

## 두 개의 미묘한 삼각관계

# 한국-중국-일본 및 파라과이-브라질-아르헨티나 간 국제 관계의 예술적 문화적 매개에 관한 문화 간 비교 연구 프로젝트

산드라 디넨달 로페스

## *Two Subtle Triangles*

### *A cross-cultural comparative research project on artistic and cultural mediations of international relations between South Korea—China—Japan and Paraguay—Brazil—Argentina*

Sandra Dinnendahl López

본 논문은 한국 미술 및 문화 플랫폼, 이벤트, 행위자가 한국-일본-중국의 국제 관계와 역사적 갈등의 문제를 어떻게 매개해 왔는가를 5개월에 걸쳐 연구한 결과물이다. 본 연구의 범위는 현재부터 지난 10년까지로 한정되며 포괄적 연구를 시도하지는 않는다. 시간과 이동의 제약을 고려하여 해당 시기 본 주제에 대한 지역적 접근 몇 가지를 보여 주는 다섯 가지 사례를 선정했다. 추가로 파라과이-브라질-아르헨티나의 과거 및 현재의 관계를 다룬 파라과이의 예술적 문화적 매개 사례가 될 만한 같은 시기 세 가지 사례도 선정했다.

국제 관계는 그 근원에 긴장감이 자리하기도 하는데, 특히 점령, 군사 공격, 제국주의 내지는 신제국주의, 차별 등의 역사를 겪은 곳이라면 더욱 그렇다. 물론 모든 국제 간 상호작용이 부정적이라거나 파괴적인 것은 아니다. 특히 문화 교류는 어떤 국가 간에도 창조적이며 평화를 구축할 가능성이 있음을 보여 주는 증거다. 그럼에도 불구하고 한국에서 이 문제가 갖는 민감성은 아무리 강조해도 지나치지 않다. 특히나 민감한 문제가 일본 식민의 잔재와 당시에 비롯된 인적 손실, 문화 말소, 세대 집단 트라우마에 여전히 남아 있다. 또 다른 중요한 문제라면 한국의 대중국 관계는 북한 그리고 한국전쟁 후반에 결정적이었던 중국의 군사 개입을 언급하지 않고서는 설명할 수가 없다는 점이다. 이 두 가지 예시는 지난 세기 한국-중국-일본의 관계를 단순히 건드린 정도에 불과하다. 이 지역의 정치, 경제, 문화, 군사 교류와 국가 간 조약, 침공, 정복의 역사는 천 년을 거슬러 올라간다.

외교관이나 판사, 변호사, 정치인이라면 복잡다단하고 변동을 거듭하는 법적 외교적 정치적 규정을 준수하며 이 깊고 거친 물살을 헤쳐 가야만 한다. 반면 미술가, 큐레이터, 미술관장에게는 이런 고려사항이 그만큼 엄격하게 적용되지 않는다. 이들은 현재와 과거의 국제 갈등과 협력에서 비롯된 기억, 역사, 서사, 자료로 무엇을 행하고 있을까? 미술과 문화의 측면에서 한국은 이웃 국가들과의 관계에서 비롯된 문제에 어떻게 대응하는가?

This research paper is the result of a five-month investigation into how South Korean art and cultural platforms, events, and agents have mediated topics of international relations and historical conflict between South Korea, Japan, and China. This research limits the scope of its inquiry to the last ten years up to the present and does not attempt to be a comprehensive study. Given time and logistical constraints, five case studies from that time period have been selected that illustrate a few of the local approaches to this subject matter. A further three case studies from the same time period have been selected that exemplify Paraguayan artistic and cultural mediations on Paraguay—Brazil—Argentina historical and contemporary relations.

International relations are often a source of tension, in particular where there has been a history of occupation, military aggression, imperialism or neo-imperialism, and discrimination. Of course, not all international interactions are negative or destructive. Cultural exchanges, in particular, are a testament to the creative and peace-building potential between any two nations. Still, the sensitivity of this subject matter in South Korea cannot be overstated. A particularly delicate issue remains the legacy of Japanese colonization and the human loss, cultural erasure, and collective generational trauma that stem from this time period. Another critical issue is that 20th century South Korean relations with China cannot be spoken about without referencing North Korea and decisive Chinese military involvement in the last leg of the civil war. These two examples only touch upon Korea—China—Japan relations in the previous century. The history of political, economic, cultural, and military exchanges, treaties, invasions, and conquests in this region stretches back millennia.

Diplomats, judges, lawyers, and politicians must navigate these deep and troubled waters in accordance to complex and fluctuating legal, diplomatic, and political regulations. On the other hand, these considerations do not apply as strictly to artists, curators, and museum directors. What do they do with the memories, histories, narratives, and materials that proceed from contemporary and historical international conflict and cooperation? How does South Korea respond to issues stemming from international relations with its neighboring countries in terms of art and culture?

산드라 디넨달 로페스는 파라과이 아순시온 출신의 독립 문화 실천가이자 연구자, 미술가다. 2010년 미국 오벌린대학(Oberlin College)에서 시각예술 및 문학 창작 학사 학위를 받았고 부전공으로 종교학을 공부했다. 2015년 베를린예술대학의 아트 인 컨텍스트 연구소(Institute for Art in Context)에서 석사 학위를 받았다. 이후 고국에서 활동하며 지역의 미술가, 큐레이터들과 함께 다양한 미술 기반 프로젝트와 플랫폼을 진행했다. 2017년에는 브라질 미술가 방 지 제주스(Van de Jesús)와 함께 템포럴 아트 페스티벌(Temporal Festival de Arte)을 창설했는데, 아순시온 시내 공공 공간에서 진행되는 행위 기반 미술을 중심으로 하는 격년제 행사다. 같은 해 아르헨티나의 문화실천가 알레한드로 타포니에르(Alejandro Tapponier)와 매년 아르헨티나 클로린다시에서 열리는 미술 합류(Confluencias de Arte)를 공동기획했다. 이번 국립현대미술관 프로그램에서는 탈식민 담론과 한국, 중국, 일본 간의 국제 관계를 살펴보는 비교 연구를 진행 중이다.

Sandra Dinnendahl López is an independent cultural practitioner, researcher, and artist from Asunción, Paraguay. In 2010 she obtained a BA in Visual Arts and Creative Writing and a Minor in Religion from Oberlin College (USA). In 2015 she obtained an MA from the Institute for Art in Context of the Universitat der Künste Berlin (Germany). Since then, she has been working in her home country, where she has initiated various art-based projects and platforms in collaboration with regional and local artists and curators. In 2017 she co-created Temporal Festival de Arte alongside Brazilian artist Van de Jesus, a biannual festival dedicated to action-based art in public spaces of Asunción. The same year she co-created Confluencias de Arte with Argentinean cultural practitioner Alejandro Tapponier, which takes place annually in the city of Clorinda, Argentina. At the MMCA program Dinnendahl Lopez is conducting a comparative study into post-colonial discourse and international relations between South Korea, China, and Japan.

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### Introduction

This research paper is the result of a five-month investigation into how South Korean art and cultural platforms, events, and agents have mediated topics of international relations and historical conflict between South Korea, Japan, and China. This research limits the scope of its inquiry to the last ten years up to the present and does not attempt to be a comprehensive study. Given time and logistical constraints, five case studies from that time period have been selected that illustrate a few of the local approaches to this subject matter. A further three case studies from the same time period have been selected that exemplify Paraguayan artistic and cultural mediations of shared Paraguayan, Brazilian, and Argentine historical and contemporary relations.

International relations are often a source of tension, in particular where there has been a history of occupation, military aggression, imperialism or neo-imperialism, and discrimination. Of course, not all international interactions are negative or destructive. Cultural exchanges, in particular, are a testament to the creative and peace-building potential between any two nations. Still, the sensitivity of this subject matter in South Korea cannot be overstated. A particularly delicate issue remains the legacy of Japanese colonization and the human loss, cultural erasure, and collective generational trauma that stem from this time period. Another critical issue is that 20th-century South Korean relations with China cannot be spoken about without referencing North Korea and decisive Chinese military involvement in the last leg of the civil war. These two examples only touch upon Korea—China—Japan relations in the previous century. The history of political, economic, cultural, and military exchanges, treaties, invasions, and conquests in this region stretches back millennia and is necessary to understand the subtext and context of, for example, President Trump’s 2017 comment claiming Prime Minister Xi Jinping stated that “Korea actually used to be a part of China”<sup>1</sup> and to understand the outrage that this seemingly offhanded comment generated in South Korea.

<sup>1</sup> Michelle Ye Hee Lee, “Trump’s Claim That Korea ‘Actually Used to Be a Part of China,’” *Washington Post*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/04/19/trumps-claim-that-korea-actually-used-to-be-a-part-of-china/>.

2  
"Paraguay–South Korea Relations," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, March 13, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraguay–South\\_Korea\\_relations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paraguay–South_Korea_relations).

Diplomats, judges, lawyers, and politicians must navigate these deep and troubled waters in accordance with complex and fluctuating legal, diplomatic, and political regulations. On the other hand, these considerations do not apply as strictly to artists, curators, and museum directors. What do they do with the memories, histories, narratives, and materials that proceed from contemporary and historical international conflict and cooperation? How does South Korea respond to issues stemming from international relations with its neighboring countries in terms of art and culture?

### Purpose of research

The proposed practical outcome of this line of questions is that the author, a Paraguayan artist, curator, and cultural practitioner, may learn from South Korean art-related and cultural approaches to international relations and historical conflict in its region to inform her own work locally (or glocally). On a more general level, this proposal represents a radical departure from Western-centric comparative research projects. Former European colonies, particularly those considered "developing" or "third world," tend to be compared to their former imperial centers. This is a straightforward manifestation of cultural hegemony. Comparing a country like Paraguay to its regional neighbors, like Brazil or Argentina, or to former imperial centers like Spain, Portugal, and France, seems to be the evident path. There are numerous points of comparison with which to work, especially the fact that Paraguayan society, as a former colony, was modeled after Spanish interests. Even after gaining independence most Latin American countries looked to France and French political, economic, and cultural models to shape their own. Of course, the opposite wasn't as prevalent. France and Spain did not look to Paraguay for inspiration or guidance. Brazil and Argentina have historically treated Paraguay as a geopolitical chessboard on which to mobilize their own political and economic interests. This is also a straightforward manifestation of hegemony.

Breaking away from these colonialist and neo-imperialist paradigms, other alternatives arise. One is to create new artistic, academic, and theoretic alliances between countries of the global South or countries that have no clear-cut history of dominating or subjugating the other. South Korea in 2019 is no longer the global South, even if does have the word in its name. This is historically very recent, however. Only a generation ago, especially right after the civil war, South Korea and Paraguay were not too dissimilar in terms of economic development. The point still stands that the history of Paraguay–South Korea relations is short. Diplomatic relations were officially established in 1962 and there have been no significant confrontations between the two countries.<sup>2</sup>

### Comparison between South Korea and Paraguay

The premise of this research rests on a few parallelisms drawn between South Korea and Paraguay. It is not the intent of this text to suggest that these two wildly dissimilar countries are otherwise; the parallels are few but sufficient for the intellectual exercises that lay ahead. Both South Korea and Paraguay were under occupation by their closest neighboring countries in a relatively recent time period. South Korea was occupied by Imperial Japan from 1910 until the end of World War II, while Paraguay was under Brazilian and Argentine military occupation towards the end of the Triple Alliance War in 1868 until at least 1876. These occupations have had immeasurable impact in shaping the sociopolitical and cultural present-day in the two countries. The destructive 1865–1870 Triple Alliance War wiped out more than half of Paraguay's population and most of its male population.<sup>3</sup> Paraguay then underwent formative reconstructive years in the shadow of pro-Brazil and pro-Argentina partisan influences that directly intervened in Paraguayan political matters. The two main Paraguayan political parties, the Colorado Party and the Liberal Party, were formed in this time period in 1887.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting that, in their respective triads, South Korea and Paraguay represent the smallest economies. According to the International Monetary Fund, China holds the number 2 global position in terms of GDP size. Japan sits at number 3 and South Korea sits at number 11 (the fourth Asian country on the list which includes India at number 6). In the South American triad, Brazil has the largest GDP of Latin America, sitting at number 8 worldwide. Argentina holds the global position number 30 and Paraguay appears at number 92, in the very middle of the list.<sup>5</sup>

Other points of comparison may be drawn up; however, these two points are the most relevant to this study.

A well-studied impact of colonization is economic retardation. Former colonies struggle to recover from the theft of material and environmental resources and human labor. In the case of South Korea, and despite the mid-century civil war, it made record-breaking progress during the Miracle on the Han River decades. Paraguay has had no such comparable historical economic growth. It is decidedly an underdog of its region, in contrast to the regional and global power that is South Korea. In 2019 Paraguay is still subject to neo-imperialist Brazilian and Argentine interests, as it has been since it became an independent nation. These neo-imperialist interests are one of the leading causes of environmental degradation in Paraguay (particularly through monoculture). Paraguay's lax environmental regulations make it an attractive choice for Brazilian nationals who work in the soy and cattle industries.<sup>6</sup> Case in point, the largest landowner of the country is Brazilian (or *brasiguayo*<sup>7</sup>) Tranquilo Favero, nicknamed the Soy King. In April 2019 major news broke out about a new *acta bilateral* (bilateral agreement) between Paraguay and Brazil regarding the bi-national hydroelectric dam

3  
"The Never-Ending War," *The Economist*, December 22, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/news/christmas/21568594-how-terrible-little-known-conflict-continues-shape-and-blight-nation>.

4  
"La Post-guerra "Guerra De La Triple Alianza," *Historia y Cultura del Paraguay* (blog), July 21, 2009, <https://paraguay-historia.blogspot.com/2009/07/la-post-guerra-guerra-de-la-triple.html>.

5  
"Projected GDP Ranking (2019-2023)," World GDP Ranking 2019—StatisticsTimes.com, <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-ranking.php>.

6  
J. M. G. Kleinpenning and E. B. Zoomers. "Degradación Ambiental En América Latina: El Caso De Paraguay," *Revistas Científicas Complutenses, Universidad Complutense De Madrid*, <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/AGUC/article/view/AGUC8989110037A/31864>.

7  
Term meaning half-Brazilian and half-Paraguayan or Brazilian residing in Paraguay.

**8**  
"Totalidad Del Documento Era Favorable a Los Brasileños," *Abc Color*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresia/economia/2019/09/26/totalidad-del-documento-era-favorable-a-los-brasilenos/>.

**9**  
Ian Bremmer, "Why the Japan-South Korea Trade War Is Worrying for the World," *Time*, October 3, 2019, <https://time.com/5691631/japan-south-korea-trade-war/>.

**10**  
Jane Chung and Heekyong Yang, "South Korea to Drop Japan from Its Fast-Track Trade 'White List,'" *Reuters*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan-labourers/south-korea-to-drop-japan-from-its-fast-track-trade-white-list-idUSKCN1V20CO>.

**11**  
Maximiliano Durrón, "NEWS Artists Demand Removal of Work from Aichi Triennale Following Censorship Controversy," *ARTnews*, August 13, 2019, <http://www.artnews.com/2019/08/13/aichi-triennale-2019-work-removal/>.

**12**  
Koki Tanaka, "Koki Tanaka - STATEMENT BY THE ARTISTS OF AICHI TRIENNALE...," Facebook, August 6, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/koki.tanaka/posts/10157379410344618>.

**13**  
It is worth noting that the term "alternative space" has fallen out of favor or is considered outdated to the newer generation of art spaces that might have been described as alternative a decade or two ago. This information was gleaned from a conversation with Yang Ji Yoon, director of Alternative Space Loop, which opened in 1999.

Itaipú. The new *acta* has been described as being "totally" beneficial towards Brazil, and its effects have already been felt in Paraguay in the form of higher household electricity costs.<sup>8</sup> Clearly such an agreement would never take place without a consenting counterpart in Paraguay, often in the form of politicians who are rewarded materially or with influence. These are only a few instances that exemplify 21st-century neo-imperialist attitudes in the region.

Concurrently, in South Korea the 2019 diplomatic and trade falling-out with Japan has been described as the highest point of tension between the two since the Japanese occupation of Korea.<sup>9</sup> Japan first took South Korea off its "white list" of countries that enjoy minimum trade restrictions in August, to which South Korea responded in like manner. The initial cause of this dispute has been traced back to the 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling that "Japanese companies should compensate South Koreans who were conscripted as forced laborers during World War Two."<sup>10</sup> The issue of Korean forced laborers and comfort women remains a hot topic between the two East Asian nations. This was exemplified during the 2019 Aichi Triennale, which opened on August 1 with a section titled "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" showcasing, among other "controversial" works, Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung's "Statue of a Girl of Peace."<sup>11</sup> This statue of a comfort woman drew such intense criticism and even death threats from Japanese conservatives that Director Daisuke Tsuda closed down the section. The censorship of this artwork (and all the other works in the same section) elicited enormous controversy and open letters decrying the move, including one signed on August 6 by 72 of the 90 participating artists.<sup>12</sup>

It is in the midst of all this news that I am conducting my research, which may well have informed some of my interviewees' opinions.

### South Korean Case Studies

As has been stated above, it was necessary to set limits to what could fall within the scope of this research. The time limit was the first important element; all exhibitions took place within the last ten years. Another significant limit was that the research examined case studies from a curatorial or organizational point of view, not from the points of view of artists. The reason for this was that it focused on people and institutions that create those platforms that raise or make visible art works and art projects about the subject matter. This research also looked exclusively at more "established" art and cultural institutions, as opposed to smaller-scale or "alternative" (defined here as in opposition to established) art spaces.<sup>13</sup> These more established institutions have all been in existence for at least two decades and are able to access considerable resources, often through significant state-issued funding that is renewed yearly. The exception to this is the MMCA itself, which is funded totally by government institutional

operations, like the National Museum of Korea and the National Library. This in turn raises interesting questions about the autonomy of these more established institutions that depend on public financing.

The first institution of interest was, of course, the MMCA, given that it is the organizing platform for this research project. As its name makes clear, it houses the state-owned modern and contemporary art collection. It is the largest institution on this list of case studies and falls under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. It is comprised of a veritable army of curators, administrators, and civil servants in four locations: Seoul, Gwacheon, Deoksugung, and Cheongju. The MMCA is perhaps more stable than private art or cultural institutions, as it is government-financed and needs not apply to grants or outside financing. On the other hand, it is subject to a different set of rules. Part of its team is on a rotating basis, so that most civil servants are there for only three years. Although it is an extension of the Ministry of Culture and, as such, of the government (regardless of which political party is in power), it does not utilize the heavy handed nationalistic language and rhetoric that its sister organization the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History (MUCH) does. Of course, as it is not a history museum, it need not do so. It was difficult to find an MMCA exhibition that coincided with this research's subject matter. The exception to this was the recurring *How Little You Know About Me* exhibition, curated by Park Joowon.

The other case studies are as follow: The 2010 *Muntadas: Asian Protocols* at Total Museum of Contemporary Art, the 2014 *A Journal of the Plague Year* exhibition at ARKO Art Center, the 2015 *The Subtle Triangle* at Seoul Museum of Art, and the 2019 *We Are Bound to Meet* exhibition at Alternative Space Loop.<sup>14</sup>

The only case study that I was able to personally visit was *We Are Bound to Meet*. Therefore, for the purpose of this text, most information utilized is extracted from the exhibitions' publications. These include articles, curatorial texts, and academic essays. Another source of information is interviews with the exhibitions' curators, museum or gallery directors, and local artists.

### **A Journal of the Plague Year**

The complete title of this exhibition reads as follows: *A Journal of the Plague Year: Continental Fear, Islands, Ghosts, Rebels*. According to a text co-written by the director of Hong Kong-based art space Para Site, Cosmin Costinas, and Inti Guerrero, Colombian curator and current director of Manila-based Bellas Artes Project,

Originally curated in Para Site in Hong Kong and travelling to the Arko Art Center, *A Journal of the Plague Year* is physically expanded

**14**  
Other examples worth mentioning are the recurring *Move on Asia* exhibition at Alternative Space Loop, the 2019 *Zero Gravity World* at SeMA, and one present-day (at the time of this research project) installation at MUCH titled *Light of the Repose of the Soul*.



and also attempts to enlarge the exhibition's spectrum of content by reflecting characteristics of Korean history and society as well as the relationships amongst Asian nations."<sup>15</sup>

Costinas and Guerrero initiated and curated this project, which was exhibited at Para Site in 2013. It traveled to Arko Art Center in 2014 and also to TheCube Project Space in Taipei and The Lab in San Francisco. The original Hong Kong exhibition, titled *A Journal of the Plague Year, Fear, Ghosts, Rebels, SARS, Leslie and the Hong Kong history*, "critically analyzes historical and contemporary imaginations and politics of fear in the face of disease and the specter of contamination in society and culture."<sup>16</sup> In South Korea these same general ideas were applied, with new locally significant elements added to modify the exhibition to its new context. According to Kim Hyunjin, former director of Arko Art Center, one concept that transcended the geopolitical differences between Hong Kong and South Korea was a recognition of "imperialistic perspectives of the West towards Asia and the Asian internalization of this superior perspective, which is turned towards other under-developed Asian countries."<sup>17</sup> These internalized imperialistic perspectives manifest differently in each place. *A Journal of the Plague Year* focused on Hong Kong society's "ambivalent position, as it objectifies Mainland China as being inferior to its status as a more civilized society after the hand-over from the position of the 'suppressed other' in its colonized experiences."<sup>18</sup> Concrete examples referred to were the 2003 SARS outbreak, the 2008 milk powder scandal in Mainland China (which drove its citizens to buy baby formula in Hong Kong), and conflicting issues over Hong Kong's democracy.

The most salient difference between Hong Kong and South Korea in the context of colonization is that the former was colonized by Britain, the most powerful Western imperial nation of the time, while the latter was colonized by Imperial Japan, a neighboring country. However, the metaphor of hygiene and its equivalency to imperialistic perspectives (where "a higher level of hygiene is equivalent to certain superiority"<sup>19</sup>) functions in both places. *A Journal of the Plague Year* draws upon a historical event from occupied Korea in 1931 named the "Wanpaoshan Incident." Namely, it was a "riot during which Koreans destroyed a Chinese immigrant neighborhood" and which heightened anti-Chinese sentiments in Korea and anti-Korean sentiments in China. Thousands of people were massacred in riots and protests as a result. Kim ponders the complex underlying elements of anti-Chinese sentiment in Japanese-occupied Korea, citing that

"Koreans might have had prejudice against the Qing Dynasty, which had been established by people who were considered barbarians by the Chinese Han as well as Chosun—as well as in the superiority seen that the Chosun people might have identified themselves as citizens of the Japanese Empire during the occupation."<sup>20</sup>

*A Journal of the Plague Year* artworks examine anti-Mainland China sentiments in Hong Kong and South Korea from multiple points of view: from Western imperialistic perspectives as well as local imperialistic perspectives (Imperial Japan and Chosun [Joseon]), and from exclusionary East Asian nationalistic perspectives. They also pinpoint other loci of tension. Sorokdo Island's status as a quarantine post in occupied Korea and the disputed Dokdo Island are two such sources of tension, one historical and the other contemporary. North Korean communist propaganda is juxtaposed against anti-communist and anti-North Korea propaganda. In these the metaphor of the plague is brought to the fore, as evidenced by disease-carrying rats and dirty pigs drawn to represent enemy Japanese, South Koreans, or North Koreans in propaganda cartoons.

*A Journal of the Plague Year* deploys the metaphor of disease and hygiene to understand complex and contradictory concepts surrounding Hong Kong and South Korean attitudes about themselves and towards other East Asian societies. In doing so it is at risk of being "contaminated" by dated 20th century ideas about disease, contagion, and immunity. Indeed, many of the incidents its artworks refer to belong to that century. In Hong Kong it avoids doing so by selecting specific mainstream events that affected millions in the 21st century, like the 2003 suicide of singer Leslie Cheung. This incident serves as a powerful (almost populist) metaphor that is accessible to the general public. It is described as a unifying, catalytic event that compelled masses of Hong Kong's population to accompany his funeral in the streets, disregarding health warnings of the time to avoid busy public areas. The metaphor, although impersonal, is brilliant in that it is also ambiguous. There is no moral to this story; it is neither clearly negative nor positive. Leslie Cheung had an international audience. Fans and sympathizers of all backgrounds occupied the streets of Hong Kong despite volatile tensions of a racialized, xenophobic character. The city's social body was shocked into overcoming these tensions as if it had received a bitter medicine. And yet the health warnings were well grounded and scientifically based. Ignoring them impacted public health in non-trivial ways.

In the South Korean exhibition, on the other hand, the social and political incidents that serve as referential framework (to make the artwork significant to its context) lack contemporaneity and immediacy. Most belong to a pre-Miracle on the Han River era, drastically different from 21st-century South Korea, and might therefore be less relatable for newer generations.

Of course, I write this as a non-Korean. (What could I understand about what Koreans find relatable?) Still, the idea of immediacy and utilizing relevant, contemporary events as referential framework are important points of comparison that I will return to.

## Muntadas: Asian Protocols

Total Museum's collaboration with renowned Spanish artist, Antoni Muntadas, is the largest and most ambitious project on this list of case studies. It involved not just the Total Museum curatorial team and Muntadas himself, but also several experts in various areas of studies, like Kang Jeehyun, a South Korean specialist in international political economy. The exhibition uses a six-chapter format: "Cartographies," "Fragments," "On Translation: Pille," "Three Projections," "Public/Private Space," and "Blackboard Dialog: Redefining Asian Protocols." Of these the ones most appropriate for this research project are "Cartographies" and "Blackboard Dialog."

Asian Protocols is a project based on the similarities, differences, and relationships between "Asia's main countries: China, South Korea, and Japan,"<sup>21</sup> countries which Nathalie Boseul Shin, director of Total Museum, refers to as "so near, yet so far" and "sometimes friends, other times enemies, a shifting web of alliances."<sup>22</sup> This exhibition deploys the metaphor of language, translation, and protocol to address its subject matter. As Shin writes in her text "'Protocol' as a Lens on Korea, China and Japan: Muntadas' Asian Protocols":

"The "translation" that [Muntadas] refers to is not limited to the literal sense of one language being translated into another. It is something that must be viewed in a larger context: the other meanings and contexts by which an image is understood, the process of how something is "translated," understood, and interpreted from one culture to another. . . . The different aspects of the Korea, China and Japan images are both an interpretation that are precisely *untranslated*—or, better yet, wholly *untranslatable*."<sup>23</sup>

On the subject of protocol as metaphor, both Shin and curator Lee Joo Yun described its usage in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese, both in its translated and transliterated versions. Quoting Muntadas, Lee writes that "by viewing protocols as a 'repository of social memory' inscribed in texts, images, and the behaviors inherent in our daily lives, we could gain a new perspective on our realities."<sup>24</sup> The concept of protocol is utilized to create a cognitive distance from the sociopolitical, cultural, linguistic context that surrounds a person. Complex social behaviors, cultural customs, and etiquettes can be understood as protocols to de-familiarize and deconstruct them.

Of the exhibition's six chapters, "Cartographies" is referred to as the highlight of the exhibition. Muntadas selected 43 English keywords that each represented a significant societal aspect. These include diplomacy, politics, military, safety, order, regulation, meeting, media, sport, pornography, religion, ritual, liturgy, public space, and private space. For each keyword, three images were selected for South Korea, Japan, and China, totaling nine representative images per category. The process of selection was work-

intensive, highly subjective, and involved people from each country, who obtained the images from public media, like news articles. Shin describes the results for the category "test":

"Most of the Korean images showed students taking a test, or images related to the big college entrance exam. But many of the Chinese images showed testing in a science laboratory, while some of the Japanese images showed a banana being given to a monkey. The word was the same, yet different images were chosen, a process determined by the native language translation of the given English word, or the proclivities and background of the individual researcher."<sup>25</sup>

All this material was gathered into an interconnected map that was the main focus of the audience's attention. In my interview with her, Shin described having initial misgivings over the sheer amount of information contained in "Cartographies," which might overwhelm a viewer. However, she added that her fears were unfounded, as viewers dedicated long periods of time, even hours, to this chapter. It stimulated much conversation among the visitors, who commented on the images selected, agreeing or disagreeing and adding their own opinions and comments.

For "Blackboard Dialog," Muntadas formulated 30 questions about the three countries that the international political economy specialist Kang answered. This section was translated through Chinese and Japanese participants into their respective languages. As Shin points out, "The experience, in this case, was as important as the result."<sup>26</sup> As with "Cartographies," "Blackboard Dialog" also stimulated the audience, who "reacted actively and assertively."<sup>27</sup>

*Muntadas: Asian Protocols* traveled from Seoul to Tokyo in 2013, and then to Beijing this year. In each place it was subject to modification in the form of censorship. As a palpable manifestation of this process, the book that was published in each country to accompany the exhibition was drastically altered. In South Korea it is a thick, 300-page volume. In Japan it is perhaps half this size. Certain topics are left out, particularly topics surrounding Japan's occupation of Korea and comfort women. In China the "book" is an empty carton with a URL address. On it, a blurb describes the exhibition in completely different terms. Emphasis is laid on Muntadas as the arbiter and star of the show, rather than on the collaborative team-effort from all three countries. Significantly, the subject of the exhibition is described as a Western-centric production that explores the idea of Asia as imagined by the West. This is misleading, at best, but necessary to sidestep strict Chinese content control. Shin stated that it was imperative that Muntadas himself be cited as the exhibition's leading figure. If they had presented the project as being equally led by a South Korean team, given its subject matter, it would likely have been rejected by Chinese censors. The processes that

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

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Hong Leeji et al., *The Subtle Triangle*, Seoul Museum of Art, 2015.

the exhibition underwent as it traveled from South Korea to Japan to China adds meta-content to itself in a self-recurring manner, evidencing its theses through experience.

Shin addresses a few important questions about the exhibition in her curatorial text. The most common one is "why a Spanish artist should be focusing on what people have to say about Asia."<sup>28</sup> This is understandable, as Muntadas is not only a European foreigner, but also does not speak any of the languages the exhibition deals with. To this she replies that his presence was a neutral balance to normalized biases held by South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese participants. Here, perhaps, neutral is not the keyword, as it suggests that Muntadas would not have any biases or prejudices, which is not only unlikely, but also impossible to prove. Rather, he was an additional distancing perspective and one of his strengths lies in the diversity factor. The question is not whether the exhibition would be better if it was entirely composed of locals. This is a reductive approach. The question is whether it would not be enriched by adding even more perspectives (from different countries and continents). It would be impractical and burdensome to add too many. A balance must be struck between having too few people involved and so many that the processes of question, answer, and selection are drawn out. Shin also stressed that:

"This project . . . was an art project by an artist, not a research paper attempting to analyze Korean, Chinese, and Japanese history or relationships. In other words, Asian Protocols is not trying to give an objective or empirical answer to a question. Its goals are more about raising questions, about evocation."<sup>29</sup>

Keeping this in mind, the exhibition allows itself certain liberties and lays emphasis on interpretation, debate, questioning, and subjectivity. This is in line with its subject matter of language and translation as essentially ambiguous, context-based, and ultimately indefinable. If any of its statements is "wrong," it opens itself up to the audience for correction.

### The Subtle Triangle

The Korean title of this exhibition, «미묘한 삼각관계», translated loosely to "The Subtle Triangle," is a phrase recognizable to Japanese and Chinese speakers, due to the "Chinese character culture shared by the three countries."<sup>30</sup> It used to refer to the three-way relationship between Korea, China, and Japan.

*The Subtle Triangle* exhibition took place in 2015 at Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA) and was part of the "Trilateral Cultural Shuttle Program," itself an outcome of the first Trilateral Foreign Ministers' 2007 meeting, an international organization established by South Korea, China, and Japan. *The Subtle Triangle* was also related to an academic colloquium sharing the same title held at SeMA in 2014. The main topic of discussion for both

the exhibition and the colloquium was "an exploration of the concepts and limits of Asia and community."<sup>31</sup> "Asia" as a geopolitical or geocultural idea rather than geographically defined area was questioned and analyzed. In the curatorial statement, the principal curator, Hong Leeji, cited a number of relevant exhibitions, publications, and events as precedent to *The Subtle Triangle*, including "*Under Construction* (2002, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Japan) where Asian curators met up to analyze art history of the times and to unfold it in an Asian perspective."<sup>32</sup> Kuan-Hsing Chen's text *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, published in 2010 (Duke University Press) is another reference point. Focusing on the same time period, Hong writes that:

"Korea, China, and Japan have entered a new more complex phase as they went through the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup, the publication of *History for the Future: Modern History of Three Countries in East Asia*, written by the three countries collaboratively in 2005, and the declaration of 'the Year of Cultural Exchange among Korea, China and Japan' in 2007."<sup>33</sup>

The exhibition and the colloquium explored different perspectives on the relationship between Korea, Japan, and China. Lee Dong Keun, professor of cultural theory at Korea National University of Arts, describes some of these perspectives:

"The idea of 'East Asia as method,' 'East Asia as purpose,' and 'East Asia as intellectual experiment' all display different perspectives, yet they agree with the viewpoint of perceiving the term 'East Asia' as a cultural structure that should be composed freshly, rather than one that is substantialized."<sup>34</sup>

The artistic platform of *The Subtle Triangle* sought three artists, one each from South Korea, China, and Japan, respectively, "who could talk about the three countries' complicated past, present, and future."<sup>35</sup> The considerations for selecting the artists were detailed and specific. The artists' backgrounds as well as their artistic development were examined. They had to be born in the 1970s, had to be local graduates, and had to be presently residing in their country so as to have "naturally accumulated this time inside regional conditions."<sup>36</sup> For the Chinese artist, it was imperative that they had not left China after 1989. In my interview with her, Hong described looking for artists who were not "big names" like Yayoi Kusama. The descriptor "emerging" was used in a loose way, as all three artists had already internationally renowned careers. The three selected artists were Yangachi, representing Korea; Xu Zhen, representing China; and Koizumi Meiro, representing Japan. A commissioned work from each was shown alongside previous works. Describing the three artists, Hong writes:

"Their art is the fruit of three countries' modernization processes arriving in different speeds. Each of the three artists handles

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

different temporalities. Koizumi Meiro focuses on the memories and incidents of Japan's Imperialistic past; Xu Zhen on the current period of highly compressed growth; and the Korean artist Yangachi on his new interpretation of the upcoming future under the shades of rapid growth."<sup>37</sup>

It seems clear from the various publications and events leading up to the exhibition that this project was thoroughly discussed and deliberated upon. Yet the curatorial team was not prepared for the controversies that would arise from the exhibition's inauguration (even before it opened). It is pertinent to describe the situation that surrounded these controversies, as they are a reflection on the uneasy relations between South Korea, China, and Japan.

The evening before the official exhibition opening, a private showing was arranged for members of press. Among those present was a journalist from local conservative newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo*. When they arrived at Koizumi's section, where a four-screen version of his 2009 video installation *Portrait of a Young Samurai* was shown, the *Dong-A Ilbo* journalist left after watching a few seconds. *Portrait of a Young Samurai* is a provocative work that lasts just under ten minutes. Although its protagonist is an actor dressed as a kamikaze soldier, with a Japanese flag bandana tied on his head, the work is not nationalistic or pro-Japanese military. If the journalist had watched the video through to its end, this would have become clear. However, after viewing it for a few seconds, the journalist left in apparent disgust.

What happened next set off a series of events that almost shut down the entire exhibition. That night the journalist published an impassioned and scathing review of *The Subtle Triangle*, which was set to open the next evening. By early morning, word had spread and SeMA's curatorial team and administration were fielding texts, emails, and phone calls from upset and worried readers non-stop. At least one museum chairman suggested *The Subtle Triangle* be shut down. Police warned the museum about potential "accidents," and curators, including Hong, received personal threats. Some demanded the museum director and city mayor both step down. The curatorial team penned a statement for the press and lengthened the curatorial wall text to explain the misunderstanding. Despite their attempts to alleviate the situation, they had to cancel some of their events, planned two years in advance, as Japanese and Chinese middle schools that had arranged to participate canceled their attendances.

The backlash was enormous. So also was the interest in Koizumi's work as a result. The artist talk held two days after the opening was well attended. Koizumi himself was uncertain about his role and doubted his work. His commissioned piece *Oral History: What Happened In and Around Japan Between 1900 to 1945*, a 47-minute video, was also polemical. Koizumi suggested removing the audio and covering the subtitles with black bars in

an act of self-censorship. *Oral History* was thus edited and replaced with the censored version for the remaining three months. It is worth noting that four years later Koizumi would be involved in a similar situation at the 2019 Aichi Triennale, though this time his work would not be at the center of the controversy.

A difficult question for Hong was whether *The Subtle Triangle* could be described as a successful exhibition. Much of the attention gathered around the controversy, the death threats, and the curatorial team's role. Of course, Koizumi was in the spotlight as well. The other two artists were often overlooked. According to Hong, *The Subtle Triangle* was a failure from the government's point of view, and for all the governmental agencies involved, as they would rather focus on a future of cooperation and not on the past. However, for Hong personally, *The Subtle Triangle* was a success in that it opened a Pandora's box of difficult and uncomfortable conversations. It forced upon the general public meaningful dialogues about geopolitical tensions and histories that are always shifting. She maintains that it is essential to commission works based on current situations and from "next" generation artists, to keep up with these shifting dynamics.

The experience of *The Subtle Triangle* raises some important questions about the roles of curators, museum directors, and artists surrounding mediation of international relations. To what extent is opening up dialogue about controversial shared histories also re-opening wounds stemming from painful memories? When is it too soon to do so and when is it too late? How does an artistic and cultural platform that is funded by government resources reconcile its goals with that of its patrons? To what point should it attempt to do so, given that government resources are, ultimately, public money? Is censorship of artworks sometimes or ever appropriate?

## How Little You Know About Me

The 2018 *How Little You Know About Me* is an MMCA exhibition curated by Joowon Park and set to be a recurring project. Similar to *The Subtle Triangle*, this exhibition examines "Asia" as a multi-faceted amalgamation of concepts in flux. In his foreword statement, former director Bartomeu Marí writes:

"*How Little You Know About Me* inquires 'From what and how do we understand Asia?' and raises questions about numerous images that have been painted under the title of 'Asia.'"<sup>38</sup>

Park expands upon this introduction in her curatorial statement with the following questions: "Where is Asia?" and "What do we read Asia as?"<sup>39</sup> She references the Eurocentric and Orientalist narratives tied up with the concept of Asia, even with the Greek etymology of the word. (Indeed, all continents have European etymologies, a problematic issue in itself.)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Park Joowon et al., *How Little You Know About Me*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ferdinand Bada, "Where Did the Continents Get Their Names From?" *WorldAtlas*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/where-did-the-continents-get-their-names-from.html>.



41  
Park, *How Little You Know About Me*.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46  
Jia-Zhen Tsai, *We Are Bound to Meet*, Alternative Space Loop, 2019.

Like Hong Leeji, Park cites Kuan-Hsing Chen's *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* as a reference for her work, as well as Chien-Hung Huang's 2017 text *World Genealogy and the Asian Experience*. However, where *The Subtle Triangle* selected three artists representing South Korea, China, and Japan, Park departed from this narrow focus. *How Little You Know About Me* includes artists from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, as well as South Korea, Japan, and Mainland China.

The exhibition title is provocative, almost accusatory, a point Park is quick to address. She writes that "not knowing enough about each other can actually be a suggestion to take an interest in each other, and can lead to more conversations down the road."<sup>41</sup> She proposes that Asians and non-Asians move away from monolithic, reductive definitions of Asia, like the Asia-as-brand used in snappy tourism slogans. However, the purpose of this exhibition is not to propose a new definition. Rather, Park affirms the role of "the artist as a storyteller" and focuses on the personal by "recalling the personal experiences of each artist who is living inside [Asia]" and "concentrating on the inspirations exposed in personal encounters, experiences, history and artistic practices."<sup>42</sup>

The power of subjectivity versus objectivity is highlighted for a number of reasons. Park underlines the importance of recognizing one's relative perspective and its limitations. This in turn pertains to a redeeming of the individual, particularly one threatened by high-paced, increasingly technological economic systems divorced from "production activities in human territories."<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that *How Little You Know About Me* as a platform for sustained communication included "both 'study' and 'play' functions" with a diversity of programs like "day markets, lemon wine bar, cooking classes, schools, and lectures."<sup>44</sup> In doing so, it opens up a number of questions on the MMCA's possibilities "as a real interface of the Korean modern and contemporary culture with the rest of the world."<sup>45</sup>

### We Are Bound to Meet

The 2019 *We Are Bound to Meet* exhibition at Alternative Space Loop stands out in this list for a couple of reasons. First off, it is the only case study I was personally able to visit, which lent me unique insight in comparison to the others. More significantly, it is a collaborative effort between Taiwanese and South Korean artists spearheaded by Taiwanese curator Jia-Zhen Tsai. The exhibition is subtitled "Chapter One: Many wounded walk out of the monitor, they turn a blind eye and brush past me," named after "the short story 'Cartoon-Box City' of Taiwanese art critic Val Ling-Ching Chiang who passed away suddenly in 2015."<sup>46</sup> Tsai states:

"This chapter will exhibit works related to Japanese colonial history, an era that is now a chapter in our history textbooks, but we have not

been able to process the wounds and hurt cast from generation to generation."<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the other case studies, *We Are Bound to Meet* focuses directly on one Taiwanese and Korean shared historical experience: Japanese occupation. The two are quite distinct despite obvious similarities. Japan's occupation of Taiwan started earlier, in 1895 as opposed to 1910 in Korea. Both occupations ended with WWII in 1945, although Japan did not officially renounce rule over Taiwan until 1952. Taiwan had earlier been part of the Qing Dynasty and today, of course, is part of the Republic of China. Korea, on the other hand, had earlier been an autonomous region under the Joseon Dynasty and, despite being divided into two opposing nations after the Korean War, retained its autonomy.<sup>48</sup>

*We Are Bound to Meet* explores these contrasts and comparisons from the point of view of two former occupied territories, one of which remains so. It raises questions about how Japanese rule is viewed and represented in South Korea as opposed to in Taiwan. It also addresses how Japanese rule is remembered and compared to ROC rule in Taiwan. Was Japanese occupation as brutal in Taiwan as it was in Korea? Often, the consensus is that it wasn't, and despite the violence and death toll against the local and aboriginal Taiwanese population, "the older generation—and one has to be in one's 80s or older to have any real memory of the period—often speak of the Japanese occupation with equanimity, even nostalgia."<sup>49</sup> The author of this text, director of the University China Centre at the University of Oxford Rana Mitter, goes on to write:

"Compared with the suppression of the native Taiwanese population by the [Chinese] Nationalists (for instance in the notorious 2.28 Incident of 1947, which led to the mass killing of many of the island's indigenous intellectuals), Japanese rule seems quite benign."

The comparison seems an impossible one, of a lesser of two evils, yet it occupies a significant position in present-day international politics and diplomacy. This is evident in the outpouring of news articles generated whenever the subject of Japanese imperialism is brought up internationally. In 2015, when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave a speech commemorating the 70th anniversary of Japan's surrender, South Korean and Chinese media-spheres were ignited with criticisms over Abe's non-apology of Japanese occupation.<sup>50</sup> An article focusing on Taiwanese perceptions of the speech wrote:

"The people who lived through both [Japanese and ROC occupations] have a rosier memory of the past colonizer compared to the current colonizer, while people nowadays would rather not associate themselves with the current colonizer's own anti-Japanese sentiments."<sup>51</sup>

47 Ibid.

48  
Jeffrey Hays, "Japanese Occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945)," Facts and Details, June 2015, [http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Taiwan/sub5\\_1a/entry-3796.html](http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Taiwan/sub5_1a/entry-3796.html).

49  
Rana Mitter, "Judging Empires: Was Japanese Rule in Taiwan Benevolent?" *South China Morning Post*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2128067/judging-empires-was-japanese-rule-taiwan-benevolent>.

50  
Steve Denney, "Taiwan's Collective Memory of Japan: Around the Horn," *Sino-NK*, August 31, 2015, <https://sinonk.com/2015/08/31/collective-memory-of-japan-in-taiwan/>.

51 Ibid.

52  
Tsai, *We Are Bound to Meet*.

53 Ibid.

54  
"The 'Rover' Incident in Taiwan and the Making of US Marine Corps Small Wars Doctrine," Targeted Outrage, January 31, 2005, <http://targetedoutrage.blogspot.com/2005/01/rover-incident-in-taiwan-and-making-of.html>.

55  
Carlos A. Jáuregui, "Introduction," in *Canibalía: Canibalismo, Calibanismo, Antropofagia Cultural y Consumo En América Latina* (Iberoamericana, 2008).

This is a simplified answer that raises an interesting point. Mainland Chinese perceptions of Japan influence Taiwanese perceptions of Japan. Do Korean perceptions also influence Taiwanese perceptions? In *We Are Bound to Meet*, this is part of the conversation between the artists and the curators. In her curatorial statement, Tsai mentions two details that elevated the conversation between the Taiwanese and South Korean artists. One is a recognition of and attempt to disengage from Othering.

"The subject in this project is not the self (individual, personal) against the Other; but 'we': You are I, and I am also/conscious of you, this 'we,' refers to the people and events that have happened in a historical timeline, with all in the present shifting into the future."<sup>52</sup>

This is a significant point to make when attempting to bridge dialogue across the cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical divide between two countries. Another detail relates directly to Tsai's background as a schoolteacher in Taiwan. Textbooks are mentioned in the curatorial statement for this reason. Tsai is very conscious of how contemporary Taiwanese discourse on nationhood, political identity, and independence is shaped early on by education. History textbooks are a direct manifestation of this. As such, many of the artworks investigate education of colonial history by researching under-taught historical instances and figures that do not enter mainstream knowledge. Artist Fei-hao Chen's video-installation work, for example, focuses on an obscure American diplomat named Charles W. Le Gendre (1830–1899) "based in Xiamen, China, who was asked to intercede in events following the Rover Incident"<sup>53</sup> in Taiwan. The *Rover* Incident referred to is the "shipwreck of the US merchant ship 'Rover' on 13 March 1867, [after which] the survivors came ashore on the southeast coast of Taiwan, where they were set upon, murdered, and eaten by the local aborigines."<sup>54</sup> (Here it is worth noting that accusations of cannibalism have historically been leveled by colonizers against indigenous populations in order to characterize them as primate, subhuman, and in need of civilization. Spanish conquistadores made use of this rhetoric often to justify their violent conquest of indigenous Americans, the veracity of which is today difficult to prove or disprove.)<sup>55</sup> The shipwreck's survivors included Mercy Hunt, wife of the ship's captain and a central figure in Chen's work. He juxtaposed Mercy Hunt's murder at the hands of Taiwanese aborigines with Empress Myeongseong's assassination by Japanese agents. Le Gendre is tied up in both deaths. He was first an American consul to the Qing Dynasty during the *Rover* Incident, then advisor in foreign and military affairs to the Japanese Meiji government, and finally advisor to King Gojong of Korea during the Eulmi Incident.

The specificity of these historical incidents and figures allows for an in-depth exploration of Korea's and Taiwan's experiences of Japanese occupation. It is a didactic as well as artistic approach. It remains relevant and contemporary in its direct association to the public education issue. What histories do South Korean public schools teach and how? What histories do Taiwanese

public schools teach or what are they allowed to teach? What are the official narratives found not only in textbooks, but also in monuments, buildings, music, literature, and all forms of art? These are complex questions the exhibition raises. *We Are Bound to Meet* is testament to the potential latent in establishing artistic collaboration and research-backed dialogue between nations or regions that share colonial history.

## Paraguayan Case Studies

For the Paraguayan section of this comparative exchange I have selected three examples. The first one is the 2012 Residencia en Recorrido—Paraguay AAA, which was a coordinated by the following four art spaces: Casa 13 from Cordoba, Argentina; Centro de Arte Jardim Canada from Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Fundación de Arte Contemporáneo from Montevideo, Uruguay; and Planta Alta from Asunción, Paraguay. Four artists were selected (one from each country) to participate in a traveling artist-in-residence program held in Paraguay and housed, for the most part, in Planta Alta. The subject matter was specifically the Triple Alliance War (also known as the Paraguayan War, among other titles) and the objective was the following:

"To create a space of crossing of ideas and thoughts about the Paraguayan War, historical and economic approaches, and influences in the present day regional situation."<sup>56</sup>

The project was divided into four phases, three of which were devoted to research. During the first three weeks the artists participated in seminars and workshops; visited museums, institutions, and historical sites like battlegrounds; and held meetings.

"The selected artists will visit the scenes of the war chronologically, starting with the invasion from Ñeembucu until Cerro Corá. There will be talks, debates, visits, meetings, etc., surrounding the topic."<sup>57</sup>

The fourth week and final phase of the project was allotted to preparing an art exhibition in Planta Alta. Each artist had been asked to produce a travel blog, although this idea was discarded early on at the behest of one of the artists, Luvier Casali from Paraguay. The original intention was to publish and catalogue the travel blogs and to produce an accompanying documentary. This was also not realized due to financial shortcomings. Perhaps as a result, archival material and texts regarding the residency's four weeks are scarce and difficult to come by. There is no website dedicated to the Residencia en Recorrido and what I have been able to find is scattered across several websites (mostly social media sites). One of the project's organizers, Paraguayan artist Daniel Milessi, informed me that there was no curatorial statement or final publication. This absence of text-based sources makes it difficult to formulate a clear understanding of the curators' and organizers'

56  
Larissa Jiménez Planta Alta, "Artistas De Distintas Disciplinas," Facebook, December 13, 2011, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2816075450959&set=a.2375099906846&type=3&heater>.

57 Ibid.

motivations, references, conceptual frameworks, short-term and long-term goals, and final thoughts. The residency was also a one-time project.

The organizers faced several logistical problems, most of them financial in nature. The project's structure and format was kept open-ended and flexible and the artists were able to make some alterations. Instead of producing travel blogs and interviews for a documentary, the artists decided to create a "Belated Museum of the Paraguayan Sea" for the exhibition. This was an ironic museum designed to bring attention to the poor conditions of historical museums and related institutions in Paraguay. The museum's name itself is satirical, as Paraguay has been a landlocked nation since before its territorial losses to Brazil and Argentina post-Triple Alliance War.<sup>58</sup>

The residency's original proposal focused on an artistic and historical re-reading of the war. The Belated Museum of the Paraguayan Sea departed from this proposal and focused instead on a museological criticism. This deviation is significant. Was this outcome a better use of the resources and opportunities the residency laid at the artists' disposal?

The original premise of the residency is very promising. A natural continuation of the project would be to hold similar residencies in the other three countries. Artists would be able to visit museums and historical sites related to the Triple Alliance War in each location. A comparison of each experience would be valuable and lead to interesting questions. How does each country archive and preserve materials related to the war? How is the war remembered in each country? How do the museums and institutions create an "official narrative"? What are possible unofficial narratives? Critically, how do these narratives influence present-day international relations? A commentary on museums and archival institutions is probably inevitable in this type of project, but does not necessarily have to be center-stage.

The next two Paraguayan case studies are projects I have co-created in the past three years. It is difficult to maintain a levelheaded objectivity about one's own work; however, I will attempt to do so.

Temporal Festival de Arte is a biannual festival that I co-created with Brazilian artist Van Jesús in 2017. It is exclusively dedicated to action-based art in public spaces, involves up to 15 artists from Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil, and takes place in and around Asunción. In the first edition of 2017, the curatorial statement highlighted the importance of engaging artists from these three countries:

"Temporal proposes exposing the Paraguayan public to the methods, processes and creations of national and regional artists engaged in action-based art. We selected three countries that share a triple frontier, centuries of history of war and peace, and a

constant sociopolitical and cultural flux. The nucleus is Asunción, the most equidistant capital of the three countries and the most disadvantaged one in their international dynamics."<sup>59</sup>

The first edition received a majority of foreign artists. Among them, two Brazilian artists, Elilson Nascimento and Caio Gusmão Ferrer, created works about the Triple Alliance War. A third Brazilian artist, André Macedo, who resides in the triple frontier city of Foz do Iguaçu, created a work titled *Abraço/Abrazo* (Hug), in which he paid passersby for hugs in a busy market of Asunción. Significantly, the currency he used was the US dollar, which has a high exchange rate in Paraguay. His work addressed the economic disparity between Brazil and Paraguay and the issue of United States neo-imperialism in South America.

The interest of Brazilian and Argentinean artists in addressing the Triple Alliance War in Paraguayan art events has surprised me, as a curator involved in international projects. It has also given me pause, as the same eagerness has not been evident from Paraguayan artists. It raises the question of how the subject enters public consciousness and discourse in each country. How is it represented from the "victors'" point of view versus from the "losers'" point of view, and does it make sense to use these terms 150 years after the war? For Paraguayans, the subject is taught early on in schools and revisited continuously. The devastating death toll and material, economic, political, and cultural consequences suffered are generally taught in depth. Added to this is the human legacy—the stories passed down from one generation to the next. Paraguayan artists who approach the subject of the Triple Alliance War have a long and sizeable corpus of literature and art to build upon. On the other hand, for most Brazilian and Argentinean artists the subject is rather obscure. I would venture to say that it is almost exotic.

These concerns occupied my mind when I co-created *Confluencias de Arte* with Argentinean cultural agent Walter Tapponier that same year, in 2017. *Confluencias* takes place annually in Clorinda, a small Argentinean city bordering the Pilcomayo River in the poorest department of its nation. Across from the river is Asunción. The first two editions of 2017 and 2018 included artists from Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina. The last edition of 2019 has expanded its open call to include artists from all Latin America. *Confluencias* does not have a limitation on artistic genre and accepts anywhere from 15 to 20 artists.

Subjects we ask artists to address in *Confluencias* are international relations, power dynamics between neighboring countries, "border identity," and frontier porosity. The 2018 curatorial statement listed a number of topics:

"This encounter between artists, cultural practitioners, and citizens of Clorinda is dedicated to the topic of migration and trans-frontier and in-transit culture in the South American context. This also

60 Ibid.

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Operation Condor was a CIA-backed intelligence network that worked with these dictatorships to eliminate the "Red Threat" of socialists and communists during the Cold War.

includes the issue of frontiers, identities of migrant/nomadic/trans-frontier communities, diasporas, the modern "colono" figure, cultural assimilation, among others."<sup>60</sup>

This list was meant to re-focus the attention of artists away from the single subject of the Triple Alliance War and into more contemporary issues of international relations. Over the festivals' three years we have received site-specific installation and performance-based works that have delved into these complex issues with fresh language and metaphors. The Pilcomayo River, in particular, has attracted a lot of artists' efforts. The Amistad Bridge that connects Clorinda with Paraguay is only a few meters long, heavily circulated, and almost completely without customs control. Anyone can cross over from one side to the other without presenting identification, although it is officially illegal to do so. In 2017, two Brazilian and two Argentinean artists made use of this specific situation in their works. Morgana Mafra, a Brazilian artist, created *Lisêncio*, in which she transported a large papier-mâché orb through Clorinda and across the Pilcomayo River to the Paraguayan riverbed. The strangeness of the situation had the local customs police at a loss. They did not know whether to stop her, tax her, or intervene at all. When fellow Brazilian artist Marcela Antunes attempted her work *Libro de la Amistad* (Friendship Book) on the Amistad Bridge, customs police impeded her efforts because it involved photographing the area, citing unspecified security reasons. Antunes had set out to photograph the sky above the frontier, and invited other to do so to create her Friendship Book. María Paula Doberti and Déborah Kirnos, from Argentina, created an installation titled *Río Memoria* (River Memory) along the riverbed and in the river that dealt with the concept of shifting, fluid memories, histories, and narratives. This was in reference to the 20th-century military dictatorships of the "Operation Condor" countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Uruguay).<sup>61</sup> The contextual specificity of these works grounded them in relation to the area's history and present day.

A curatorial challenge is how to create platforms that encourage artists to delve into the historical past without losing connection to the present. That is, how to tie past events directly to current ones. What are smaller historical incidents that are sometimes overlooked along the way? The Triple Alliance War, like the Japanese occupation of Korea, is so massive that it distracts from other topics related to international relations. How do we work through these topics in fresh and novel ways? What are we adding to the already lengthy conversation on the matter?

### Conclusion

The metaphors and conceptual tools to handle topics of international relations in the South Korean case studies are clear and effective. *A Journal of the Plague Year* and *Muntadas: Asian Protocols* both worked with language

as metaphor. The first delved into medical language of disease and health. The second looked at the processes of translation and protocol. *We Are Bound to Meet*, *The Subtle Triangle*, and *How Little You Know About Me* worked with national histories as stories and narratives. The first focused on how these narratives enter the education system or are discarded. The latter two highlighted the importance of personal and subjective stories and how "Asia" as a concept is more than the sum of its parts. These are metaphors and conceptual tools that can be re-framed to adjust to a Paraguayan or South American context.

All three Paraguayan case studies share one shortcoming: a scarcity of text-based material. A curatorial text is vital but not enough. I was able to work with the South Korean case studies, despite not having visited most of them, thanks to their publication. Of course, this is a matter of funding as much as of effort on behalf of the curatorial or organizational teams.

A lack of funding is a generalized problem for cultural practitioners and artists in countries like Paraguay. Comparing South Korea to Paraguay in this respect is lopsided. South Korea invests a great deal more in arts and culture across all levels, from the government down to the individual. Not only is its economy many times bigger than Paraguay's, its population is 51 million compared to 7 million.<sup>62</sup> It simply has more artists, curators, and consumers of art. Added to this is the infrastructure to house museums, cultural centers, and institutions that are crucial for stimulating arts and culture.

In the Paraguayan contemporary art scene, a scarcity of text-based material means that a majority of artworks and art events are insufficiently documented. If they are documented and even written about, where are these documentations archived? There exists no widely used platform, online or offline, where archives and documentation can be accessed and shared in Paraguay. This in turn means that what little is written about local art is not being read. Therefore, there is a vacuum of critical reception. Paraguayan art and cultural agents are not writing, reading, or discussing Paraguayan art enough, and should not expect others to do so either. If curators, museum directors, and gallerists wish to "elevate" and internationalize Paraguayan art, the first step is to produce more text-based material to accompany artworks and events.

Glaring differences that proceed from obvious economic disparities between the two countries are important to point out. However, not all interesting points of comparison derive strictly from the issue of funding and financial stability. The histories between South Korea, Japan, and China stretch back much longer than the histories between Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. Korea has a long history of tributary relations with neighboring dynasties. Sino-centric tribute systems between, for example, the Joseon and Qing dynasties were very different from the colonial relationship between indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Spanish and Portuguese

62 "Countries in the World by Population (2019)," Worldometers, 2019, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>.



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Chun Hae-Jong, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations in the Ch'ing Period," in *The Chinese World Order* (Harvard University Press, 1968).

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Mary Gilmartin, "Colonialism/Imperialism," in *Key Concepts in Political Geography* (SAGE, 2009).

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Kang Shin-who, "Is Korea Homogeneous Country?," *The Korea Times*, December 22, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/01/113\\_36575.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/01/113_36575.html).

empires.<sup>63</sup> The history of colonization in the Americas has no parallel in Korean history, where submission to neighboring nations is more akin to imperialism. The two systems of colonization and imperialism should not be confused. According to Edward Said, imperialism involved "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory," while colonialism was enforced by "implanting of settlements on a distant territory."<sup>64</sup>

The demographic constitutions of both countries are related to the landed army issue of colonization versus imperialism. In Paraguay, as in all South American countries, the population is largely mestizo, that is, a mix between European, indigenous, and African ethnicities. In contrast stands the highly politicized concept of ethnic homogeneity in South Korea.

"Children are still taught at school that all Koreans are of the same ancestry. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has no immediate plans to completely erase the term 'homogeneous Korean people,' thought it has toned down the parts emphasizing it."<sup>65</sup>

These differences are evident in the two sets of case studies. In the Paraguayan case studies, dialogues between Paraguayan, Brazilian, and Argentinean artists and curators underlined the shared colonial histories and the idea of shared *mestizaje*. There are no clear ethnic lines drawn between the three countries. The same cannot be said for South Korea, Japan, and China.

Shared colonial histories and *mestizaje* in Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina can muddle conversations on present day neo-imperialism. Power dynamics between the three are distinct despite blurred ethnic lines. Still, any discourse on neo-imperialism must necessarily be a continuation on post-colonial discourses; the two are merged together. Likewise, in South Korea conversations on post-colonial history that reference the Japanese occupation must be held vis-à-vis conversations on imperialism and neo-imperialism. How each country balances or entangles these discussions can be illuminating for the other.

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