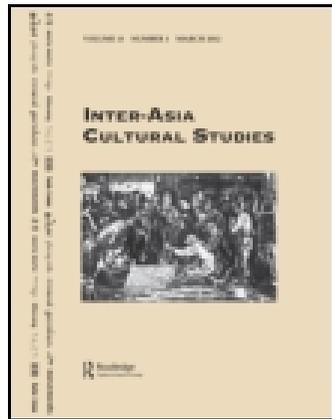


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Editorial Introduction

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Editorial Introduction

Kuan-Hsing CHEN

1.

In the context of the 2010 Shanghai Biennale, the *West Heavens*¹ project started to facilitate dialogues between Indian and Chinese intellectuals. In 2011, the project also organized a film festival—entitled “You Don’t Belong”—touring Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kunming, Hong Kong, and Hsinchu, along with intellectual forums. Such dialogues between Indian and Chinese circles of thought were actually made possible via the wider network of “Inter-Asia Cultural Studies” that has been in place since the late 1990s and the East Asian Critical Journals Conference.² Hence, from the beginning of the *West Heavens* project, we had begun to imagine the possibility of expanding the “India–China” focus of the dialogue to encompass other Asian circles of thought. In collaboration with the 2012 Shanghai Biennale, three intersecting intellectual networks converged to stage the “Asian Circle of Thought 2012 Shanghai Summit.”

With “World in transition, imagination in flux” as the title of the conference, which was held in the Power Station of Arts in Shanghai, from October 12 to 19, this event attempted to initiate a platform for critical dialogues among intellectuals and thinkers across Asia. The purpose of the conference states:

As the world is now in rapid transition, economically, politically and culturally, there is a sense of urgency to come together to analyze the present and imagine the future in regional terms. For the past two or three decades, different projects have been carried out to contribute to the (re)integration of Asia at the level of knowledge production. Projects like *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*:

Movements journal, East Asia Critical Journals Conference, and the *West Heavens* have been able to connect intellectual circles across different parts of Asia. We feel this is the moment to work together to initiate the Modern Asian Thought Project to create new forms and modes of knowledge for the future of global peace and a more humane world.

The essays in this special issue were first presented in the forum and subsequently selected, edited, and translated. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movements* journal is pleased to be part of this initiative and would like to share with our readers the important aspects of this historic event.

2.

The notion of a “circle of thought” has a long history in East Asia, and has been extensively used in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Singapore and Malaysia. From the late-nineteenth century onward, along with the process of systematic modernization, intellectual spaces for current concerns have emerged to discuss and debate controversial issues arising from the process of social change. While discussions are usually surrounding the immediate social and political world of everyday life, the dimensions of observation, explanation, and critical thinking usually go beyond the single matter itself, to coalesce, in time, into diverse modes of thought, characteristic to either specific thinkers or intellectual groupings. During the process of debates, newspapers, magazines and journals became platforms for “circles of thought.” Although such spaces have

begun to shrink since the late twentieth century, they have nevertheless been passed on in different forms, and become a noticeable landscape of the circles of thought in the East Asian region. In particular, the “spirits” that examine the hardships of livelihood and political affairs, and the “modes of knowledge” are inherited, transfigured and developed. In addition to certain daily newspapers’ columns and supplements, journals such as Japan’s *Shiso* (Thought), *Gendai Shiso* (Modern Thought), and *Impaction*; Okinawa’s *Keshi-Kaji* (Wind that Returned); Korea’s *Quarterly Changbi*; China’s *Dushu*, *Tianya*, and *Refeng*; Taiwan’s *Si-xiang* (Thought), *Renjian Thoughts Review*, and *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*; Singapore’s *Tangent*; Malaysia’s *Aliran*, are some examples. In south Asia, we may add publications such as India’s *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Seminar* to the list.

Unlike common academic practices, participants in the circles of thought come from diverse sections of society. While some of them working in the university may have a specific disciplinary background, their intimate allegiances to the immediate social world have rendered their participation, interventions, and concerns *not* about loyalty to academic disciplines, and their modes of writing and thinking *not* confined to professional institutions. Owing to their instantaneous concerns about politics and societies, the significance of their writings often goes beyond their immediate concerns. While their views on issues at stake were often inspiring at the moment of intervention, these views and ways of looking at things have been mobilized to illuminate other disturbing affairs by later generations. It is in the processes of intellectual discursive engagements across generations that a “tradition” of modern thought manifests itself.

Therefore, “circle of thought” is not an institutionalized term, as it has no clear boundaries, and its membership may come and go. Historically speaking, these circles keep transforming: some have a long-term accumulation while others vanish after a brief appearance—what have been passed on are their trajectories formed within

dynamic histories. In contrast, “academia” has undergone tremendous transformation: during the processes of institutionalization, systematization, and professionalization especially after the 1960s, the divided disciplines, via various mechanisms of reproduction, have regulated the modes of practices through distributions of powers and resources, and then enforced a sense of loyalty to one’s own discipline. The situation has been intensified in the pursuit of international competition since the 1990s, research publications have raised the “science” banner and aimed at a global (in fact, English) range, while SCI and SSCI have become indexes for promotion and awards. Academic researches, being de-localized, de-historicized, and de-politicized, have sunk into a “professional yet thoughtless” crisis. Worse still, from the 1980s onward, some of the previously self-reflexive and critical fields in humanities started to elevate “theory” above all else, which had been studied, understood and deployed in an overly simplistic manner. Even with reflections and interventions of “postcolonial” theory, the tendency to worship high theory continues to deepen in various Asian regions. In the end, ironically, we find the most original, explanatory, and analytical works of the Asian regions coming from those who have been engaged in the circles of thought that directly confront the problems of the local with reference to wider regional and global transformations. It is in this context that the “Modern Asian Thought” project was initiated at the Shanghai Forum, with the aim of bringing resources of thought that have accumulated in the diverse histories of the “circles of thought” to intellectual attention, and through mutual learning and referencing, we hope to break through the current impasse of knowledge.

3.

During the 2012 Shanghai Forum, six leading thinkers from different sub-regions of Asia were invited to deliver the main lectures: Paik Nak-chung from Seoul (on October

12), Jomo Kwame Sundaram from Kuala Lumpur (on October 13), Partha Chatterjee from Calcutta (on October 14), Arasaki Moriteru from Okinawa (on October 16), Itagaki Yuzo from Tokyo (on October 17), and Ashis Nandy from Delhi (on October 18). In addition, a special session was held in the evening on October 17 in Rockbund Art Museum, where leading writer and thinker Zhang Chengzhi from Beijing was invited to be in conversations with Professor Itagaka. Other partners involved in the Modern Asian Thought project were invited to serve as discussants to raise issues and problems emerging out of the lectures. On October 15, a full day was devoted to a session where all the main speakers were present to converse with each other. On October 19, two panels were organized to sum up the conference. Although some of these thinkers are well known internationally, we still feel the need to provide a brief introduction for our general readership.

Moving along with the development of post-war democratic movements, Paik Nak-chung has been, since the 1960s, an important figure in South Korea's circle of thought. Born in 1938 in Taegu, Paik taught English Literature at Seoul National University in 1963 and retired as Professor Emeritus in 2003. Under the authoritarian regime, Paik Nak-chung established the magazine *Quarterly Changbi*, which has been in publication since 1966, staging a public platform for "national literature" to deal with social realities. This influential journal has evolved into a high-quality publisher of humanities; publications of journals and books from *Quarterly Changbi* make it the most significant thinking resource in post-war Korea. As a critic, editor, publisher, writer, and activist, Paik has, since the 1980s, developed highly original discourses on the "Theory of Overcoming the Division System," suggesting that the purpose of the unification of the Korean peninsula is to overcome world capitalism (Paik 2011). Along with the ever-changing political situation in Korea, Paik has continuously renewed and deepened the development of this theory. From 2005 to 2009, he was elected as Chair

of the South Korean Committee for Implementation of the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration, contributing to Korean unification. Being a prolific writer and the most noted figure of Korean circles of thought, Paik's important works have already been translated into Japanese, Chinese and English. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* published a special issue on Paik Nak-chung in Volume 11, Number 4, December 2010.

A leading figure in the Malaysian and South East Asian intellectual scene, Jomo Kwame Sundaram was born in 1952 in Penang. After finishing his college education in Malaysia, Jomo went to study in the US, receiving his MA and PhD in the US, and then returned to Malaysia to teach economics. In 2004, Jomo retired from University of Malaya. From 2005 to 2012, he held a post as the assistant secretary-general for Economic Development in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). During the administration of Mahathir (1981–2003), Jomo, as a world famous economist and public intellectual, investigated and openly criticized public policies and was actively involved in promoting the development of civil society and helping to establish independent and autonomous research communities of social sciences. *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits* ([1997] 1999) is his representative work during the period. After the 1990s, Jomo broadened his perspective with Southeast Asia, the Third World, and the global economy as his research objects. In 2005, he promoted the establishment of IDEAs (International Development Economics Associates) to intervene in the global economic development. Jomo has authored more than 30 books, and edited nearly a hundred—even on a global scale, very few in the academia can surpass his energy for persistent productivity. His work in the United Nations since 2005 has given Jomo firsthand experience at the global level to sharpen his account on the current transformation of the world in flux.

Partha Chatterjee is a renowned political theorist, having an enormous reputation in

both Indian and international academies and circles of thought. Born in 1947 in Kolkata, Chatterjee has inherited the intellectual tradition of modern Bengali culture and knowledge exemplified by Tagore; he has written in Bengali and based himself in Kolkata up to today. In 1971 he received his PhD in the US and then returned to India to teach the following year. From 1973 onward, Chatterjee joined the distinguished Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC), serving as the director of the Center from 1997 to 2007. For more than ten years, he has also lectured every fall semester in the Department of Anthropology at New York's Columbia University. As one of the founding members of the Subaltern Studies, Chatterjee was deeply influenced by historical and anthropological methods, and therefore his approach has been interdisciplinary. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986) his well-known work, has demonstrated a convergence of various disciplinary fields. Political commentary is one of the significant components of Chatterjee's writing; from the 1970s onward, he has contributed critical analysis to newspapers and magazines to reach a wider readership. *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism* (1998), a collection of his commentaries, comprises his view on the changing politics of post-war India. Since the late 1990s, Chatterjee has begun to formulate the concept of "political society" to account for the dynamic forces in relation to both state and civil society. *The Politics of the Governed* (2004) and *Lineages of Political Society* (2011) have triggered debate and discussion in different parts of the Third World. *Theorizing the Present* (Ghosh et al. 2011) is a recent collection to critically examine different aspects of his thought evolving over the past 40 years. In addition, Chatterjee is a noted playwright and actor in Kolkata, as he blends his thinking together with public lives.

The relationship between mainland Japan and Okinawa has been "both internal and yet external," as Arasaki Moriteru intuitively suggests. One of the crucial reasons is the ongoing US military "occupation" of

Okinawa since the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, and for more than 18 years Okinawa was under the rule of the US military, until it was "returned" to Japan in 1972. Serious problems caused by the US bases, concerning the livelihood and security of the Okinawan people, have still not been resolved. Precisely because of the urgency of facing these critical conditions, the circle of thought in Okinawa has generated grounded and powerful theoretical formulations.³ In both Okinawa and mainland Japan, Arasaki has been acknowledged as an important political thinker of our time by academic and intellectual circles. An authority of modern Okinawa history, Arasaki held the position of the president of Okinawa University twice. Devoting himself to the writings of history, Arasaki has authored more than ten books and edited more than 40.⁴ Born in 1936 into an Okinawan family residing in Tokyo, Arasaki graduated in 1961 from the University of Tokyo. As Okinawa was "returned" to Japan, he started to teach there from 1974 onward. His efforts and contributions for the last 50 years have been recognized by the Peace Studies Association of Japan, as he has been praised as "the people's running partner whose involvement through writings and speeches has spanned forty years."

In studying histories of Okinawa one can hardly skip over Arasaki's works. Arasaki's research method is unique, as he writes histories with his own participation within the historical process. Arasaki has said that modern Okinawan history was never his object of research, since his own life has been closely intertwined with the "Okinawa Problem." Arasaki's research on modern Okinawa history is characterized by his narration of "history" as the histories of people's movements, with focuses on structural transitions of world history and on the changes of how those who live in Okinawa deal with the US military and Japan-US relation. In 1993, along with the important thinker Okamoto Keitoku, Arasaki participated in the issuing of *Keshi-kaji*, a publication that has become an important Okinawa journal of our time.

Born in 1931 in Tokyo, Itagaki Yūzō has a very high reputation in Japanese circles of thought where he is the most well-known scholar on the Middle East, and is influential in establishing the Third World studies in Japan. Itagaki graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1953, teaching afterwards at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and the University of Tokyo. The unique feature of Itagaki's studies of the Middle East and Japan's international relations is based on a conceptualization of world history with a theory of "N-Area." His research demonstrates how to understand the people's world of the Middle East with an internal perspective, and thus to re-define world history on the basis of this understanding. His theory of "N-Area" is more than an area theory that relativizes the subordinate and exploitative relationships within the systems of the world and of a modern nation-state. Rather, Itagaki's theory starts from the dynamics of the people's world in the Third World, exploring the possibility of how people, as a "self-formed and unfolding site," choose a brand new "area." In addition, he devotes himself to deepening the Japanese people's understanding of the Middle East through cultural and academic exchanges. He collaborates with civic groups whose concerns cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, support of refugees, and international cooperation, in order to initiate a learning process that includes a re-defining of the character of modern Japan through understanding the Middle East.

India's intellectual, Ashis Nandy, has been a symbolic figure for the past 40 years, with a perspective deeply rooted in South Asia and the Third World.⁵ Nandy was born in Bhagalpur, in east-northern India, in 1937. After his graduation in the late 1970s, he joined the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, and became its Director from 1992 to 1997. Recently, Nandy retired from the Center, yet remained an Honorary Fellow. He sees his own intellectual concerns in the past 30 to 40 years to have been swinging between two extremes: at one end is the potential and creativity of

humans, and at the other is human violence and destructiveness. Nandy's formation as a scholar is closely linked with social movements and political communities outside the nation-state, as this connection makes his research highly interventional and politically active. In the last 30 years, he has participated in various kinds of commissions of inquiry and public hearings on issues regarding communal riots, developmentalist violence, racism and sexism, electoral malpractice, and human rights abuse. Along with Nandy's basis on the actual circumstance of South Asian histories and societies, his knowledge production opens up many issues outside the mainstream academia, including those of scientific creativity, futures studies, post-developmental and post-secular visions, cities of the mind, myths of nation-states, and so on. The unfolding of these issues is related to his highly self-conscious Third World perspective: for Nandy, the significance of these problems is articulated by the survival conditions of the late-developing societies. As a prolific writer and a public intellectual, he continues writing on what is happening at this moment. Whenever a controversial incident occurs, circles of thought always look forward to reading his unpredictable analyses and opinions. Therefore, Nandy's readership in South Asia is large, and his influence is huge. Nandy has published 20 books, including important ones such as *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (1983),⁶ *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (1994), and *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (1995).

In reading their work and meeting these thinkers in person, we feel that what they have in common is the long-term concern to continuously confront the existing yet unsolved problems in the societies where they live. When considering a crisis that is urgent, they do not drift away, but continue to renew and update their earlier thought to meet new circumstances. Over the time, the style and characteristics of their own modes of thought have been established.

That being said, their works of knowledge are not isolated: on the one hand, the societies confronted by them are in fact extensive; on the other, they are embedded within the circle of thought to which they belong. We must gain a deeper understanding of the tension between these two sites, in order to comprehend more thoroughly their respective situations and dialogic relations.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Shanghai Biennale and the Moonchu Foundation for their generous support. The conference staff's hard work, our network members' enthusiastic participations and commitments from our translator friends are deeply appreciated.⁷

Notes

1. For the reviews and criticisms of the *West Heavens* project, see Shen and Wang (2011) and Chang (2011).
2. The East Asian Critical Journals Conference was first held in 2006, as *Quarterly Changbi* celebrated its fortieth anniversary. The chief editor of *Quarterly Changbi*, Professor Baik Youngseo, launched this conference project; the conference was later held in Seoul (2006, 2012), Taipei (2008), Kinmen (2010), Shanghai (2011), Seoul (2012) and Okinawa (2013). See Baik (2006).
3. See the works of the significant thinker of Okinawa, Okamoto Keitoku (1934–2006).
4. Arasaki has published many books in Japanese; the major ones are *The Postwar History of Okinawa* (1976), *Okinawa: Anti-war Landowners* (1986), *Okinawa Contemporary History: a Series*, ten volumes (1992–2004), *The Unfinished Okinawa Resistance* (2005a), and *The Contemporary History of Okinawa: New Edition* (2005b), and so on. *The Contemporary History of Okinawa* was translated into Korean in 2008; in 2010, Beijing Joint Publishing published its Chinese translation—the only one of his works to be translated into Chinese to this date.
5. For further discussions on Ashis Nandy's researches, see the special issue edited by Viany Lal (1995–1996).
6. The Complex Chinese version of *The Intimate Enemy* was published in 2012 by *Taiwan: a Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, translated by Fred Y.L. Chiu.
7. We thank Yi-hung Liu for her help with the translation of an earlier draft of the editorial introduction.

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