decade from 1970 to 1980, the difficult situation in diplomacy drove artists to break away from the previous Western-oriented trend and to reconsider and focus on localized and life-related approach. As a result, the Localization movement began.¹⁴ It consisted of self-taught artists, the revival of folk art, and development of the style of local realism.¹⁵ Artists in many fields and media such as painting, sculpture, and ceramics, etc., all presented excellent art works such as the *Banana* series by Y.J. Cho (1950–), *Taichi* series by Ju Ming (1938–), and modern ceramic works by Winnie Yang (1946–).

Some artists experimented in Taiwan during 1980 to 1989 started to further explore and discuss potential meanings of space. The exhibitions entitled “Play of Space I” and “Play of Space II” of 1984 consisted of Richard Lin (aka Lin Show-yu, 1933–2011), Tsong Pu (1947–) and Lai Tsun-tsun (1953–) who were considered representatives of the avant-garde during this period. Later, the founding of SOCA continued to develop based on this trend. Art practices based on the theme of social critique also appeared at the same time. For instance, Lee Ming-sheng (1952–)’s *Mourning of a Tree* aims to discuss the relationship between the natural ecosystem and social environment. When the martial law was officially declared an end in 1987, the restriction of artistic creation was also released. The development of Taiwan art therefore would step into another new stage.

Art and Events from the 1960s

The revolutionary history of Taiwan art is constructed by many events. At first, it is the “New Art Movement” advocated by Hou Tien-hua (1909–83) and Li Chung-sheng (1912–84) in 1950. Most members were artists who settled down in Taiwan when the KMT government came from Mainland China.¹⁶ However, many avant-garde activities at that time are often accused of conspiracy because of their association with politics. Many artists hence moved or turned their focus abroad, and this movement gradually declined. The next influential event is the founding of the Fifth Moon Group and Ton-Fan Group. The Fifth Moon

Group was formed in 1957 by the alumni of the National Taiwan Normal University such as Liu Kuo-sung. As a response to Western paintings, their goal was to return to the ethnological characteristics and contexts manifested in traditional ink-brush paintings. The Ton-Fan Group was established in 1956 by artists including Hsiao Chin and Li Yuan-chia (1929–94). These artists learned about the development of modern paintings in the West through their teacher Li Chung-sheng who studied modern art in Japan. Discontent with the conservative art circle, they argued for the importation of modern and new painting styles into Taiwan. These groups successfully introduced new concepts to Taiwan’s circle of arts and culture which further led to the popularity of abstract art.¹⁷

Meanwhile, some Taiwan artists were involved with new development in Europe. The Punto Movement was announced by Antonio Calderara (Italian, 1903–78), Eduarda Emilia Maino (Italian, 1930–2004), Azuma Kenjiro (Japanese, 1926–), Li Yuan-chia and Hsiao Chin both from Taiwan, in Milan, Italy in 1962. Against the extremity of Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s and influenced by Hesychasm formed by Eastern philosophies, Punto artists believed the goal of art creation should pursue a representation of humanity from an introspective viewpoint.¹⁸ Some works by Punto artists were exhibited in Taiwan and gained great amount of discussions and feedback in local art circles. The spirit and free form in this exhibition also give a tangible and visible example of Complex art developing in Taiwan.¹⁹ [fig. 01](#)

During the mid-1960s, Complex art emerged as a new possibility for art experiment. The “Ecole de Great Taipei Autumn” exhibition in 1966, organized by Huang Hua-cheng, brought impact on art and culture circles with fresh and new presentations. This exhibition realized an anti-art manifesto by the

¹³

The whole content of this manifesto will be further discussed.

¹⁴

Hsiao Chong-ray, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁵

Lai Ying-ying, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁶

While supporting mainstream trends such as Anti-Communist and Anti-Soviet Union soldiers, they also acquainted themselves more with modern art and thoughts of the West. Artists in this movement held exhibitions such as “Collective Exhibition of Modern Paintings” and “Free China Art Exhibition” and established several art groups.

¹⁷

During this introductive stage, the Chin Sung incident forced local artists to become aware of the threat of political ideology. Artist-poet Chin Sung showed his abstract painting, *Yearning for Spring*, and was reported to the authority on the suspicion of “vilifying the head of state.” The exhibition was canceled at the last minute. Consequently, the China Modern Art Center concluded without concrete results and the development of avant-garde art suffered certain setbacks.

¹⁸

Lai Ying-ying, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[fig. 01](#)

Li Yuan-chia, *LYC Museum 1973*. Collection of Mr. Chu Wei-Pai. LYC museum was opened to public in late 1960s and organized over 100 exhibitions for the local community.

[fig. 02](#)

Li Yuan-chia, *Museum brochure*, 1973. Collection of Mr. Chu Wei-Pai. Li Yuan-chia is one of the founding members of Ton-Fan Art Group, highly respected by his peers and respected as the pioneer of conceptual and abstract art in Taiwan.



artist: inside the exhibition space, all kinds of everyday objects were placed randomly on the ground so that audiences directly “stepped” onto them. Furthermore, Huang placed a doormat that was pasted with reproduced images of world-famous masterpieces, leading the audience to enter by stepping on them. Through the random and disordered arrangement of found-objects, artist criticized the sense of chaos in Taiwan society and hoped the audiences’ activities in the exhibition space would help them to demystify the myth of the existing art scene. This exhibition is not only a fulfillment of the manifesto, but also a classic example of the explosive energy of Complex art of the 1960s avant-garde.

The publishing of *Theatre* magazine and the founding of the Painting-Exclusive Art Group are also significant factors in the development of Complex art during the 1960s. *Theatre* magazine was published by those who were discontent with the current mainstream cinema presentations. The members of this magazine also organized theater performances and experimental films which provided contemporary avant-garde artists opportunities for

new media. *Theatre* magazine helped to promote Taiwan art experiments outside paintings and literature, and further encouraged mutual understanding and collaboration among artists of poetry, painting, design, photography, film, and theater. This magazine ended in 1968 due to several of its editors going overseas to pursue further career opportunities. ^{fig. 03.04} The Painting-Exclusive Art Group was founded in 1967 by Ma Kai-chao and others. They sought to transcend formalism, in terms of stylistic presentation, to present new relationships between subjects and objects in paintings and to create new forms of aesthetic viewpoints. They also brought Buddhist and avant-garde aesthetics into their art production and became an art group that was infused with local thinking.

In 1970, Taiwan withdrew from the United Nations. Cultural roots and realities were constantly questioned prior to the opening of the first modern art museum in 1983 when many artists returned to Taiwan to argue for new art institutions, art system and international exchanges. The 1980s allowed more experiments of media and space which are best demonstrated by the exhibitions “Play of Space” I & II in 1984 and 1985. Gender, political and social taboos were challenged by artists such as Chen Chieh-jen and Lee Ming-sheng. Their performances and activities on the streets reveal a new page of cultural rebellion in Taiwan.

Artists and Their Works

Li Yuan-chia (1929–94) was born in Guangxi and entered the Taipei Normal School majoring in Fine Arts in 1951. Li learned with Li Chung-sheng and is one of the founding members of the Ton-Fan Art Group. He went to Italy to pursue his dream for modern art in 1962. Li showed his artworks at the renowned Lisson Gallery in 1966 and gained much attention. In 1968, he founded the Li Yuan-chia Art Museum. Since he left Taiwan, Li settled abroad and never returned again. He lived in England until his death in 1994. After encountering the current art movements in the West, Li incorporated his Eastern cultural background into his works. In the early years, Li specialized in abstract ink-brush paintings. For example, in his artworks *Emptiness*, *Q.V.D.X.* and *Nothingness*, *Nullity*, and *Void*, there is very little depicted on the surface of the painting with plenty of blank space instead. Since his museum was opened, Li has been devoted in promoting art in communities and public participation. Li can be regarded as the

fig. 03
Huang Hua-cheng, Performance of
Waiting for Godot, 1965.
Courtesy Chuang Ling

fig. 04
Theatre magazine, 1965–68



pioneer of participatory art. His unique art practices and philosophy are deeply admired by his peers, and is respected as the first conceptual artist.

Huang Hua-cheng (1935–96) was born in Nanking and studied in the Fine Arts Department of the National Taiwan Normal University in 1954. In 1965 he worked as an editor and layout designer for *Theatre* magazine. He also participated in theater performances and experimental films. He and his “Ecole de Great Taipei Autumn” exhibition were the most subversive art practice in the art circle. Critical of conventional, standardized art forms and thinking, Huang was very versatile in different media and disciplines. Huang claims “beauty/aesthetics exists indeed in our life for real and for sure.” He organized his installation-exhibition in the fall of 1966, where the whole exhibition space was regarded as a piece of artwork and audiences were allowed to walk inside the artwork/space. The randomly piled objects, hung clothing, and pop music guided audiences to discard conventional aesthetics and to realize that “life is the real art.” Excessing over the limitation on materials and media, and adopting spirits and thoughts as the focus of his practice, Huang has been like a legendary hero in the history of Taiwan avant-garde. [fig. 05, 06](#)

Chang Chao-tang (1943–) began to produce experimental images in 1964. In 1966, upon being invited by Huang Hua-cheng, Chang participated in art events and film shows organized by *Theatre* magazine. In 1970, Chang founded Group Visual-10 and further advocated a “holistic art” which emphasized the infusion of life and media. Later, he continued to focus on social realism in photography. In Chang’s art practice, he starts with descriptive figures and landscape photography that require lighting for tableaux and composition, and then he turned to surrealist images incorporated with sources from literature and paintings. His signature pieces include the *Headless Rear Profile Portraits* series in 1965, which, responding to the existentialist aura at that time, perfectly projects the depressed environment of humanity with headless figures. Another famous piece is *Happy Birthday* in 1967, in which he chooses ready-made found-objects in life and places portrait photos on each of them. He intends to break away from the two-dimensional boundary of photography so one could have further extensive thinking. Chang’s artistic career and

transition develops from the experimental photo and film in the 1960s, and return to immortality of the ordinary life and people from the 1970s. He is highly recognized for his talents demonstrated in various different media, photograph, film, music, etc. [fig. 07, 08](#)

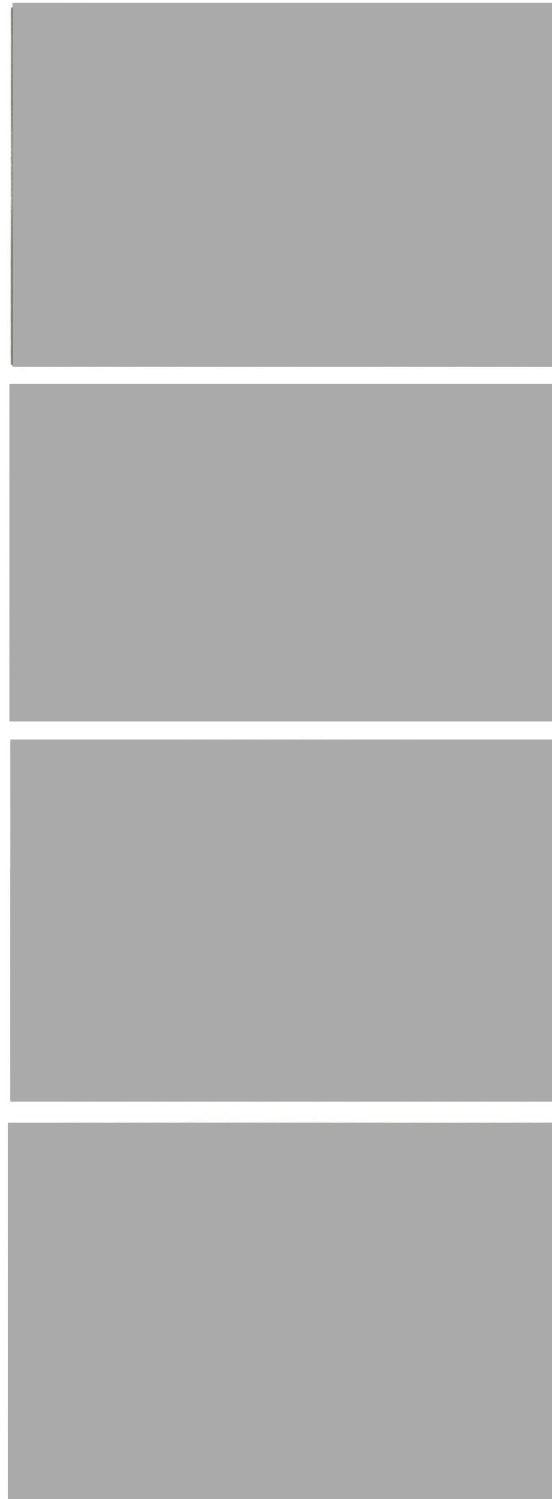


fig. 05

Huang Hua-cheng, “Ecole de Great Taipei Autumn,” exhibition, 1966, installation view.
Photo: Chuang Ling

fig. 06

Huang Hua-cheng, “Ecole de Great Taipei Autumn,” exhibition, 1966, installation view.
Photo: Chuang Ling

fig. 07

Chang Chao-Tang, *Headless Rear Profile Portrait*, 1965, gelatin-silver print.
Collection of the artist

fig. 08

Chang Chao-Tang, *Backstage*, 1976, gelatin-silver print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm
Collection of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum

fig. 09

Hsieh Tehching (Sam), homepage.
► <http://tehchinghsieh.com/>
(Accessed August, 2014)

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fig. 10

Lee Ming-sheng, webpage at Taiwan
Contemporary Art Archive
► [http://wiki.avat-art.org/mediawiki/
index.php/李銘盛](http://wiki.avat-art.org/mediawiki/index.php/李銘盛)
(Accessed August, 2014)

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fig. 11

Chen Chieh-jen, webpage at Taiwan
Contemporary Art Archive
► [http://wiki.avat-art.org/mediawiki/
index.php/陳界仁](http://wiki.avat-art.org/mediawiki/index.php/陳界仁)
(Accessed August, 2014)

fig. 09

Hsieh Tehching (Sam), *Cage Piece*,
1978–79, one-year performance

—

fig. 10

Lee Ming-sheng, *Fire Ball or Circle*, 1993,
installation and performance
The 45th International Biennale, Venice,
Italy, June 1993.
Collection of the artist
Photo: Chen Chang-hua

Hsieh Tehching (Sam) (1950–) was born in Ping-dong. He went to America as a stowaway in 1974 and was granted amnesty in 1988. Since 1978, Hsieh had conducted action-art performances and has gained wide attention from the American art circle. Currently, he is compiling his own artwork documentation and actively accepting academic invitations. His most famous pieces consist of five one-year projects from 1978 to 1986. *Cage Piece* (One Year Performance 1978–79) is a wooden cage, built by Hsieh himself, placed in his studio. For the performance, he locked himself up in this cage for the entire year. The second piece, *Time Clock Piece* (One Year Performance 1980–81) is where he punches his time card every hour over the course of the year. *Outdoor Piece* (One Year Performance 1981–82) is the third piece in which Hsieh lived outdoors throughout a year without entering any indoor space. In the fourth piece, *Rope Piece* (Art/Life: One Year Performance 1983–84), Hsieh spent a year tied to fellow artist Linda Mary Montano (1942–) with an 8-foot long rope. While attached, they were to avoid all direct contact for the year. The last

one is *No Art Piece* (One Year Performance 1985–86), in which Hsieh declined all artistic activities, including producing, seeing, and speaking about art, and simply lived that year. [fig. 09](#)

Lee Ming-sheng (1952–) was born in Meinong, Kaohsiung. He began his artistic practices after he went to college in 1977. [fig. 10](#) *Mourning of a Tree* of 1983 is the first artwork discussing the issues of natural ecosystems in Taiwan. *The Purification of the Spirit of Life* of the same year becomes the first publicized action-art piece in Taiwan, where the artist travelled around the island on foot. He gained worldwide fame with his artwork *Fireball or Sphere* in 1993. Lee's creational themes often relates to environmental conservation and human life. He expresses his artistic concepts through action-art and opposes conventional standards of arts and believes in care for humanity and local culture. [fig. 11](#)

Chen Chieh-jen (1960–) was born in Taoyuan. During the 1980s, he once voiced his discontent with martial law through action-art performances and underground art creation in the style of "guerrilla warfare." After the martial law was declared to end in 1987, his creational themes turn to historical memories and humanitarian issues. In particular, he has recently become more focused on the socially marginalized and has produced photography, installation, and performance. Chen considers that the meaning of art is not merely an introspection of reality, but also an experiment of new social relationships during the process of execution. Furthermore, via his art productions, a new aesthetic imagination is thus opened. [fig. 11](#) His famous artwork *Lingchi: Echoes of a Historical Photograph* transforms the remains of those tortured or executed into "passages" between the past and the present. He proposes an examination of punishment while discussing the victims' states of mind. [fig. 11](#)



fig. 11
Chen Chieh-jen, *Lingchi: Echoes of a
Historical Photograph*, 2002,
video installation
Collection of the Taipei Fine Arts
Museum

Cultural Rebellion: Japan from the 1960s to the 1980s

Hayashi Michio

Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sophia University

The aim of today's session is to build a shared basis for further discussion by attempting an overview of the situation in Asia from the 1960s to the '80s through the lens of "rebellion," or what in Japanese would be called *teikō* or *hankō*.

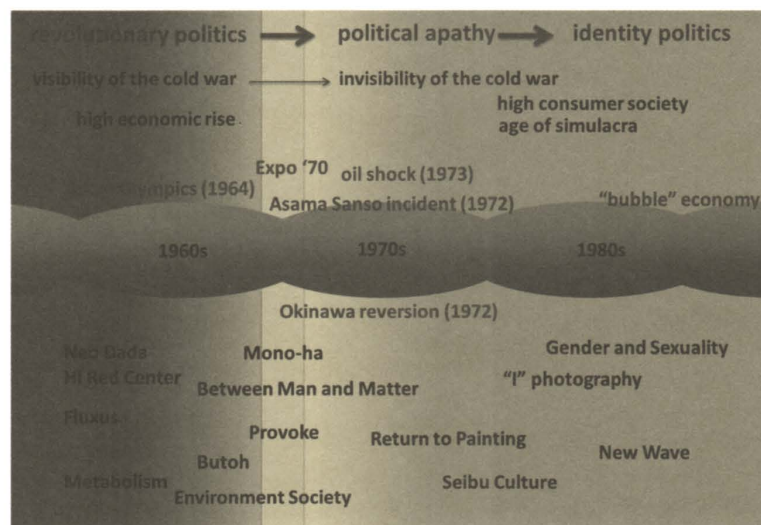
I am responsible for speaking about the Japanese situation, but as time is extremely limited, I am afraid I must speak in broad terms. That the Cold War structure was an important factor in determining cultural conditions in Asia as a whole was something Suzuki Katsuo addressed in his keynote speech yesterday, and it also relates to what I will be discussing here.

I would first like to show a diagram. [fig. 01](#) In a sense, if everyone can comprehend this diagram, then you could almost say my talk today is done, and the rest is just filling in the details.

This diagram attempts to summarize the cultural situation in Japan from the 1960s to the '80s along a chronological axis that proceeds from left to right, but, as you can see, there is a distinct, yellow band passing through the area around 1970, which divides the diagram into differently colored sections between left and right. In other words, this division indicates that the time around 1970 was a major turning point in the history of post-war Japan, and in particular the history from the 1960s onward.

Normally, historical turning points are more often considered to be catastrophic events such as wars and political upheaval, but no such major incident happened in Japan in 1970. It is possible to suggest the Expo '70 in Osaka as an approximation, but, differing from the way that war, revolution, and political upheaval prompt new changes exogenously,

fig. 01
Diagram of Socio-Political Events and Arts and Cultural Movements during the 1960s to the '80s.



Expo '70 was not the kind of event that could start a chain reaction as an exogenous factor in itself, and was instead more pronounced as a "symptom" that was produced as the crystallization of already changing major currents.

Addressed from this perspective, the hypothesis of 1970 as a turning point may appear somewhat unconvincing, but numerous critics have in fact supported this interpretation from diverse angles. Although it is impossible to elaborate every instance, it is an established fact that it was around this time that Japan's rapid economic growth slowed down and the country entered a period of low development. And the recognition that it was against this backdrop that Japanese society entered its next phase is broadly shared—by thinkers such as Yoshimoto Takaaki and Mita Munesuke, and more recently by figures such as Ōsawa Masachi and Kitada Akihiro.¹¹¹

In fact, this analysis also holds up when examining my own personal experiences. Expanding the perspective beyond just Expo '70, in 1972 there was the United Red Army's Asama-Sansō incident and the reversion of Okinawa, as well as the publication of Tanaka Kakuei's *Building a New Japan: A Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago*, while 1973 saw a series of symptomatic incidents including that year's oil crisis. Concurrently, in the music scene, for example, songs with strong public messages had been relatively common to that point, but with the appearance of singers like Arai Yumi (now known as Matsutōya Yumi) and Inoue Yōsui, there was a shift toward "private" content. Taken as a whole, this certainly gives the sense that seismic shifts were occurring throughout the first half of the 1970s.

There were similar changes in the art world, too. Although this is a limited example, if the idea of the "avant-garde" as contemporary art practice—embodied by groups like Fluxus, Neo Dada and Hi Red Center (hereafter, HRC)—was already losing currency in the 1960s, there was nevertheless no letting up in actions that intervened into and disrupted public spaces and institutions. The HRC is emblematic of this. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics was a symbol of Japan's rapid economic growth, but the group held events at sites across the city which seemed to mock the attempts to sanitize and control Tokyo's public, urban spaces that were occasioned by the games.¹¹² However, entering the 1970s, such artistic action as social practice all but disappeared, although certainly there were elements that continued on a small scale, just as the New Left continued

underground in the world of politics.

I won't go to the extent of quoting Foucault and Lyotard, but the shift from the grand narrative of "revolution" to the minor narrative of "rebellion" or "resistance" is the change that defines the political climate of this period. In that sense, since the 1970s, movements that could call for an outspoken challenge to power mostly fell silent, and the primary concern of art shifted toward issues of everyday, private life. As is indicated at the very top of the diagram, once the fantasy of revolution wore off in the early 1970s, and after the momentary state of aphasia that directly followed, the center of gravity moved toward "identity politics" dealing with issues related to the subjective form of the "self," with a special emphasis on gender and sexuality.

Behind this was the arrival of the high consumer society, which Guy Debord attempted to capture through his concept of the "spectacle," followed by Jean Baudrillard through his concept of the "simulacrum." There are differences in the evaluation of the changes in the economic structure depending upon what index is used, but broadly viewed, there is no debating that generally it was around 1970 that Japan's industrial structure changed from a focus on secondary industry (production) to a focus on tertiary industry (information, service, retail, and so on). In essence, industry as a whole shifted its weight from the making of things to the selling of things—furthermore to the selling of intangible things including information and services, and, above all else, images. From the viewpoint of the consumer, this was a shift from the age of functional consumption based upon the use value of a commodity to an age of semiotic consumption that emphasized the vague images enveloping the commodity.

It could be said that the Tokyo Olympics had a major role in the advance of this irreversible process, but around the same time, the thoughts of figures like Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, and Daniel Boorstin were introduced into the discourse on art, and in tandem with the assertions of sociologists like Tada Michitarō and Katō Hidetoshi, terms such as "reproduction," "phantasm" and "illusion (image)" flew about as buzzwords in an almost instantaneous response to the arrival of the new age of semiotic consumption (in this regard, Tōno Yoshiaki and Okada Takahiko played central roles in the field of art criticism).¹¹³ In this context, the proliferation of "images" through reproductive media was admitted as an inescapable condition of contemporary production, while the question of how to circumvent

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See for example Yoshimoto Takaaki, *Waga tenkō* [My Conversion] (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1995); Mita Munesuke, *Gendai Nihon no kankaku to shisō* [The Thought and Sensibility of Contemporary Japan] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1995); and Ōsawa Masachi and Kitada Akihiro, *Rekishi no "hajimari"* [The "Beginning" of History] (Tokyo: Sayūsha, 2008), among others.

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Numerous treatises on the concepts of reproduction and phantasm were published in the 1960s. Selected examples include, Tada Michitarō, *Fukusei geijutsu ron* [Theory of Artistic Reproduction] (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1962) and a special issue on the theory of reproduction in *Bijutsu Techō*, No. 346 (September, 1971). Further examples include, *Fukusei jidai no shisō* [Thought in the Age of Reproduction], *Graphication* [special issue] (Tokyo: Fuji Xerox, April 1971); *Zoku fukusei jidai no shisō* [Thought in the Age of Reproduction, Continued], *Graphication* [special issue] (Tokyo: Xerox, October 1974). In the context of art criticism, representative titles include, Okada Takahiko, *Kiki no kesshō: gendai bijutsu oboegaki* [Crystals of Crisis: Notes on Contemporary Art] (Tokyo: Izara Shobō, 1970); Okada Takahiko, *Gen'ei teki na genjitsu no yukue* [The Whereabouts of Illusory Reality] (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1970); Tōno Yoshiaki's treatise on America, *Kyōzō baiyō koku shi* [Writings on the Land of Phantasm Cultivation] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan, 1968).



fig. 02

Hi Red Center, *Shutoken seisō seiri sokushin undō* (Campaign to Promote Cleanup and Orderliness of the Metropolitan Area), October 16, 1964. Performance on the streets of Ginza, Tokyo

Photo: Hirata Minoru

fig. 03

Nakahira Takuma, Takanashi Yutaka, Taki Kōji, Okada Takahiko, *PROVOKE* magazine, November 1, 1968

or break through this increasingly tight enclosure was recognized as the challenge for all fields of expression. Put in Marxist terms, the question was how to recover the integrity of individual subjectivity from its bondage and alienation by the image, and, at the start of the 1970s, this critical awareness would generate a number of emblematic movements. The representative case here is Mono-ha. Setting

aside whether the name Mono-ha is ultimately even appropriate or not, in reading the writings from around 1970 by Lee Ufan, who served as the movement's spokesman, one feels that at the forefront of Lee's mind was the critique of the image as described above and, ultimately, a "rebellion" against the world of representation itself. For him, the "encounter" with "things" was an impetus for escaping the



world of meaning that stood upon the bondage of the image, and the recurrence of the sign and its consumption; it was an event that could produce cracks in that world's protective shell. That he rejected "making" was because he was aware of the danger that the act of "making" had in being immediately co-opted into some kind of meaning.¹³ So, for him, the "work" was an "apparatus" for making encounters possible—a device for drawing the viewer's mind and body away from the net of everyday codes and toward what could even be called a transcendental site. And in their tendency to generally lack color, and avoid the use of recognizable, concrete images—whether reproductions or those drawn by hand—the works of Mono-ha can be understood when viewed from this perspective.

Lee's core concept of the world "as it is" readily communicates his antipathy toward the world of images. It is significant that this occurred in parallel to Expo '70, which vociferously proclaimed the technologically mediated image and the environmentalization of information. This aspiration to the "as-it-is" is, in a sense, a reflection of the historical awareness that the direct-action-style disruptions and interventions of the previous generation could no longer be effective, and can also be understood as the last form of resistance that rejects the world of representation in its entirety. Looking at how the concept of the "as-it-is" was also shared and appropriated by the contemporaneous photographer and critic Nakahira Takuma, we can confirm that this interpretation is not off the mark.

Through the limited-run publication, *PROVOKE* (1968–69) which he helped to found, Nakahira raised objections to the way that photographs are incorporated by language and narrative as psychological representations, and, in order to break that filter, he sought a means for presenting photography as a "provocative material" for escaping narrative.¹⁴ What the artists behind this publication called "provocation" has correspondences with Lee's "encounter," and was rooted in a critical awareness that questioned how to create fissures and tears in the fabric of representation, so as to recuperate a holistic and direct contact with reality. However, a kind of romantic subjectivity latent within that approach was also the reason why the dream of "provocation" had to go unfulfilled. In fact, this "provocation" was quickly rehabilitated by the system. Specifically, the massive DISCOVER JAPAN advertising campaign sponsored by Japanese National Railways (the predecessor to JR) facilely appropriated, as "style" alone, the

then-innovative and anti-orthodox technique, known as *are, bure, boke* (grainy, blurry, out-of-focus), that was pioneered by the *PROVOKE* photographers such as Nakahira and Moriyama Daidō.¹⁵ What had been for them the stamp of a physical encounter that could shake their entire existence was transformed into a signifier of mundane travel (the simulacrum of encounter) that could be consumed as an escape from the everyday, that is, leisure. It was the resignation that everything, including gestures of resistance, could now be encoded and reiterated.

Grappling with this situation, Nakahira sympathized with Lee's thinking, and invoked his rhetoric in publishing *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?* (1973), in which Nakahira discussed photography as a path toward the world "as-it-is."¹⁶ The text is pervaded with the pessimism that the encirclement of the world of images cannot be easily escaped; the sense that the everyday world itself had become adhered to the world of images, and the two were now perceived as an inseparable entity. This was saying almost the same thing as the world of "hyperreality" that Jean Baudrillard proposed through his concept of the "simulacrum." Baudrillard was primarily addressing Euro-American society since the 1970s, but his ideas also apply to Japan. With the end of rapid economic growth and the shift toward high consumer society, this was the moment when the simulacralization of society as a whole proceeded all at once, with the prime illustration of this being the diverse activities of the Seibu (Saison) Group from the latter half of the 1970s onward.¹⁷ Operating not only department stores but also art museums, theaters, performance spaces, and cutting-edge bookshops, the Seibu Group would come to represent the new cultural trends in the consumption of "signs." And the illusion of the "self" that could be obtained from the simulation of "signs" would become an important focal point in both cultural production and consumption. This mood continued throughout the 1980s, and, in tandem with structuralist/post-structuralist textual analysis (theories of semiotic play), it produced clusters of "petit rebellion" in sites across the everyday world. The fantasy of revolution would be transformed/diffused as the play of the rebellious "I," but this was not just a simple trivialization. Because the body and fantasy of the real "I" are always either in excess of or produce lack in such semiotic play. This inevitably creates strains in the "play," which leads to an aching struggle over the constitution of the "I." In any event, these identity issues about how to

¹³ Perhaps the representative example of Mono-ha's critique of "making" is Sekine Nobuo's statement in the round-table discussion, "'Tsukuru' to iu koto 'Tsukuranai' to iu koto" ['Making' and 'Not Making'] with Ikeda Masuo, Sugai Kumi, Horiuchi Masakazu, Tōno Yoshiaki and Sekine, reproduced in *Bijutsu Techō*, No. 315 (July 1969), pp. 176–192.

¹⁴ Nakahira Takuma, *Naze, shokubutsu zukan ka* [Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1973).

¹⁵ Seibu Group changed its name to Saison Group in the mid-1980s.

Fig. 114
DISCOVER JAPAN
campaign poster, 1970

of

From about this time, the ideals aspiring toward the future and the image of the future itself—which the Japanese mass mentality so blindly relied upon since the high economic rise to the “bubble period”—collapsed so rapidly causing the conversion from a middle-class society to a disparate society (*kakusa shakai*). From these situations emerged a new form of gaze directed at the hard realities of the political and economic conditions [in Japan] which were once sugar-coated in the image of an advanced urban culture. 3.11, it could be argued, partly triggered the sharpening and proliferation of this new type of gaze.

define the “I” became the “primary battlefield” of rebellion, and this tendency would only be further amplified throughout the 1980s.

Considering this age of simulacra that followed the transition period around 1970 from a different angle, it could also be said that Japan had entered an era in which opposition to the main framework defining its political situation to that point—the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty—disappeared, and the Cold War structure itself was rendered invisible. Specifically, the fantasy of revolution collapsed with the Asama-Sansō incident of the early 1970s, and as the gaze toward the everyday “I” became the baseline of cultural phenomena it brought about a situation where the questioning of the framework of the Cold War, which surely prescribed the deepest parts of everyday life, no longer obtained any sense of reality. For example, the year 1972 saw the reversion of Okinawa and an “apparent” step toward the resolution of the Cold War structure, but for the people of Okinawa this was in a sense the true beginning of the “cold”—no longer “hot”—war. Ironically, for the rest of Japan, Okinawa’s visibility faded as it came to be seen as a specifically “local” issue. In other words, the gaze toward Okinawa broadened only in terms of culture/leisure, while the political reality receded into the background. In that sense, the economic chauvinism of the rapid economic growth period had an aspect that was “naturalized,” as a mentality, from the 1970s onward. The thought and sensibilities that questioned political issues, and in particular major structural issues, were neutralized, and perhaps ultimately even relegated to the realm of the unconscious, straight through to the natural and nuclear disasters of March 11, 2011. Since 3.11, there has been a prompt increase in the discussion of Fukushima and Okinawa as a pair; nuclear energy is another issue that has quietly but widely advanced since the 1970s. It could be said that in addressing these two problems together, we are finally confronting the mentality that allowed the invisible Cold War structure to go unquestioned to this point.

Reviewing the history, in the art world of the 1950s there were works and movements—such as Reportage art and the print movement—that directly challenged the Cold War structure itself, starting with the struggles over U.S. military bases in Japan. ¹⁶ In the 1960s there were also numerous cases of artists, such as the aforementioned HRC, directly engaging with the massively transforming urban space, and the political and economic structures it represented (this includes Akasegawa

Genpei’s *Thousand-Yen Note Trial*), and it is my personal impression that the current intensity of the gaze directed at this history is not unrelated to the post-3.11 situation. From a broader perspective, perhaps it should be said that momentum had been gathering from around 1995, and finally erupted with 3.11. ¹⁷

In any case, if there is now a certain sense of reality to revisiting the art of the 1960s and ’70s, I believe there are two factors at play here. One is that the current situation in Japan allows for the memory of these previously existing examples of “rebellious” art to be perceived with a certain sense of reality. The other is that there is a need for a genealogical retracing (in the Nietzschean sense) of how the double-sided construct that emerged in the 1970s—with the simulacralization of reality and the shift toward identity issues on one side, and the obscuring of the Cold War structure on the other—came to define our consciousness over the years since its establishment. That is, there is a need for a dissection of our mentality.

To conclude, the situation in Japan that I have sketched out here is, in fact, deeply related to Japan’s relations with other Asian countries. Not only with regard to art, but also in terms of culture in general, the links between Asia and Japan follow two basic patterns. In one, there is the rediscovery of other Asian cultures as the forgotten origins of Japanese culture. In the other, Asia is the new market for Japanese mass culture. Connected to a cultural-anthropological/ethnographic perspective, the former has followed an uninterrupted development since the 1960s, while the latter emerged primarily in the 1980s, and has gradually overwhelmed and occluded the former.

Certainly, this is a gross simplification, and something that needs to be examined more closely, but the structural changes in the Japanese view toward Asia are not unrelated to the simulacralization of the 1970s, and one has the sense that this was also what transformed the cultural-anthropological/ethnographic perspective that predates it. (Here it should be noted that the successor campaign to DISCOVER JAPAN was themed “EXOTIC JAPAN.” The re-apprehension of Asia as a whole that occurred in the 1980s can be understood as a manifestation of a similar gaze.) And even where there was concern for Asia in such cultural fields, we cannot forget that this was countered with a consistent “indifference” toward the Cold War structure and Asia’s political situation. In that sense, the Cold War structure had the effect in Japan of focusing political consciousness exclusively



on Japan-U.S. relations. Put another way—and this applies also to the case of Okinawa—another issue that must be carefully studied going forward is the way that the cultural gaze had a highly ideological effect of compensating for and covering up the lack in Japan's political consciousness. In that sense, perhaps there is also a need for the problem of cultural rebellion to be read as the rebellion *against* culture.

Here I must conclude my presentation on the general situation and the issues that relate to it, but it is my hope that it can in some way provide a spark for further discussion. Thank you for your attention.

Translated by Andrew Maerkle

fig. 105
Nakamura Hiroshi, *5th Sunagawa*, 1955,
oil on plywood, 92.5 x 183 cm
Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo



Cultural Rebellion in Asia | 1960–1989

Day 2

Session II In the Case of Southeast Asia

Moderator

Hayashi Michio

—
Yu Jin Seng

Competing Notions of the “Avant-garde” through
Exhibitionary Discourses in Post-War Southeast Asia
from the 1950s to 1970s

—
Prapon Kumjim

Magpie Modernity in Thai Art

—
Simon Soon

Malaysia: A Cultural Rebellion

—
Patrick D. Flores

“Suddenly Turning Visible”:

Art as Experiment and Pedagogy in the Philippines

—
Nguyen Trinh Thi

Re-Reading History through Recycling Old Films

—
Discussion on Sessions I and II

Competing Notions of the “Avant-garde” through Exhibitionary Discourses in Post-War Southeast Asia from the 1950s to 1970s

Yu Jin Seng

Senior Curator, National Gallery Singapore

This paper traces and examines the emergence of competing claims and notions of the “avant-garde” in post-war Southeast Asia (1950s to the 1970s) driven by changing exhibitionary formats, strategies, and concepts, advanced and deployed by artists, that focuses on exhibitionary discourses on the “real” and the “new” produced by ideologically-based and critical exhibitions as new exhibitionary modes. Some of these exhibitions examined include the Modern Art Society (MAS) annual exhibitions (Singapore), “Towards a Mystical Reality” (Malaysia), Sang Tao (Creation Group) exhibitions (Vietnam), the “First Exhibition of Non-Objective Art in the Philippines (FENOAP)” (Philippines), the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (GSRB; New Art Movement) exhibitions (Indonesia), and the Artists’ Front of Thailand (TART)’s exhibitions. The different notions of the “avant-garde” that is embraced, rejected or appropriated to suit local contexts is examined as symptoms of cultural rebellions in this paper through contested ideas of the “new” advanced by ideologically-based exhibitions that referenced the avant-garde along formalist, subjective, and perceptual lines with a lineage that is traced to the avant-garde movement in Euro-America. Other competing notions of the avant-garde gravitated towards the “real” propelled by the critical exhibition as an alternative exhibitionary mode to the ideologically-based exhibitions. The critical exhibition called for a reflexive approach to thinking about and making art based on their social, political, and cultural realities, drawing from multiple frames of references besides Euro-America, widening the scope of art that includes conceptualism and traditional cultural forms and deployed art as a vehicle for

dissent and social change. Tensions between the avant-garde, ideologically-based exhibition and the critical exhibition were manifested in debates over the notions of the “real” and the “new.” The contestation between the two new exhibitionary modes—the ideologically-based and critical exhibitions—intersects with global contexts such as the radicalized student movements that started in Europe in 1968, the process of decolonization, the rise of the “Third World” and the geo-cultural politics of the Cold War. This paper will focus on the exhibitionary discourses while acknowledging that an analysis of the artworks produced by both ideologically-based and critical exhibitions is needed to complete our understanding of this new exhibitionary mode.

From Salon to Ideologically-based and Critical Exhibitions:
The Avant-garde and the Critical

The art historical significance of exhibitions tend to be overlooked without examining the different strategic systems of representation employed by different modes of exhibitions such as the Salon exhibition, medium or style-based exhibitions that promote a particular set of medium, styles, or even ideas. Southeast Asia after World War II was plunged into a period of nationalist struggle against colonialism, and became an ideological battleground within the global context of the Cold War. Artists who considered themselves the avant-garde burst into prominence in the region in Southeast Asia within the context of the Cold War and introduced a new mode of exhibition—the ideologically-based exhibition—distinguished from earlier exhibitionary