

**Feminism in Transit/ion, Elsewhere**  
**(Women Artists in the Contemporary Visual Arts of China, Korea, Philippines)**  
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**ABSTRACT**

Framed by Griselda Pollock's (via Teresa de Lauretis) notion of an "elsewhere," this report presents the outlines of a developing feminist frame, as well as some of the most vital concerns that emerged from my ongoing study of women artists in Asia, the most recent of which was conducted from September to November, 2002 in Seoul, South Korea; and from December 2002 to May 2003 in Beijing, Gouangzhou, Shanghai and Hangzhou, People's Republic of China. Focusing on my most recent field work in China and Korea, this report also suggests some agenda for future research.

As in previous papers on Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, this essay constitutes a building block and starting point for the ultimate goal of a continuing project: the generation of new purposes for inquiry and the articulation of alternative feminist theoretical models for interpreting works and retelling histories, not only in the paternal disciplines like art history, but also in feminist theory and practice.

**Negotiating Art History in 'Asia': The Feminist 'Elsewhere'**

Let me begin my paper by citing a passage in a paper I wrote in March 2003 for a symposium of women artists and art historians in Taiwan. I never made it to this symposium because it never happened, as it was overtaken by the SARS outbreak. However, the anthology of essays written for the symposium is said to be forthcoming, and this is how I introduced my essay:

"I write this report in Beijing, amidst harrowing news of war that is being inflicted on a sovereign nation by an arrogant superpower. As my heart bleeds for the women, children and the aging of Iraq, I am at the same time, saddened and alarmed by the news that Filipino overseas workers in Hong Kong are being infected by a mysterious virus from the mainland, and it is reported that at least one has died from it. (We know of course, that the Filipina who died of the disease, contracted it in Canada) As I worry about the safety of our loved ones back home, and that of my own family here in this room of my own in a concrete box I temporarily call "home," I feel immobilized by my own helplessness as a puny human within a space I can only describe as an "elsewhere." Elsewhere is a term I appropriate from Teresa de Lauretis' conception - via Griselda Pollock's use of the term (1996) - of a space-off or blind spot of discourse and its representation. As I hope to show in the following account, I find the concept useful, since the opposing notions of center and periphery, margin and mainstream are to my mind, no longer competent to describe our status as women in a rapidly changing Asia, much less account for the complexities of such terms as "women artists" and "women's art." I believe we are neither at the center nor periphery, neither inside nor outside the margins; instead, we and our "feminine" selves are "complexly part of the fabric of historical discourses, institutions and practices." (Pollock 1996, 308). As such, our femininity, which I use, not as essence, but as a historically-situated and lived position, is a site of contestation, resistance, cooptation and containment."

I start with this quote, not only to introduce the notion of an elsewhere, an important concept that frames the preliminary categories I will discuss in this paper, but also to map out an ongoing project that spans a wide and diverse geographic area. Covering the period 1996 to the present, this area includes Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and more recently, in 2002 to early 2003, South Korea and the People's Republic of China, where I conducted research on women artists as an Asia Scholarship Foundation fellow. While I cannot present an exhaustive survey in this paper, allow me to present a few examples that will show how women artists in the visual arts in "Asia" straddle a very grey area between empowerment and disempowerment; center and periphery; resistance and subjection; and between subversion and cooptation. Such an "in-between" condition can be described as an **elsewhere**, a *politically and historically generated* space-off from which feminist theorists and writers can view dominant cultural discourses and practices, whether traditional or oppositional.

The categories that I will suggest emerges out of a feminism-in-transit and transition, formed and nurtured between destinations, elsewhere. To borrow another phrase, my feminism is "under construction," one which exists in constant tension with the paternal discipline of art history, where I originate, but one that also partakes of its categories. As I have discussed more fully elsewhere, this discipline is at a very young stage of development in Asia, and as it is practiced by dominant practitioners, it is one that is still informed by the outdated notion of art as artifice (formalist, connoisseurial) and as reflection (mimesis). To compound the problem, feminist art history is practically non-existent in the Philippines and Asia, and has a very limited output, especially when compared to the other disciplines like literature, theater, film and cultural studies (Datuin 2001 and 2002).

### **Preliminary Categories**

It is within these personal, disciplinal and discursive contexts that I am now presenting some of the preliminary categories that emerged from my journeys. These categories intimate the contours, not only of a developing art historical, historiographic and theoretical model, but also the methodological concepts that framed my field works. They are the following:

- Empowerment
- Creative engagement
- Personal, social and artistic conflicts
- Locality
- Body as Site of Critical and Aesthetic Revision
- Understanding Contemporary Art

These categories are highly interrelated and can even be conflated, but I am discussing them separately for convenience. Let me count the ways:

**1. Empowerment** refers to the artists' capacity to transcend and transform the limits and advantages of their social and artistic environment, and their contexts of production, thus prefiguring new images and identities, and alternative ways and spaces for making and disseminating art.

A striking example in this category is the Kasibulan, a group of cultural workers and women artists in the arts (visual arts, dance, literature, theater, etcetera) formed out of a series of consultations with women in various professions in 1987. Its founding members include a designer and maker of handcrafted leather bags (Ida Bugayong), a sculptor (Julie Lluch), and three painters (Brenda Fajardo, Imelda Cajipe-Endaya and Ana Fer). They were later joined by terracotta artist Baidy Mendoza.

Since its founding, Kasibulan has nurtured and continues to nurture a significant group of women artists through exhibitions, forums and other activities which not only challenged women's negative and stereotyped images but also questioned the very parameters of art and artistry as they are defined in mainstream culture. In its many projects, the Kasibulan linked up with women in the communities (such as artisans in Paete), with women in non-art sectors (such as Filipina migrant workers), and women in other disciplines such as medicine, law, and labor.

But aside from these important contributions to the redefinition of art and artistic practice, the founding of Kasibulan, along with other all-women groups Kalayaan, Makibaka, Gabriela, Women in Media Now, among others is – to my reckoning - a watershed for feminist history. The founding of Kasibulan in particular, marks the first time women artists consciously decided to carve their own niche in a terrain where the key players are men. As I have discussed in my book (Datuin 2002), the turning points for women artists – from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 50s and 60s, are hinged on their entry into movements and institutions initiated by men. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a significant turning point was the entry of Pelagia Mendoza to the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, the first formal colonial art school, which was later to become the UP School of Fine Arts, now the College of Fine Arts. The next significant turning point was the modernist revolt led by Victorio Edades, and the formation of a group called the 13 Moderns. Anita Magsaysay Ho was the lone female member. When Kasibulan was founded, women artists ceased to be mere auxiliaries and token representations to movements (e.g. 13 moderns, the conceptual art movement, social realist or protest art) and mixed-gender groups (such as Art Association of the Philippines, ironically founded by a woman, Purita Kalaw Ledesma). It was only when Kasibulan was formed that women were able to tell their own stories in their own voice and their own terms, and forge their own community in a space where the conscious stirrings and debates on feminist practice and theory emerged and took place.

A similar turning point is apparent in the formation of Yeo Mi Yoon, a group of Korean women artists who organized themselves initially, as part of a broader social realist movement in the 1980s (Minjoong movement), then later as a women's group that stands on its own, with its own set of feminist and/or feminine agenda. At that time, another group, Pyo-hun came together to “simply survive as women artists (Kim Hong Hee 2000).” Although Pyo-hun pioneers later evolved into Korea's first feminist artists, “their feminist consciousness was purely a feminine expression with an interest in feminist materials.” (Kim Hong Hee 2000). While Pyo-hun was more “tentatively” feminist, Yeo Mi Yoon was more directly socially conscious and geared towards class

and labor issues. But while they have different ideologies, both groups were formed as a response to the modernist abstract movement prevalent in Korea during that period.

In the 90s, amidst pluralism and decentralism, IPGIM, a group of young feminist artists, emerged, partly partaking of the legacies of the first generation feminists (at least one IPGIM founder originally belonged to Yeo Mi Yoon), but mostly charting an entirely different direction more geared towards postmodernist artistic strategies and practices. While these feminist groups remain peripheral to the male-centered mainstream, they nonetheless point to new possibilities of making art grounded on a sense of community and solidarity.

A similar direction is evident in China's artists, although there are no organized women's groups similar to the Korean and Philippine example. While I did "discover" in a roundabout way, that a woman's group called "Siren" does exist in China, it is currently inactive or most probably defunct, and its membership of four women who came together largely because of friendship has not expanded, even during its more active periods. The four women who comprised the group are now either out of China or are busy with their own individual career paths.

Nonetheless, in the absence of a more distinct feminist grouping, Chinese women artists are making a "bid for empowerment," (Lee 2003) each in their own ways: either overtly and indirectly through works that are not manifestly feminist, but can be re-interpreted according to a feminist frame; or directly through confrontational works, mostly through performance pieces using the nude female body. The present generation, mostly those born in the 60s and 70s, are more predisposed to employ the second strategy. They are less constrained by state ideology and are more likely to launch their resistance from a more empowered position. Less burdened by national upheavals such as the Cultural Revolution, which brought so much pain to the generation before them, and more exposed to international cultural developments, they employ a wide range of styles and strategies that boldly compel the audience to confront feminist issues.

**2. Creative Engagement** refers to the artist's agency and capacity to re-tool their legacies. Within this frame, the study hopes to cast in high relief the ways by which the present generation of women artists reinvest the technology and signifying systems of art with the power to prefigure new modes and conditions of seeing, feeling, and thinking.

An example is Chinese artist Xiong Wen Yun, who took her work out of the gallery with *Rainbow Road* (1999-2001), a convoy of 110 trucks covered with rainbow colored tarpaulins, traversing the environmentally-depleted and dangerous route from Sichuan to Tibet, the last stop of which was very close to the peak of Mt. Everest. The work not only called attention to environmental degradation of an important water resource that supplies, not only China but Vietnam, Thailand and the Mekong River Delta; it also put forward some possible routes for the role of artist in everyday life. From a solitary figure working in the studio, Xiong took the role of mediator, organizer, fund-raiser and connector, having to source private sector funding, obtain government permission, solicit local official participation, provide information to the media, coordinate the team of truck

drivers, owners and booth administrators. As Xiong aptly puts it: “It’s not the artist working alone anymore, but functioning as a part of a bigger team.” (in Lee 2003, 21).

While bringing works out of the gallery and working with the community is one of the standard practices among Chinese artists, Xiong’s contribution is significant since it pointed to “other” ways of negotiating with official and popular culture, in a way that is not confrontational, but no less effective.

**3. Personal, Social and Artistic Conflicts** refers to the way the artists negotiate their interpersonal, internal and social conflicts through and in their art, the institutions of the art world and everyday life. In the visual arts, women locate themselves within their studio and their homes, a highly charged field which necessarily extends from home to the contending power structures and political economic pressures of the art world (museums, galleries, the academe, the state). Because the artists’ spaces and works are contiguous with the art world and the “world,” they are not autonomous “geniuses” laboring away in their studios, classrooms and “rooms of their own,” independent of social pressures and political economic constraints. Instead, they are thinking, feeling and acting agents who are context-driven *and* context-generating.

This concept is painfully exemplified in an incident involving a work *A-bang-gung* (2000), by IPGIM, a new-generation feminist Korean artist group. Through installations and performances centered on women’s everyday life such as cooking, sewing, childbirth, and so on, *A-bang-gung* or “beautiful and great uterus” took place in a public park in front of Jongmyo, the shrine of royal ancestors of the Jeonju Lee clan. Premised on bringing art into everyday life through interaction, communication and sharing, the event, which was intended to be low-key and peaceful, unintentionally offended the sensibilities of a group of patriarchs who felt that the vaginal figures, the hanging skirts, among others, disrespected the memory of royal ancestors enshrined nearby. What began as a silent visual feminist event turned into a violent incident when the works were torn down and the exhibition forcibly closed by the Clan Council of Jeonju Lee Families, a powerful and one of the strongest such organizations in Korea, and the Coalition to Protect Traditional Families. A month later, on October 20, 2000, a festival was held organized by women’s groups who rallied together to protest the violation of artists’ rights and freedom of expression. Initially low profile, IPGIM and the occupation project became a media sensation, and for several years was, and still is mired in a legal battle with perpetrators of the violence.

**4. Locality**, refers not simply to “local color,” “contemporary chinoiserie,” or “exotica” but a “rootedness in a particular historical moment and at the same time a mobility facilitated by various modes of exchange and practices” (Flores 2001, 2) like trade and commerce, information technologies, tourism, national and international artistic exchanges, migrations of peoples, and so on. This concept locks horns with the tension between legacies and “influences,” in the case coming largely from Europe, America, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, among others, on one hand; and the artist’s active negotiation of local traditions, on the other. This tension recognizes the artists’ ability and will to make the best of what their legacies (modernism, postmodernism, Chinese and

Korean traditional art, and so on) can offer and proceed to re-tool them, according to their contexts, their needs and individual creative language.

In the two countries, but especially in China, the polarities between the traditional and the contemporary; national/"eastern" and international/"western" are very pronounced. Caught between these seemingly opposite poles (I maintain that these poles are not mutually exclusive, but I reserve my arguments in another essay), some artists either depict the push and pull of these elements in their works, often in awkward, cliched and reductive ways; or break away from the "traditional" entirely and produce works that singularly partake of the international (read: "western") vocabularies, in order to earn the status of "contemporary." Critics work within this frame, and more often than not, they readily dismiss artists hewing more closely to the idioms of Chinese traditional painting. Those who delve in ink painting, decorative portraits, landscapes and still life are categorized as "traditional." Some critics and curators say these artists are not worth my time, because they are not "contemporary," or because they are "commercial" and proceed to recommend those who are working on more cutting edge strategies, and media. However, as I will argue and demonstrate more fully in another paper devoted to this issue, the dichotomy between tradition and contemporary is problematic since, as I found out in my studio visits in both countries, some of those who are working on so-called contemporary mediums are actually "conservative" even downright reactionary in their visions; while those who are working on denigrated traditions actually offer fresh directions in enriching the vocabulary of contemporary art. This is exemplified in the works of Korean artist Kim You-Soon, who works in the unique medium of mother-of-pearl; in Korean abstract artists Kyong Lee and Suk Ran-Hi, and Chinese artists Yang Fan, Yu Hong, Pan Ying, Chen Xi, Shen Ling and Liu Liping, who persist in expressing themselves through painting. In Korea, I came across a very interesting professor who works in traditional Korean embroidery, a medium closely associated with women's specific form of creativity.

The fact that the dichotomy between contemporary and traditional exists however, points to the anxiety of being considered an exotica. While there are artists who play up their exoticism to cater to Western curators "shopping" for art with a Chinese face, there are artists, who continually defy this mind-set by consciously removing most – if not all - references to their "Chineseness."

**5. Body as Site of Critical and Aesthetic Re-vision**, refers to the ways by which women artists return the gaze of the patriarchal vision, not only by exercising the power to define and re/represent themselves, but also by defining the contours of an emerging feminist aesthetic, grounded on a *matrixial space* (Pollock 1996a) of unities, instead of oppositions between mind and body, self and other, nature and culture, margin and periphery. Construed and interpreted within this category, we can redefine the "aesthetic" not as a function of pure form or pure gaze (*pace* Bourdieu), which the critic supposedly perceives and relentlessly inspects for its own sake. Instead, the aesthetic is all about *encounter*, affect, gesture, and movement. Form embodies not just style, but also intersubjective and interpersonal (as opposed to solitary) testimonies of struggle, pain, gains and triumphs. This is particularly salient for the women artists under study, because

a considerable number of them are employing the non-wall bound, highly interactive and body-centered media of performance, installation and multi-media – mediums that go beyond the four walls of the museum and studio and has the potential for intersubjectivity and connection .

As can be seen in the examples cited above, these categories are highly interrelated and such interrelation is evident in the way Chinese and Korean artists of the 90s empowered themselves by benefiting from the economic reforms and influx of advanced information technologies that began in the 1970s, the decade when most of them were born. Such conditions provided space for art experimentation and self-expression in ways which were not possible for the previous generations. China's recent entry into the global economy for example, encouraged the broadening and opening up of opportunities for women to participate more actively in the national and international contemporary art scenes. However, as Huangfu observes "the power base for access to the globalized market has remained firmly in the hands of Western tastemakers. Successful Asian artists invariably measure themselves in relation to their participation in the structure." (Huangfu 2000) In addition, Chinese and Korean women artists have to contend, not only with the pressures of the global market, but also their position within traditional cultures, which are themselves undergoing rapid changes that are often traumatic.

One of the most striking examples of this conflict is Yang Fan, an artist from Gouangzhou, 24 hours away by train from Beijing, and has the unfortunate reputation of being the origin of the SARS virus. Her works are all about women painted in striking and stark lines and color. Culled from images of glamour magazines and based on actual women from the artist's life, these poster girls are surrounded by modern conveniences, yet their eyes hint at disquietude. Through Lora, her interpreter, Yang Fan reveals that she was born in a fishing village very close to cosmopolitan and very modern Hong Kong. Like so many women of her generation, she was brought up and educated with very traditional values: "you have to be an obedient child, a good wife who takes care of her husband and children. But then, everything is changing due to the open door policy. In China, there are megacities – Beijing, Gouangzhou, Shanghai – and people are influenced by famous brands, movies, TV, and are very materialistic. A lot of modern things are coming in, and you want to be modern, too, but inside you have traditional value." In her paintings, which imitate the style of commercial posters, Yang Fan wants to "express this kind of conflict, between inside and outside." As Lora states: "She tried not to be so traditional; she is concerned about women's change, we have to adjust ourselves to different values, ideas and she would like to express this kind of thinking in her painting. In her paintings, these pretty girls are very modern, with very nice makeup, but inside the values do not catch up. Their eyes are empty, and confused about what to do as women."

**6. Understanding contemporary art.** The points stated above demonstrate the need to seriously engage with the complexities of Asian contemporary art. Such engagement necessitates an in-depth awareness of some of the vital concerns that emerged from this ongoing study. Some of them are as follows:

A. The notion of “alternative.” In my research, I often found it very useful to work with “alternative” spaces such as Ssamzie Space in Seoul; Seniwati Art Gallery for Women in Bali; Cemeti Gallery in Yogyakarta, Shangrilart (formerly Mustard Seed Garden), the recently-established Beijing Tokyo Art Project, Courtyard and Red Gate Gallery in Beijing; ShangArt in Shanghai; the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), University of the Philippines Vargas Museum, Big Sky Mind and Surrounded by Water in Manila; Mariyah Art Gallery and Kamarikutan Gallery in Dumaguete and Palawan, Philippines. I listed CCP among this list of “alternatives” even if it is a state-ran institution haunted by the memories of the repressive Marcos regime. In the 70s, the CCP was an important component of Marcos’ efforts to bolster his dispensation’s claim to legitimacy, progress and national identity. At the same time, it was within its cavernous halls, where the plot against “traditional” art practice was hatched by a group of conceptual artists led by no less than its museum curators. To this day, the CCP remains as a negotiated space of competing discourses, and for cementing the uneasy alliance between museum/gallery, curator and artist.

These spaces’ varying degrees and nature of “alternativeness” begs the question: In what context is a space alternative? What is the relationship of alternative spaces to young artists, and women artists in particular? When alternative spaces support new and emerging artists, are these artists automatically “alternative” or do they merely replicate the oppressive values of the status quo? What then constitutes the alternative?

B. the notion of “postmodern/postcolonial.” Like the terms “feminist,” and “alternative,” postcoloniality and postmodernity are extremely problematic and slippery terms, whose definitions are very much contested (Loomba 2001). Thus, we have to reckon, not only with how the concepts are mediated locally, but also how they mutate according to local imperatives. Although artists and scholars in Asia (and this is particularly true for Korea and China) have access to the most cutting edge postmodern and postcolonial theories, they are also divided as to its interpretation, actual application and usage.

C. the notion of “contemporary.” For some curators and artists I talked to in Seoul for example, the Contemporary Art Museum of Korea is not really “contemporary” but “modernist,” because its collections and exhibitions focus largely on male masters, whose vocabulary derive largely from the academic modernisms of abstract expressionism, minimalism, and so on. Few – if any - of the younger, more “contemporary” artists ever get exhibited there, and this is why Ssamzie Space and other “alternative” spaces exist, to fill in this gap.

In China, as I mentioned earlier, “contemporary” is synonymous with cutting edge media, thus consigning to the “traditional” works that partake of long-standing artistic practices and vocabularies.

What exactly is “contemporary” and what issues are implicated in the persistent dichotomy between traditional and contemporary?

This question indicates that despite the seeming vitality and vibrancy of the contemporary art scene, especially in Korea and China, there is a dearth of systematic and informed critical debates and discussions on the concepts and definitions of “contemporary.”

D. the notion of “women’s art” and “women’s groups”. As I stated earlier, women artists are located in an elsewhere, a site of resistance that is also vulnerable to co-optation by the reading and writing conventions of the patriarchal optic. Most of the Korean and Chinese women I have encountered so far are already “established” and are now stellar names in the global and local art firmaments. When they gain entry into a male dominated territory, they may imagine themselves free, if not from being women, then from being seen and defined exclusively in those terms; thus they resist the term “woman artist” and in the case of Chinese artists, are even wary of coming together in a group exclusively for women, lest they be designated as “merely” women. In our interviews, Chinese feminist art critic Liao Wen also attributed this reluctance to bond together in a formal support group to the women’s very personal struggles, and the apprehension that their individual expression – which they are now enjoying in a period of relative freedom – may be subsumed by their identification with the group.

In the context of equal rights and equal re/presentation in the canon, we may consider some women “successful,” and therefore have little or no need for support system from fellow women. However, in the pursuit of equal access, there is danger of being assimilated and co-opted into the intact canon of “geniuses,” or “superstars” both as a token examples of “essential” female and feminine creativity, and as cipher for racial essence, as in for instance, “Asian,” “Filipino,” “folk,” “native,” or in the case of Chinese artists, male or female, as contemporary “Chinoiserie.”

E. the notion of “Asia.” The last point brings us to the ever-present question of identity and the problematic terms “Asia,” “Chineseness,” among others. Much has been written about this issue, and if there is one insight I can derive from these debates, it is that our job description as responsible scholars, curators, critics and students of culture is to unpack the discourses of what might be termed “Asia” or “Asian” and undo some of the tidying that nationalist and other grand narratives have done. (Lee Weng Choy 2000) As the challenges of my field work demonstrate, “geographical nearness is by no means proof of cultural kinship,” as Singaporean critic Lee Weng Choy puts it (2000). As scholars, we must then be wary of hyping our Asianness and must continuously resist being coopted into the touristic master narratives of regional and diplomatic harmony.

### **Agenda for Future Research**

- 1) Tracing the genealogy of women artists is a very important research agenda. In Korea, the benchmark period is the 1980s, but I know from sources at EWHA that there are scholars who wrote about women artists (including women from dance, literature and related arts) from as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but this is inaccessible to me because the dissertations and essays were written in Korean, the translation of which require much time and other resources. Scholars like Kim Hong Hee also admitted that her own genealogy starts with the present day (1980s), largely because

going through the archival records requires knowledge of a very different, very specialized and very antiquated scholarly Korean. In China, the first woman artists are slowly being excavated, going all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century court painter Lady Liu (Liu and Roth 1996). In another account (Jia 1998), Guo Shuo, the sister of the emperor Sun (exact date not given, but presumably pre-20<sup>th</sup> century) is said to be earliest documented painter in official history books of the Han and Qing periods. Little is known about these women and there are several gaps in the historical records. As I argued more fully in my book and dissertation (Datuin 2002 and 2001), women's art continue to be invisible and denigrated not only because they are perceived to be lacking in the problematic criteria of "quality" or "genius," but because their works are too scattered, fragmented and dispersed to make much of an impact. My own historical survey of Filipina women artists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present (Datuin 2002 and 2001) is a modest attempt to piece these fragments together, not only to expose the gender-biased erasures and judgments of art history, but also to make present and re-present a lineage and *tradition*, within which women artists and critics can situate and locate themselves and their practice. The need to claim and establish this tradition is also apparent in Korea, China and the rest of Asian countries visited by the researcher.

- 2) Lesbian artists. In 1999, I was taken to task for the lack of lesbian representation in the Women Imaging Women exhibit and conference on women artists from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. It is a blindness for which I struggled to make up for by consciously seeking out lesbian voices in my subsequent field works, and by actively supporting activities by lesbian artists and cultural workers, such as Lesbianarama. I have also closely followed the works and lives of several lesbian artists, most of whom I included in my account of Filipina artists in my book and dissertation. (Datuin 2002 and Datuin 2001).

While the influential and powerful Catholic Church still frowns on homosexuality, lesbian advocacy groups are very active in the Philippines, especially in Manila. But the issue is invisible in Korea, as one gay artist I talked to disclosed, and more so in China, where on hindsight, I was a bit reckless in my bid to touch base with as many persuasions as possible. As I narrated in my report to my fellowship headquarters, tracking down lesbian art practitioners is not that simple, and it is one that must be pursued with extreme caution, due to state restrictions.

- 3) More fieldworks outside the capital cities of Seoul and Beijing. Although most artists from the provinces have settled and are working in Seoul, Manila, Beijing, other key cities can also prove to be informative destinations: Kwanju, Cheju, and the like. I have visited Pusan for the international biennial and the international film festival. However, it deserves a longer and more in-depth visit. In China, other cities like Chengdu, Kunming, Xiamen, among many others deserve more attention, especially since China has the unique distinction – among sites I visited – of having many artistic "centers" other than Beijing. Although Beijing is admittedly the capital, the tectonic shifts that shook the Chinese art world from the 70s to the 80s actually emanated from other cities, which not only had movements of their own (e.g. Xiamen

Dada in the South, the Elephant Group in Gouangzhou), but also had distinct vernacular visual vocabularies. There is a Chinese saying: “The sky is wide and the emperor is far.” Cities away from Beijing enjoyed a relative ideological “freedom,” even during the height of repression and censorship of contemporary art during the latter part of the past century. Innovations and rebellions launched in these cities inspired and reinforced each other, resulting, not only in a richer artistic vocabulary, but also effecting a sea change that benefited and seeped into the tightly guarded center.

- 4) Possible future destination: Japan. Almost all of the artists tell me: “If you are now in Korea and China, why not Japan?” Conducting a similar fieldwork in Japan will round out the East Asian component of what has become my “lifework.”
- 5) More interaction with academics. My fieldwork was largely conducted among alternative spaces and official museums. Despite my strong ties with EWHA University professors in Korea, I have yet to touch base with other academics in leading universities like Yonsei, Seoul University, and so on. Similarly, in China, connections with academics in Tsinghua University, Normal University, Beijing Culture and Language Institute, among others, were not firmly established, including that of my own host in China, the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Closer ties with colleagues in the academe may open up fresh insights and routes for further research.
- 6) Library and archival work in countries beyond China. Scholars from Europe and the United States reveal that a bulk of important materials now “deleted” out of Chinese archives, especially after the Tiananmen Square massacre, can be found in libraries in Chicago and Berlin, among others. Some of these materials contain important historical documents that go farther back than the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A lot, in other words, remains to be done, and it is a task that not any one person can do alone. The networking and documentation activities of this research brought us one more step towards reaching out, making connections and forging ties with future collaborators and hopefully, future researchers who will continue to build on this and other similar projects.

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