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Asia Looking Towards Asia

Seong Hee Kim^{1*}

¹ Kaywon Art University, South Korea

Correspondence: ganesakora@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Until now, different parts of Asia have neglected each other, each of them busy looking towards Europe. If the discourse of contemporary arts so far has been placed in 'the West in the eyes of Asia', Asia Culture Center (ACC) Theater has built a system where different parts of Asia today can look at each other and at the same time produce and share their works in order to form a contemporary arts discourse of their own. According to the standards set by Westerners in the modern era, the West was the center of the world, all the rest being the savages (tropiques). The idea of 'Asia' also functioned within the Western fantasy. Contemporary arts of Asia in our view are about us showing our own critical perspectives on the Asia we are living in now, instead of an Asia from the Western point of view. Our vision is to become a 'hub of Asian contemporary arts.' The hub of Asian contemporary arts we aspire to is the most interesting works of contemporary Asian artists produced, spread to the world, and in doing so, making the world look at Gwangju in return. Hence the big problem that we are facing is the complete lack of infrastructure for production in Asia and of a circulating system which enables each produced work to continue its life after 2 or 3 performances. To deal with this problem and realize our vision, we established 'Asia co-production system': institutions and organizations from all over the world co-support the process of creating Asian works, which will be presented in participating institutions and further linked to world tours. This foundation can solve both of Asia's chronic problems, production infrastructure and circulation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Asia Culture Centre (ACC) is a government-driven initiative that was planned and prepared over 10 years under a clear political motivation. The government's aim was to make ACC a window into Asia Culture facing the world. ACC is an international arts and cultural exchange organization. Having the context of artistically sublimating the significance of the May 18th Democratic Movement's human rights and peace as its point of departure, the ACC, which opened in 2015, is a government-funded establishment housed in the heart of Gwangju City. ACC is doubtless the most ambitious and momentous art project in Korean history in terms of budget, artistic vision, and spatial scale. ACC was established for the advancement of mutual understanding and cooperative growth with different Asian countries through exchange, education, research, and other efforts with regard to Asian culture. ACC consists of five organizations: International Exchange, Asia Culture Research Institute, Arts & Creative Technology Centre, ACC Theatre, and ACC Children.

ACC Theater is a part of the Asia Culture Center (ACC). Based in the newly constructed center, ACC Theater aspires to become the hub theater for the production, presentation, discussion, and international distribution of the most cutting-edge works in the context of the international performing arts scene. The mission given to ACC Theater by the government was to produce a hub of 'Asia contemporary art'. The strategy we chose to approach this goal was to create the most interesting works of contemporary Asian artists being produced, spread to the world, and in doing so, make the world look at ACC in return.

What is Asian art? What is contemporary arts? What does it mean to embrace these questions? Why do we need these questions? ACC Theater seeks to perform these questions. It will do so by inviting artists with unique visions and reshape the most urgent aesthetic and social concerns of our time. ACC Theater puts the artists right at the core of its engine, by providing them full professional support: financial, residential and artistic with which they can work through their own visions free from any political pressure or aesthetic bias. The most important role that ACC Theater assumes is to create time and space for artists to enrich themselves.

The outcomes of these endeavors are presented through two channels of presentation: the annual festival and seasonal programming. As a hub theater, ACC Theater is committed to cultivating a network of theaters, organizations, and art centers that share visions and endeavors for artistic innovation. In other words, ACC Theater plays an active role in creating a platform for international partnership. This means that ACC Theater animates each project to expand beyond the stage and beyond the city limits.

In doing so, ACC Theater endorses art beyond the boundaries of genres, disciplines, and politics. ACC Theater advocates differences and multitudes; it aims to inspire and to be inspired by diverse voices that reinvent contemporary art.

2. DISCUSSION

Asia is a region of dynamic changes overlapping with traditions. Asia is a way of thinking that challenges itself. It is a multidimensional concept that constantly calls for reworking, redefining, and revitalizing. Asia is a performative, organic framework for creativity.

Until now, different parts of Asia have neglected each other, each of them busy looking toward Europe. If the discourse of contemporary arts so far has been placed in 'the West in the eyes of Asia,' Contemporary arts of Asia in our view are about us showing our own critical perspectives on the Asia we are living in now. ACC Theatre built a system where different Asias today can look at each other and at the same time produce and share their works in order to form a contemporary arts discourse of their own.

According to the standards set by Westerners in the modern era, the West was the centre of the world, all the rest being the savages (tropiques). The idea of 'Asia' also functioned within the Western fantasy. Contemporary arts of Asia in our view are about us showing our own critical perspectives on the Asia we are living in now, instead of Asias from the Western point of view.

We first examined the condition of art production in Asia. The big problem was the complete lack of infrastructure for production in Asia and a circulating system which enables each produced work to continue its life after 2 or 3 performances. To deal with this problem and realize our vision, (we brought the production system already utilized in the European art scene and adapted it for the Asian context.) we established 'Asian co-production system': institutions and organizations from all over the world co-support the process of creating Asian works, which will be presented in participating institutions and further linked to world tours. This foundation can solve both Asia's chronic problems, production infrastructure and circulation.

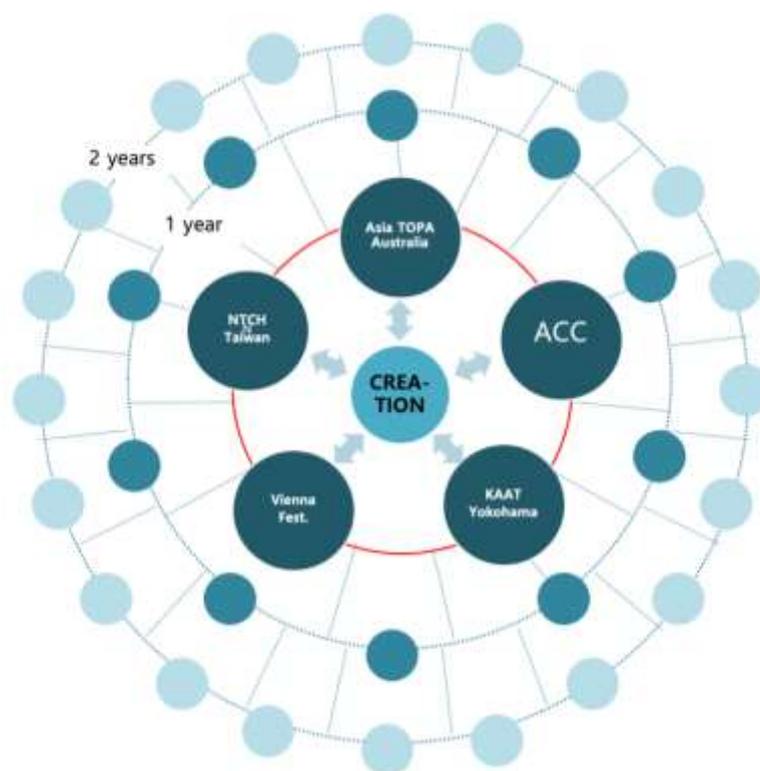


Figure 1. The Co-production System: Creation-circulations

2.1. Frame of ACC Program: Festival/Season

Our vision was realized through the perspectives of many different contemporary artists within the axes of a festival and seasonal program.

2.1.1. ACC outline program

- Festival: Sep.4-21, 2015 (3 weeks)
- Season: 2015-2016
 - Asian Window
 - Our Master
 - Community Window

The Opening Festival was a three-week celebration of multiplicity, hosting thirty-three international presentations, including premieres of twelve Asian productions/co-productions. The festival was a presentation of perspectives beyond the geographical and political boundaries of Asia to create an arena of true international communication of ideas.

What are some of the most vital means to discuss Asia today? What does “Asias” mean in individual practices? What is Asian contemporary art? ACC Theatre recognized the importance of these questions and summoned different voices articulating them. ACC Theatre supported artists with unique and stirring visions, artists who could evoke, respond to, and reshape the most urgent aesthetic and social concerns of Asia today. The festival was an organic attempt to pronounce these visions and directions.

While the Opening Festival set the standards of Asian contemporary arts and proposed the vision and direction of ACC Theatre, Asian artists drew the ancient future of Asia, re-wrote Asian history, and generated different perspectives - reflection, subversion, etc – on modernity. It was also important to invoke Asian modern arts such as butoh and Chinese revolutionary opera and to bring different Asias together to share them. Moreover, it drew the map of world contemporary arts by positioning works from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Europe as an equal mirror-image that reflected Asian perspectives. The position of Asia can be determined when it keeps being readjusted while continuously referring to the changes in the world. That is why it is crucial not to confine Asia to the ‘Asian region’ but to take a broader view in an international context.

2.1.2. ACC opening festival program

Artist	Work
Sakaguchi Kyohei	<i>ZERO Re:public</i>
Tsai Ming-liang	<i>The Monk from Tang Dynasty</i>
Tsai Ming-liang	<i>Stray Dogs in Gwangju</i>
Tsai Ming-liang	<i>It's a Dream</i>
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	<i>Cemetery of Splendour</i>
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	<i>Fever Room</i>
Mark Teh	<i>Baling</i>
Ricardo Bartis	<i>The Idiotic Machine</i>
Romeo Castellucci	<i>The Rite of Spring</i>
Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook	<i>Yummyyoo Shi</i>
Marlene Monteiro Freitas	<i>Of Ivory and Flesh</i>
Kim Jisun	<i>Climax of the Next Scene</i>
Kawaguchi Takao	<i>About Kazuo Ohno</i>
Chandralekha	<i>Sharira</i>
China National Peking Opera Company	<i>Legend of the Red Lantern</i>
Zhao Liang	<i>East Wind and West Wind + Black Face, White Face</i>
Zhao Liang	<i>Behemoth + Petition</i>
Brett Bailey	<i>Macbeth</i>
Brett Bailey	<i>Exhibit B</i>
Kim Sung Hwan / David Michael DiGregorio	<i>A Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name</i>
Yamashita Zan	<i>Daikoushin</i>
Raya Martin	<i>How He Died is Controversial</i>
Adachi Masao	<i>Artist of Fasting</i>
Su Wen-chi	<i>Off the Map</i>
Azade Shahmiri	<i>Damascus</i>
Talgat Batalov	<i>Uzbek</i>
Lee Leenam / Seo Hyun-suk	<i>Lee Leenam: Second Edition</i>
Wael Shawky	<i>Cabaret Crusades</i>
Ho Tzu Nyen	<i>Ten Thousand Tigers</i>
Okada Toshiki	<i>God Bless Baseball</i>
Konstantin Bogomolov	<i>An Ideal Husband</i>
Abbas Kiarostami	<i>Looking at Ta'ziyè (The Spectators)</i>
Claude Régy	<i>Interior</i>
Tim Etchells	<i>That Night Follows Day</i>

Table 1. Program List of the ACC Opening Festival

The second frame of the program was the Seasonal Program. It consisted of 'Asia Window' and 'Our Masters'.

Asia Windows
Helly Minarti
You Mi
Tarek Abou El Fetouh
Raya Martin
Jang Young-gyu

Table 2. Program List of Asia Windows

Asia Window focused on capturing Asia's today and bringing it into discourse through the perspectives of 5 curators from different parts of Asia. Five curators exchanged their viewpoints on Asia today. Through multi-layered platforms that included performance, exhibition, symposium, and publication, they proposed issues that they considered to be the most vibrant ones in today's Asian arts as well as the means to deal with them. The process of weaving different ideas into a comprehensive dialogue in one arena was the means of forming a map of contemporary issues. This was a collective effort to devise new Asian ways to write Asian histories. Through the acts of mutual looking, Asian voices were the active subjects of history-writing, rather than being subject to outside perspectives.

Our Masters
Philip Glass/Robert Wilson
Tim Etchells
Christoph Marthaler
Hijkata Tatsumi
William Kentridge

Table 3. Program List of Our Masters

On the other hand, Our Masters aimed to share the moments of transformation which had turned into the biggest influences in 20th century performing arts history. ACC Theater invited Frie Leysen, a curator who had made far-reaching contributions to the internationalization of the twentieth and twenty-first century to program Our Masters. She had been a faithful advocate of the visions beyond aesthetic norms and beyond the European hegemony in the arts. Frie Leysen presented some of her own masters during the season, a subjective view on the recent history of the performing arts.

2.2. Outcome

We devised our vision and built a co-production system which materialized it. The Opening Festival and Seasonal Program were put together based on this system, under which the total of 62 works were presented. Out of these, 21 works from Asia were produced with our co-production system. They have been touring more than 100 major venues and festivals in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Americas and Oceania, sharing Asian artists' visions with the world. Following is a table of the tours achieved by the ACC productions, as of December 2013.

ACC Theater Program List

❖ Production & Co-Production
 ⚡ Re-Production

All Programs: 63
 Production & Co-Production: 36
 Re-Production: 2

Opening Festival		
Sakaguchi Kyohei	ZERO re:public	❖
Tsai Ming-Liang	The Monk from Tang Dynasty	❖
	Stray Dogs in Gwangju	❖
	It's a Dream	
Apichatpong Weerasethakul	Cemetery of Splendour	❖
	Fever Room	❖
Mark Teh	Baling	❖
Ricardo Bartís	La Máquina Idiota	
Romeo Castellucci	The Rite of Spring	
Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook	Yummayoo shi	❖
Marlene Monteiro Freitas	of ivory and flesh—statues also suffer	
Kim Jisun	Climax of the next Scene	❖
Kawaguchi Takao	About Kazuo Ohno	❖
Chandralekha	Sharira	⚡
China National Peking Opera Company	Legend of the Red Lantern	
Zhao Liang	Zhao Liang Project(Exhibition)	❖
	—East Wind and West Wind	
	—Black Face, White Face	
	Zhao Liang Project(Film)	
	—Behemoth	
	—Petition	
Brett Bailey	Macbeth	
	Exhibit B	
Sung Hwan Kim / David Michael DiGregorio	A Woman Whose Head Came Out Before Her Name[피나는 노력으로 한]	❖
Yamashita Zan	A Grand March	⚡
Raya Martin	How He Died is Controversial	❖
Adachi Masao	Artist of Fasting	❖
Su Wen-chi	Off the Map	
Azade Shahmiri	Damascus	
Talgat Batalov	Uzbek	
Lee Leenam, Seo Hyun-suk	Lee Leenam: Second Edition	❖
Wael Shawky	Cabaret Crusades	
Ho Tzu Nyen	Ten Thousand Tigers	❖
Okada Toshiki	God Bless Baseball	❖
Konstantin Bogomolov	An Ideal Husband. A Comedy	
Abbas Kiarostami	The Spectators	
Claude Régy	Interior	
Tim Etchells	That Night Follows Day	❖

Table 4. Outcome of the ACC Theater Program - Opening Festival

Season Program		
Our Masters		
Philip Glass / Robert Wilson	Einstein on the Beach, An Opera in Four Acts	
Tim Etchells	Dirty Work	
	The Last Adventures	
	Neon	
	Empty Stage	
Christoph Marthaler	Tessa Blomstedt will not surrender	
Hijikata Tatsumi	Hijikata Tatsumi-glossolalia	❖
William Kentridge	The Return of Ulysse	
	More Sweetly Play the Dance	
Asia Windows		
Helly Minarti	Gaze. Projection. Myth	❖
Tarek Abou El Fetouh	Time is out of joint	❖
You Mi	Transgression and Syncretism	❖
Raya Martin / Antoine Thirion	UNdocumenta	❖
Jang Young-gyu	Vanishing Voices	❖
Community Windows		
ART WAY SUM	Forest of Sound	❖
The Black Chestnut	It's not raining, but we have an umbrella	❖
Youth Culture Hub	Homo quarens -Paper Q-	❖
Filmage	The Mad Man	❖
Community Performativity / Pre-Production		
Anna Rispoli	I Really Would Like to Come Back Home	❖
Eun Young Jung	Le Nouveau Monde Amoureux	❖
Minouk Lim	Navigation ID - From X to A	❖
Rimini Protokoll	100% Gwangju	❖
Ahn Eun-Me	Three Questions on Death	❖
Mammalian Diving Reflex	These are the People in Your Neighbourhood	❖
L'Encyclopédie de la parole / Joris Lacoste	Suite n°2	❖
Fernando Rubio	Everything By My Side	❖
Tao Ye	8	❖

Table 5. Outcome of the ACC Theater Program - Season Program

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Challenge for Asia Network

Korea

- Limitations of political projects: the mission of the institution expires every time the government regime changes
- Lack of a long-term supporting system
- Difficult to overcome a nationalistic idea that only artists of the country's nationality can be funded

Asia

- There are too few organizations/festivals that operate on a co-production basis
- Difficulty in sharing projects because of big gaps in forms and directions of programs
- There is more emphasis on managerial positions rather than curatorial, leading to the lack of network between professional curators

International

- Right-wing shift in European cultural context, leading to European centralism from internationalism, reduced number of European partners

3.2 Towards Asia Connections

- It is urgent to nurture professional curators
- To share forms, attitude, discourses on contemporary art
- More active sharing of artists and projects
- Each Asian country needs to establish organizations/festivals that can act as a platform for contemporary art
- These organizations must collaborate in discovering independent Asian artists and participate in his/her production/circulation of new creations
- Asia must look to each other, not only producing artworks but also relevant discourses

4. REFLECTIONS

Now what is needed for ACC Theater is 'time.' It has no meaning to change the vision and systems all the time out of impatience, for an organization's identity is formed when one vision and one promise continue for more than 10 years.

Korea has generated a significant vision of 'hub of Asian culture' and made a promise to the world. It should not be forgotten that this place is a hub not of politics, economics or industry, but of culture. It should protect the sacred place of culture from political power and the economy rules. It should exist for Asian artists and audiences. It should be a place where artists from Asia can freely express their critical perspectives and voices about the world, share them with societies, and play their parts in changing them.

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