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# Representation of Representation: 'Images of Other Cultures'

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The special exhibition at Minpaku, 'Images of Other Cultures', forms part of a new trend in representing cultures. New trends in representing cultures include self representation—i.e. by cultural insiders rather than by outside experts (curators, anthropologists, etc.)—and critical or reflexive representation. The latter involves criticism of past knowledge (Enlightenment, ethnology), past display strategies and past constellations of power (colonialism, neocolonialism).



*Reconstruction of the early twentieth-century  
Ethnographical Gallery at the British Museum*

Examples of such critical exhibitions have been *Exotische Welten/Europäische Fantasien* in Stuttgart 1987 and exhibitions that have unpacked stereotypes or 'reversed the gaze', by depicting Westerners. I was involved in organising a critical exhibition and am particularly interested in this kind of project. I developed the exhibition blueprint for *White on Black*, a large exhibition of Western stereotypes of Africa and blacks that took place at the Museum of the Tropics, Amsterdam, in 1991. This exhibition later travelled to Brussels and Copenhagen.<sup>11</sup>

The Minpaku exhibition focuses on Africa, Oceania and Japan. Its remit is summed up in the subtitle of the catalogue: *Re-viewing Ethnographic Collections of the*

*British Museum and the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.*<sup>21</sup> The sections of the display and catalogue are Western Views of Other Cultures, The West as Other Cultures, Japanese Views of Other Cultures, and Border-Crossing Cultures Today. Probably its strongest feature is the juxtaposition of Western views of others with others' views of Westerners. Original, from an international point of view, are the 'Japanese Views of Other Cultures', for these involve material and perspectives not seen before. The exhibition shows ethnographic items from Africa, Oceania and Japan *side by side*, within a detailed reconstruction of the early twentieth-century Ethnographical Gallery at the British Museum (see photo). This too is novel and breaks with ethnological display conventions. Several sections include borderline art/ethnography works. That the exhibit will also be

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1) Jan Nederveen Pieterse. 1992. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

2) Yoshida, K. and J. Mack (eds) 1997. *Images of Other Cultures*. Osaka: NHK Service Center.

on display at a quality art museum in Tokyo (Setagaya Art Museum) is another important step outside the narrow circle of ethnology.

Thinking through the exhibition, what emerges as a defining element is the Japanese angle. Japan is in the double position of being an object of representation (here represented in the early twentieth-century British Museum display) and a subject. It shares with Africa and Oceania the experience of being treated as an *other* from the point of view of the West, and is now in a position to *re-view* this experience. This angle is not made explicit as such and is overlaid with and crisscrossed by other lines of thought which run through the exercise—each worthy, some fashionable, none consistently worked through. Hence the exercise is a bricolage of different themes and cabinets—treating native peoples as contemporaries, as natives; representing them side by side with Japanese; blurring the relation between ethnography and art. In relation to the magnitude of the effort, the overall concept (and therefore also the presentation) is relatively weak. Presentation follows concept and if the concept is not clear, how can the presentation be so? The question is *why* should we re-view the ethnological collections, what can we gain or learn from re-viewing them? Is this adequately answered? The exhibit and catalogue make interesting points about ethnological misrepresentations and myths (such as the 'Man Catcher'), but by and large these are fine points, and if one does not have a prior investment in these ethnological concerns, re-viewing them does not matter much. The remit is wide—(images of others); the treatment is brainy and museum-centric. One impression is that this is an anthropologists' exhibition for anthropologists. An anthropologist notices quickly the departures from anthropological convention, but do general viewers get the point? These points are tentative since I don't speak Japanese and most of the exhibition texts are in Japanese. I rely on the catalogue and on Japanese friends who explained what the captions say. Also the Japanese cultural context makes a difference.

This is a major innovative exhibition and these observations are in a spirit of constructive criticism from an international angle. How can reflexive representation be more effective? Reflexive representation requires thinking seriously about what it means to the public: what kind of cultural intervention does this represent, what is its importance to the general public? How can the public be brought in, lest to them this is just curiosities about curios?

How clear is the exhibition for general viewers? For instance, in the early twentieth-century display area of the British Museum, which is faithfully

replicated (quite a feat!), viewers are drawn to the objects themselves and do not necessarily share the perspective, an understanding of *why* all this is shown. For this kind of re-representation, special display methods are required and a communication effort that addresses the public in new ways. The guiding panels that give an overall explanation must be quite explicit, not merely on factual information but on the perspective, an understanding of *why* this is being shown. One often has the impression that museums do not think particularly well of the public. One of their captive audiences are school children, so the display approach is schoolish. However, audiences generally are deemed capable of interpreting quite complex messages in media and advertising—then why not also in museums?

Curators generally believe that texts must be brief, factually to the point, in simple language. This reflects the general Enlightenment principle of information first. This, however, may not be enough to convey the message that 'something else' is going on. Texts in guiding panels could be complex, introducing new, difficult terms (such as 'representation') to give viewers, even if they would not get the fine print, at least the sense that 'something else' is being communicated. Captions could be playful, poetic, joking—to break with the monotony of providing irrelevant 'information'. Of course this also means breaking with the Enlightenment habit and code that shroud the museum in general.

Another question is how visual elements are used. On the bag that is for sale with the exhibition—a fancy, glossy paper bag—images of different times and cultures are shown side by side, in a crosscultural confetti style (which has itself become a cliché) without a sense of *why* they are being juxtaposed. (In Tokyo they would regard it as a typical 'Osaka bag': loud colours, loud style.) Would working with *visuals* be an option? The *White on Black* exhibit used advertising posters in which a well known cartoonist captured the project in a single image: Two young men, white and black, are standing side by side in front of a replica of a pre-war poster advertising soap that 'can wash a black boy white', and give each other a strange look. This captures the idea of *viewing* images, a *feeling* of oddity, while the exhibition title also made plain that this was *not* about Africa or blacks but about *whites* stereotyping Africa and blacks. The project clearly emphasized that the theme was *stereotypes*.

The special exhibition at Minpaku differs markedly from the permanent exhibition. The permanent exhibition is conventional in the extreme—a static display of quaint ethnographic objects, modelled on the Berlin Ethnological Museum. It resembles

the old fashioned displays in Leipzig and other places. Elements that suggest the contemporaneity and modernity of the peoples depicted are rarely included. In contrast, the special exhibition shows urban and contemporary sides of Africa, Oceania and Japan, for instance by showing entire kiosks from Papua New Guinea, Ghana, and Japan. It evokes a strange tension: why not change the permanent exhibition? In other 'ethno'

museums modern culture has long been integrated (for instance, showing street life in Delhi or Mexico City, in the Amsterdam Museum of the Tropics, complete with sound).

By and large this important and innovative project illuminates the in-between position of Japan—working through the occidental Enlightenment, peeking out through the other side.

## The Significance of the Special Exhibition 'Images of Other Cultures'

Norbert A. Kayombo

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While visiting the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka, I was fortunate to see the special exhibition entitled 'Images of Other Cultures', which is organised as part of the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the museum to the public. In this humble contribution, I highlight the significance of the exhibition for how we look at other cultures and the way these cultures are presented in museums. The special exhibition is organised by Minpaku in collaboration with the British Museum.

The purpose of the special exhibition is to show how, through history, the West, Africa, Oceania and Japan have been looking at each other's cultures. In the West, Africa and Oceania have been portrayed as 'wilderness' and 'paradise' respectively. Japan, Africa, Oceania and other countries all have their own images of other cultures. It is curious that Japan, which is 'non-West', considers herself as part of the West.

This dichotomy of 'self' and 'other' has a long history dating back to the colonial periods in Africa and Oceania. Since the early days of colonisation, the concept of having museums, and the conduct of collection and presentation, have been dominated by Western viewpoints. During colonial periods, African and Oceanian objects were often collected and displayed to show exotic and uncivilised aspects of other cultures.

The special exhibition on 'Images of Other Cultures' is therefore dedicated to the issues surrounding perception of 'self' and 'other' and is meant to stimulate and encourage further discussion. The exhibition has four main sections: Western Views of Other Cultures, The West as Other Cultures, Japanese Views of Other Cultures, and Border-Crossing Cultures of Today. A variety of objects created by the

different cultures in the regions as well as photographs and video presentations are shown. A catalogue entitled *Images of Other Cultures* has also been published. The catalogue presents details of the exhibits together with articles by various scholars on the subject.

Alongside the special exhibition a symposium on 'Representing "Cultures" in Museums' was organised by the National Museum of Ethnology, in collaboration with the Setagaya Art Museum and the Japan Foundation. The symposium provided yet another forum for discussions on presenting cultures in museums.

The exhibition on 'Images of Other Cultures' reminds viewers of how we perceive cultures other than our own and how the Western world, Africa, Oceania and Japan looked at each other's cultures. During colonial times in Africa and Oceania, colonial administrators, missionaries and travellers collected objects by themselves. Some of the objects were kept for display in museums in Africa and Oceania without the participation of local communities. Others were taken to Western countries and

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*'Border-Crossing Cultures Today'*



displayed at the convenience of the West. In which way the cultures were presented depended on the curator who had a self-imposed mandate to present 'other cultures'. In the special exhibition on 'Images of Other Cultures' this phenomenon is represented by a reproduction of part of the Ethnographic Gallery at the British Museum as it was in 1910. Such exhibition halls harboured collections in which other cultures were misrepresented or deprived of their true essence. The objects were displayed far from the original environment, in most cases without the name of the producer or date of production, and out of reach of those who created them. These objects, some of which had a sacred value, were given another status and other values. The objects had nothing to do with Western cultures. Since the owners were powerless, many of the objects might have been taken without negotiation.

Some exhibits show how Africa, Oceania and Japan looked at the West as an 'other' culture. The exhibits show traditional and imported cultural elements that have been incorporated into new cultures in Africa, Oceania, and Japan. Such exhibits have rarely been shown in ethnographical museums in the West because they have been considered 'not traditional' or 'inauthentic'. Their exclusion is symptomatic of how the West overlooked the fact that Africa, Oceania and Japan had their own images of the West. These images are evident here in various ethnographic objects created in the regions covered, and especially in works of art.

The images of Africa and Oceania created in Japan present yet another interesting point for discussion. Japan used to be viewed by the West as entirely 'other culture' or 'non-Western'. However, through time Japan has adopted the Western viewpoint of 'other cultures'. Japan looks at Africa and Oceania in the same way the West used to view Africa, Oceania and Japan. Exhibits in this section show how Japan has seen Africa as geographically very remote and a land where beasts are numerous. Oceania, although also seen as a primitive region, has been portrayed as 'paradise', with islands ideal for recreation by Japanese.

Adventure novels narrating stories about Africa form part of the exhibition section. Some exhibits show the titles of Tarzan movies in which Tarzan apparently communicates and understands more among animals than with uncivilised Africans. A variety of newspapers, books, films and video attract hundreds of visitors at this section. Numerous advertisements for tourism in the Pacific islands are shown, but only a handful of them for Africa. In the exhibition brochure, under the title 'Japanese Views of Other Cultures', the following question is posed: 'After more

than a century since the era of evolutionism, have we freed ourselves from the stereotyped and conventional images of Africa and Oceania?' As a non-Japanese visitor to the exhibition, I wonder what impressions the exhibition give to the Japanese visitors. The exhibition will certainly prompt more discussion and dialogue between cultures in the future, not only in Japan but also in Africa, Oceania, Europe and many developing countries.

The last section of the exhibition deals with 'Border-Crossing Cultures of Today'. Depicted in this section are some elements of cultural 'hybridisation' in today's situation, highlighting the fact that we are all living and interacting in the present era. With increased globalisation, the dichotomy between 'self' and 'others' seems to be changing. Hybrid artforms and kiosks from Africa, Oceania, and Japan are displayed as symbols of common cultural elements. The world cultures seem to be coming closer together in many aspects. However, a number of questions and issues have to be resolved. The question of identity is central in this respect. Seemingly, the special exhibition on 'Images of Other Cultures' prompts more questions than answers. Some basic questions which visitors and readers of this article might think about may include: Who has the right to present other cultures? How should 'other cultures' be presented in museums? What is the role of such museums? What are the roles of national and local museums?

While contemplating the above questions, the issue of repatriation of cultural property to its country of origin has also to be looked into. UNESCO has been promoting the return of such cultural properties to the people who created the objects. It is encouraging to see that some countries have started receiving cultural heritage that was held in other museums for years. These efforts have however sparked reactions and sometimes misunderstandings between the parties involved. Also, looting of cultural property is still rampant in most developing countries. To resolve such problems open discussion and understanding between parties are necessary. Also, there should always be legal means to facilitate the proper transfer of objects between countries. In this age let's not lay blame for what happened in the past. Instead constructive dialogue is needed to discover better ways to collect and present the works of 'other' cultures in the future.

## 'Us' and 'Them' in Thai and Northern Lao Mural Paintings of the Nineteenth Century

**Rujaya Abhakorn**

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Ethnic complexity has apparently always been the norm in mainland Southeast Asia. By various methods of categorisation, linguistic, ethnographic or political, more than one hundred groups and sub-groups of highland and lowland dwellers have been recognised, and these groups have co-existed for over a thousand years in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and neighboring Yunnan. Surprisingly, very little study has been done on the history of their relationships, largely for the lack of written historical records that touch directly on the subject. There are nonetheless other types of historical evidence<sup>1)</sup> that can tell us how ethnicity was viewed.

### Mural paintings

The tradition of having paintings on four walls inside Buddhist congregation halls and ordination halls is found in the Theravada Buddhist areas in Thailand, Laos and southern Yunnan. In the latter two areas murals can also be found on the outside walls of congregation halls. It is recognised that the paintings were not there for decorative purposes but 'serve a didactic purpose: to make Theravada Buddhist scriptures in the Pali language accessible to all through graphic visual narrative'.<sup>2)</sup> They tell the stories of the life of Gautama Buddha and his previous lives taken from the popular tales of the Jatakas. In the process, fundamental Buddhist concepts and cosmological schemes are vividly depicted. This would seem to be appropriate for an era when social communication was conducted orally and

literacy was confined to the monks and the elite.

The murals were created mostly by anonymous artists using natural tempera pigments on brick walls covered with stucco. Murals were commissioned by well-off patrons or members of the community. The artists were no mere copiers, however. They always added their own individual perception of the world as they saw it around them. This is not to say that they were 'realist' painters and that we can see in their works a faithful rendering of the people and their costumes. What we do see is social plurality and the existence of 'otherness'. What constituted the difference between us and them is more than costumes. It seems that although the nineteenth-century paintings in Bangkok, northern Thailand and Laos shared a similar tradition, the painters lived in markedly different worlds.

### The 'twelve-tongues' tradition

Indian-based cosmology was made up of different types of beings and animals, many of which would be quite alien to normal experience. Plurality of races, therefore, would not be out of the ordinary. It seems that from the eighteenth century with the continuous arrivals of European and Asian foreigners, there was an increasing awareness of the ethnic differences and they were well represented in mural paintings in Ayudhya and Bangkok.

It is traditional among students of classical Thai painters to recognise such paintings as 'twelve-tongues' paintings. These usually depicted part of the Buddha's

life story. For example at Wat Chong Nonsi in Bangkok, a temple that may have been built in the middle of the seventeenth century,<sup>3)</sup> a Persian or Mogul and beasts appeared as part of the army of Mara the Tempter who attacked the Buddha on the eve of his Enlightenment and were then swept away by a flood unleashed by Mother Earth. Europeans, Arabs, Indians and other indigenous

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1) Wyatt, David K. 1993. *Temple Murals as a Historical Source: The Case of Wat Phumthi*. Nan. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

2) Ringis, Rita 1990. *Thai Temples and Temple Murals*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, p. 87.

3) Na Pak Nam, No. 1982a. *Wat Chong Nonsi*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House.

4) Na Pak Nam, No. 1997. *Buddhaisawan Chapel*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House.

5) Na Pak Nam, No. 1983a. *Wat Dusidaram*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, pp. 80-81.

6) Na Pak Nam, No. 1982b. *Wat Ratchasittharam*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, pp. 82-85.



*European Gunners (Wat Suwannaram, Bangkok)*



Foreign merchants  
(Wat Pa Huak, Luang  
Prabang)

7) Na Pak Nam, No. 1982c. *Wat Suwannaram*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, pp. 86-87.

8) Krom Silpakon 1991. *The Tradition of Thai Mural Paintings* (In Thai). Bangkok: Krom Silpakon, p. 178.

9) Anonymous. 1974. *Collected Inscriptions of Wat Phra Chetuphon*. Bangkok: Privately Printed, pp. 695-711; Na Pak Nam, No. 1994. *Wat Phra Chetuphon*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House.

10) Na Pak Nam, No. 1983b. *Wat Matchimawat*. Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, pp. 48-51.

groups began to appear in this manner right into the nineteenth century. An early example is in the Buddhaisawan Chapel which was part of the palace of

King Rama I's younger brother. This was probably completed in the late 1790s.<sup>4)</sup> Similar compositions from the same period can be seen in Bangkok at Wat Dusidaram,<sup>5)</sup> also at Wat Ratchasittharam<sup>6)</sup> and Wat Suwannaram<sup>7)</sup> of the 1830s and 1840s. There are at least twelve temples in Thailand that contain paintings depicting foreigners in a similar way.<sup>8)</sup> A set of inscriptions at Wat Phra Chetuphon in Bangkok dated back to the 1830s, accompanied a set of paintings on doors and windows and described thirty-two nationalities and their dresses. These included Italians, Arabs, Japanese, Javanese, Karens, Shans, Vietnamese and even Africans.<sup>9)</sup>

The Buddhist faith was the basis for division. 'We' are the adherents to Buddhism, the others stand for ignorance, the enemy of Enlightenment. This however was not always the case. Foreigners could be inserted as ascetics of different faiths or as a group of heavenly gods of lesser ranks within the Buddhist cosmology. The depictions of foreigners seem to have improved as they became a permanent part of the urban landscape. Some were recognised for their prowess as soldiers, marksmen and horsemen. While the Mara scene continued to be a necessary part of the life history of the Buddha, the evil army was later entirely made up of mythical

beasts and black-skinned humans.<sup>10)</sup>

### Luang Prabang murals

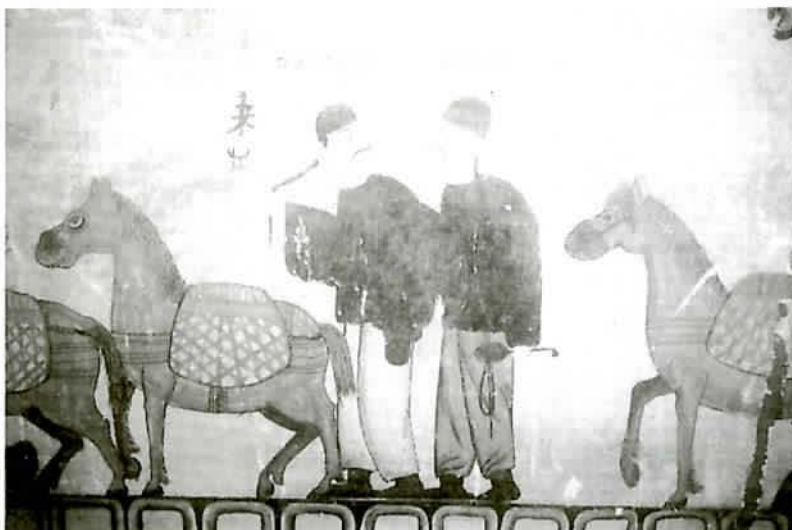
Situated on the Mekong river but away from the sea, the city of Luang Prabang was less cosmopolitan than Bangkok. Nevertheless it was a lively trading centre for the uplands and a hub for inter-ethnic exchanges. Like Bangkok, it had its share of Chinese visitors, but from Yunnan rather than the coast. The Tai-Lao speakers also had close ties with Mon-Khmer groups such as the Kha. The Luang Prabang world was less diverse but the sense of 'us' and 'them' was not absent, judging from some of the visual representation of that world in mural paintings. In the city of Luang Prabang and its vicinity, there are at least ten mural paintings in Theravada Buddhist temples (wats) that were painted in the nineteenth century and are still in good condition. Preliminary investigations showed that they were highly influenced by the Thai style of paintings popular in Bangkok at the time. Their main contents consisted of the former lives of the Buddha (Jatakas) and his story, but the dramatic Mara scene was not always there. Foreigners included Chinese and some Europeans, again identifiable by their dresses.

The murals of the small temple of Wat Pa Huak at the foot of Phusi hill in the middle of Luang Prabang is noted for its presentation of Chinese characters, ranging from courtly figures to caravan merchants. The chosen story of the Buddha subduing a rogue king, Jambhupati, is rather unusual, and the artists used the occasion to insert a variety of 'ethnic' figures representing soldiers and commoners, although they were not essential to the story. The fight between the forces of good and evil in this story was prolonged, with no one spectacular scene. It is interesting that there was no clear division on an 'ethnic' line between 'us' and 'them'. Men and women of varying skin color and various groups of curiously dressed men appeared—some for no obvious reason and apparently belonging to neither side of the moral divide.

### Conclusion

While ethnic diversity was common to both Bangkok and Luang Prabang in the late nineteenth century, the central Thais appear to have been impressed by the foreigners from overseas, while the northern Laotians readily included the Chinese and upland forest dwellers as elements in their world. There were boundaries, at least in appearances, in both places—but the Laotian 'us' may have been more inclusive and had less to do with divisions on moral grounds.

Chinese caravan traders (Wat Pa Huak, Luang Prabang)



## Half Persons, Complete Societies

Jos D.M. Platenkamp

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When is a society complete? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a society to exist? Reflecting on these questions brings such complex social, political, economic, legal and philosophical considerations to mind that it seems utterly pretentious to raise them in the first place, let alone to presume that they can be answered in any satisfactory manner. Indeed, the notion of the 'completeness' of a society evokes a certain perfection, which in many different societies is considered to be unrealisable in the present. It implies a finality of existence that may be projected into the future as the outcome of ongoing historical processes of 'progress', or into a past when societies were not yet corrupted by such developments, or, again, into a state of eternal but transcendent existence, unattainable during one's lifetime. But in spite of the ideological gaps which separate such diverse cultural systems of representations they share in common the fundamental belief that no human being during his or her lifetime will, or perhaps should, experience his or her society as being 'complete'.

How can a person be 'complete' if his society is not? The philosophical, psychological, and religious dimensions of this question are evident as well. But what turns this into a question of great ethnological interest is the fact that it has been formulated in the form of a certain type of myths. These myths take as their subject the theme of the 'half-person' or 'unilateral figure', evoking "an imaginary personage consisting of only one side: typically, with one eye, one arm, and one leg, all on the same side. The figure is generally a man or, as a mythical creature, has the form of a man; occasionally it can be a woman or some other entity such as a spirit in quasi-human form. What has to be imagined is the lateral half of a symmetrical body parted longitudinally. Normally, in order to move, it hops on its solitary leg".<sup>1</sup> Myths about the 'half-person' have been recorded in Australia, the Pacific, South-, Southeast- and

East-Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas.

Their global distribution has challenged anthropologists, philologists, psychologists, and theologians to formulate theoretical interpretations that would account for the sheer universality of the theme. It is not surprising, therefore, that the interpretations advanced to date are grounded in axioms reminiscent of the concept of the 'psychic unity of Mankind'. It has been argued that beyond the theme of the 'half-person' itself these myths appear to have very little in common, so that the theme should be understood in terms of a universal-psychological, meta-cultural reality which is basically unaffected by the specific sociocultural contexts in which such myths have originated.<sup>2</sup> However, the fact that the myths are formulated in diverse discourses and identify the 'half-person' as part of different social settings should warn us not to conceptualise their significance in universal, meta-cultural terms too quickly.

In Indonesia, 'half-person' myths have been registered from Kalimantan, Java and Bali to the Lesser Sundas and the Central and North Moluccas. Among the Galela people in the latter region—well known from the research conducted there in the 1970s by a team of scholars from Minpaku<sup>3</sup>—such a myth was recorded by Dutch missionaries

at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the hundred years which separate this recording from the period of my own research of the Tobelo and Galela societies, this myth actually offers some vital insights into contemporary North Halmaheran representations of 'society'. This stems from the fact that the myth formulates the idea that the 'incompleteness' of a person results from the absence of certain elementary relationships, which connect the living to the dead and to the Deity, and which, according to this cultural tradition, are necessary for human beings to exist as social persons. The transformations, by which a person is first reduced to a 'half-body' and subsequently reconstituted as a 'complete' and 'perfect' human being, articulate which socio-cosmic relationships are conceived as necessary and sufficient to provide each human being with a 'complete' social identity. Interpreted as such, the Galela myth of the 'half-person' is a 'sociogenic' myth: in describing the process in which the 'half-person' is completed, it articulates how the society itself, as a system of socio-



*Winnowing tray from Tobelo, depicting two male and two female persons as forms of ma nyawa, 'being alive' (Coll. Museon, The Hague, the Netherlands).*



Tobelo man holding a ceremonial shield displaying the 'image' (ma gurumini) of the ancestors

order for their members to exist. Because the myths of the 'half-person' appear to articulate these relationships in a highly succinct manner, as myths about the 'complete society', they constitute a privileged domain for the comparative study of the systems of relationships in terms of which different societies represent themselves.<sup>51</sup> Such analyses, in which my colleague at Münster University, Dr Michael Prager, and I are engaged at present, should not focus on an *a priori* assumption about the universal significance of the unilateral figure as such, but upon the systematic nature of the differences between the sets of relationships from which 'complete' societies, hence 'complete' persons, are constituted.

cosmic relationships, comes into being.

In this perspective it stands to reason that the myths of the 'half-person' recorded in different societies seem, at first glance, to have little more in common than the theme of the 'half-person' itself. Indeed, societies distinguish themselves through the relationships which their cultural traditions deem necessary to be constructed and maintained in

- 1) Needham, R. 1980. Unilateral Figures. In R. Needham, *Reconnaissances*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, p. 20.
- 2) For example, R. Needham, *op. cit.*;
- Jensen, A.E. 1950. Die Mythische Vorstellung vom Halben Menschen. *Paideuma* 5: 23-43;
- Schoffeleers, M. 1985. Twins and Unilateral Figures in Central and Southern Africa: Symmetry and Asymmetry in the Symbolization of the Sacred. In M. Jacoby (ed.) *Longing for Paradise: Psychological Perspectives on an Archetype*. Boston: Sign Press, pp.

345-372. A notable exception is Sather, C. 1994. The One-Sided One: Iban Rice Myths, Agricultural Ritual and Notions of Ancestry. In Walker, A.R. (ed.) *Rice in Southeast Asian Myth and Ritual*. (Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography 10), pp. 119-150.

3) Ishige, N. (ed.) 1980. *The Galela of Halmahera: A Preliminary Survey* (Senri Ethnological Studies 7). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

4) Originally published in Galelarese and Dutch in M.J. van Baarda, 1904. Het Loda'sch in vergelijking met het Galela'sch dialekt von Halmahera, gevolgd door Loda'sche teksten. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 56: 317-496. An English edition of the myth is in Platenkamp, J.D.M. 1988. *Tobelo. Ideas and Values of a North Moluccan Society*. Leiden: Repro Psychologie, pp. 23-25.

5) For a preliminary comparative analysis of the Galela myth, see Platenkamp, J.D.M. 1988. Myths of Life and Image in Northern Halmahera. In Claessen, H.J.M. and Moyer, D.S. (eds) 1988. *Time Past, Time Present, Time Future: Perspectives on Indonesian Culture* (Essays in honour of P.E. de Josselin de Jong). Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

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## Practising a Borderless Anthropology for the Future

**Chun Kyung-soo**

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You name it, papers, pencils, diskettes, cups, bottles, oh, even this computer keyboard working for me, my rooms are filled with things. These things are waiting eagerly to catch my attention as they pile up on each other in any corner space. Even the blinking spot in the stereo timer occupies a space right in front of my eye. And just now I have been reading these

words, cultural relativism, which I have been reading ever since my first class at college. I keep reading these words without thinking how my life might be affected by them—they are just like objects in my environment, taken for granted. Can we escape from lifestyles filled with things using the words of cultural relativism? There may be problems if we just keep reading

these words without ever putting them into practice, and furthermore without even thinking to.

We live with a flood of words like deconstruction and postmodernity in our anthropological readings. So-called theoretical arguments in the humanities and social sciences seem to be, frankly speaking, very confused about what is really



happening in the world. What are our Western colleagues really trying to achieve for the future with their anthropology? Our anthropology is still something imported to set up a new perspective on ourselves, but we are still working in some ways with how we were a century ago. The association of anthropology with colonialism is still not fully understood. Colonialism continues, and containers are still being shipped in to us with cargoes of words. The cargo of anthropology written with Roman letters continues, even with the Internet.

Were/are the cargoes of Melanesian cargo cults really just things without ideas attached? For me at least, it seems foolish and selfish for anthropologists to make people appear as naive savages in the contemporary world, by selling the words of anthropology to make a living. Anthropologists have been playing with the concept of fetishism for their own purposes. What can be the difference between words and ideas? Words carry ideas and ideas do the same thing with the words, a matter in which Sapir and Whorf competed in claiming priority while Melanesians actually practise the idea in life. Anthropologists in the West write words that they sell to customers in the East and elsewhere, and these customers simply read the words in order to appear as anthropologists in front of their own Eastern public. The anthropological cargoes are still coming in and the reverse never happens, but ironically Asian cars go out. This is the main story of one hundred years of anthropology here in Asia.

Should we talk and write about a situation of academic neocolonialism within the discipline of anthropology? Or Orientalism? Said's Orient is a reflexive binary set of/by/for the Occident. Orientalism seems simply to be a dialogue between the Occident and the Orient which may be universal exegesis and/or a very culture-specific dialogue within the colonial context. The concept of colonialism has been almost endlessly incorporated into discussions tangential to anthropology. Said's thinking could be nicely applied to issues involving various groups in Japan such as the Ainu, Okinawans, people of *hisabetsu buraku*, *zainichi*, children, men and women.

What really attracts me in Said is the sense of borders that are fundamentally created in our minds. For a sense of border, the geographical position of the Orient is irrelevant.

However, simply reiterating the word Orientalism without considering borders would be unfortunate. Orientalism with the sense of the borders could be more than relevant for our personal lives as well as our discipline. It is very risky for Asians to blindly adopt the word Orientalism to explain and justify Asian situations or to apply it to African or South American situations, for example. There is a very sharp difference between the Orient and Asia in terms of the conceptualising processes used to interpret the world. Maybe Islamic traditions and the whole history of contact between Occident and Orient need to be considered here. Orientalism has certainly been reinvented in the realm of ethnicity since the end of the Cold War and with the destruction of the Berlin Wall. The real reasons for border were concealed and sometimes the existence of hidden reasons was denied by voluble politicians who were controlled by the ideology of two dominant superpowers. But certainly never more.

Borders are there but, more importantly, there are certainly huge movements now towards a borderless reality. Economists speak every day about creating a big-bang in the borderless world of economic transitions. People have already visibly moved towards a borderless way of life as tourists and even as smugglers. This is a major reason why we anthropologists must devote our best efforts to the issue of ethnicity, for the time being. For this, the most important perspective is realising what we are and what you are, and further what is the border between you and us. Conceptualisations of border should not be final, and trying to see the borders is a sort of process. We also need to recognise the blurred areas around borders in order to delineate borders.

In Korea recently, I was working for a group concerned with nature conservation and tried to highlight a desperate strategy of community development that exists near the South Korean side of the border, in an area filled with military tension created between North and South.

Nature in this area is generally well-preserved after fifty years of existence in a de-militarised zone. Cranes and other birds remain and are undisturbed, and highland marshes dot the landscape providing a very uncommon ecosystem with nearly-extinct plants and insects. Because of the military tension, on the other hand, the human population of this area has become extremely poor and there has been continuous depopulation. How can we preserve the natural ecosystem successfully and promote community development at the same time? The Korean Peninsula is exceptional in the present era of generally peaceful relations. The problem here seems to come from a border which can be considered a product of culture. The physical and cultural border seems to create new kind ethnic groups that are somehow nurtured by ideologies. What can we as anthropologists do to eliminate the border and stabilise the borderless condition in the future? Is there any hint for doing this in our discipline? Or, is there any volunteer to conduct field research that might lead to practical solutions for border-related problems in the Peninsula?

I believe that nineteenth-century ethnology was born from an existing concept of border between civilisation and savage. This dichotomy was also the origin of the idea that progress should benefit the privileged, and produced tremendously hard times for the unprivileged, by no accident. The idea of the border has been with anthropology since its birth. In contrast, the field of ecology is premised on the idea of systems within which there are borders among components. Can the issues of border be dealt only with the law of an eye-for-an-eye; are borders determined by natural law only? If so, then humans do not need the framework of anthropology to deal with cultural issues.

I wish to give some special attention to the year 1997 in Japan because of three events. First is the Ainu New Law recognising the Ainu ethnic group at a fundamental level in Japanese law. Although less than several tens of thousands in number, the Ainu have been firmly recognised as a distinct group from the mainland population of Japan. This legal recognition was the

result of seemingly endless effort to show that Ainu and Japanese cultures are distinct. We have seen here a kind of practicing anthropology in the long run. The Ainu New Law has the important implication that Japan is a multicultural society. This act does not create new border but eliminates an old one because there already existed a discriminatory border that was recognised in legal terms. Japan has become a multicultural society in which the parts are communicating and overlapping rather than locking themselves apart. The recent change creates a borderless society within Japan as a whole, a situation which I personally envy.

Another event was reported by Tsuha Takashi in a recent issue of the *Japanese Journal of Ethnology (Minzokugaku-Kenkyu)*.<sup>11</sup> Here, he rigorously defends the concept of Yamato cultural anthropology by recognising the Non-Yamato identity in the anthropological realm in Japan. The consciousness of the Non-Yamato identity is itself an aspect of culture, and the people of this region have a strong sense of not being part of the dominant culture of Japan. Ryukyu Islanders commonly have strong sense of 'Yamato' people, but central Japanese do not. For the latter, 'Yamato' is a recognisable but old-fashioned term for Japanese. There must be a border between the Yamato and the Non-Yamato in the Japanese archipelagoes. Tsuha employs the tricky case of Amami Island in Kagoshima Prefecture in order to illustrate his hypothesis. People in the island claim a Non-Yamato

identity derived from the previously existing Ryukyu Kingdom. In this, recognition of the border must be very sensitive issue among the indigenous, particularly with regard to the implications.

Thirdly, I met a guy named Satoru at the annual conference of the Japanese Society of Ethnology and we spent one night drinking together. Then I visited him with my wife, in Sapporo, to learn more about his father and anthropologist Mabuchi Toichi. We spent a week together and I was fascinated by his research on community development around Hokkaido. The nature of his project seems to be a kind of research-as-service. He has been putting all his time into the indigenous communities, joining in with the local bathing and drinking, as well as bringing community members into the annual meetings of his research circle. His research circle members are thus also his partners in drinking and play. This example raises the question of how far can we go beyond the so-called academic discipline to practise an anthropology for the people? There must be a border between observer and observed, but an anthropologist should not remain a professional stranger if communication between two sides is to achieve some kind of equality. There seems to be potential for practising a borderless anthropology in the arena of indigenous community development. I envy Satoru's enjoyment of academism and his swimming for pleasure with natives who have crossed over into anthropology for their own purposes.

Information flows across imagined borders just as energy and materials do in ecosystems. People have also been mobile in the long run of history. The world as a whole is an inherently borderless system. Every person needs a clear image of border in order to adapt to the borderless nature of the world. The general sense of stability may follow from the personal base: self-identity derives directly from personal images of border. This does not mean that we accept the need for cultural relativism uncritically—at some point, even anthropologists must make personal or political judgements about borders. A clear and full sense of border is needed for developing a borderless worldview. Living in a borderless world with borders will, I hope, be accepted as a philosophical challenge for the future of practising anthropology.

1) Tsuha, T. 1996. On the Shared Consciousness of Non-Yamato Identity. *Minzokugaku-Kenkyu* 61(3): 449-462.

*Chun Kyung-soo has been Professor of anthropology at Seoul National University since 1982. He was educated at SNU (Korea) and at the University of Minnesota (USA). He has mainly focused on ecological and environmental issues, and recently published a volume of Essays in Environmental Anthropology (1997, in Korean). His hope is that the current ecological crisis can be challenged by attention to the human life cycle 'from food to feces'. Now he is investigating the historico-legal anthropology of East Asian countries in the eighteenth century.*

## Conferences

### Rethinking Indonesian Rituals

*21st International Symposium, Division of Ethnology, The Taniguchi Foundation, 1-8 October 1997*

The members of many Indonesian societies regard the performance of rituals as particularly significant for the perpetuation, restoration, or transformation of social

relationships. The efficacy of ritual actions is generally thought to depend primarily on whether or not they are performed according to rules that are considered to be fixed and unchangeable. Transgressing the rules leads at best to a failure to achieve the ends envisaged, at worst to calamities of various kinds. From the late nineteenth century onwards, anthropologists have advanced theoretical interpretations of such rule-following ritual practices. They have also assessed the relevance of these interpretations for the understanding of society at large in its various historical modalities.

Depending on the type of theory employed, interpretations and assessments were formulated in terms of basic concepts of meaning, representation, function, system, equilibrium, and performance.

The purpose of the present symposium was to scrutinise the validity of the usual concepts for understanding rituals in Indonesian societies. To that end, I invited anthropologists from different scholarly traditions to participate: Gregory Acciaioli (University of Western Australia), Eriko Aoki (Suzuka International University), Cecile Barraud (Centre

National de la Recherche Scientifique), Gregory Forth (University of Alberta), Masato Fukushima (International University of Japan), Makoto Koike (St Andrew's University), Satoshi Nakagawa (Osaka University), Kiyoshi Nakamura (Niigata University), Jos Platenkamp (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster), Clifford Sather (Reed College), and Urbanus Tongli (Atma Jaya Catholic University).

Various issues were addressed concurrently at the symposium: (1) When ethnographers ask hosts to explain their rituals, many of them answer only 'I don't know', 'It is the custom', or 'It is the rule our ancestor created'. How should such seemingly vague expressions be understood? (2) On the other hand, a few hosts (or many in some societies) provide detailed exegetic statements about their rituals. How should these statements be grasped theoretically? (3) Although the meaning and function of rituals are essentially unknown, their performance is defined strictly and is taken seriously. What significance do participants attribute to their rituals, and with what anthropological concepts can this significance be described and interpreted? (4) Although rituals have changed surprisingly little in formal aspects, they have undergone various minor changes. How should long-term stability and short-term change be understood? (5) Is the concept of system or systemic unity relevant to the historical study of rituals?

The anthropological study of rituals has been inspired mostly by the symbolist approach—asking what rituals signify—and by the functionalist approach—focusing on the functions that rituals might serve. Although anthropologists are skeptical of these approaches, there exist no powerful alternatives. This situation may be regrettable, but at least we have realised the need to rethink our basic anthropological concepts. Recognising that rule-following ritual practices are inherently irreducible to other social phenomena may lead to a new paradigm for understanding rituals. Discussions at the symposium confirmed my belief that the study of rituals remains of central importance in anthropology and is still a challenging theme for anthropological investigation. The

results of the symposium will be published in 1999, in English.

Takashi Sugishima  
Symposium Convenor  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

## Representing 'Cultures' in Museums

*Monbusho International Symposium, 21-24 October 1997*

The symposium was held to critically consider issues involved in ways of representing cultures in museums. Historical perspectives, practical methods and future developments were covered. Twelve participants were from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America and Oceania, and seventeen from Japan.

The symposium began with a keynote speech by Kenji Yoshida on events leading up to the present symposium, and the concurrent special exhibition 'Images of Other Cultures' at Minpaku. The subsequent sessions were entitled: (1) Ethnological Museums and Art Galleries, (2) National Identity and Ethnic Identity, and (3) Historical Textuality of Exhibitions. Participants and papers presented were as follows. Session 1: Kaori Chino, 'The Stereotype of "Traditional" Culture'; Germain Lumpet, 'Primitive Arts as Ethnographic Eccentricity'. Session 2: Naoyuki Kinoshita, 'The Himalaya Mountains and the Niagara Falls in the Mausoleum of Confucius'; Carlos G. Elera, 'The Museo de la Nacion: A Permanent Challenge for Presenting the Richness of Peru's Cultural Heritage'; Nigel Barley (no title). Session 3: Ryoji Sasahara, 'How Have "Region" and "History" Been Exhibited in Japanese "Regional" Museums?'; Stefano Carboni, 'Exhibiting Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Piece of an All-encompassing and Rich Collection'; Kazuyasu Ochiai, 'Cultural Self-portraits in Modern Mexico: Historical Philosophy in Museums'.

The discussions were serious and concrete because most of the participants had experience of working in museums. Through discussion, differences in the circumstances of each museum

became clear. On the other hand, we could also see that each museum faces similar problems in dealing with issues such as art and artefacts, minorities and modernity. It is important to recognise and confront these problems. What impressed me most was the view of many participants that museums have been fundamentally influenced by cultural and political contexts. When we design exhibitions, much care is required because museum activities are inherently cultural and political.

After the symposium in Osaka another symposium, 'Representing "Cultures" in Museums: Cultural Exhibitions in the Twenty-first Century', was held in Tokyo on October 25 and 26 in cooperation with the Setagaya Art Museum and the Japan Foundation. Intensive discussion continued and we all recognised a need to construct a network of museums to encourage progress in museum practices.

Ryoji Sasahara  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

## Rituals and Oral Tradition

*9th International Symposium, Comparative Study of Asian and Pacific Cultures, 27-30 October 1997*

The symposium, convened by Paul Kazuhisa Eguchi of the National Museum of Ethnology, examined characteristics of rituals and oral tradition in the Asia and Pacific regions. There were twenty-five participants, two from overseas and twenty-three from Japan. Twelve papers were presented.

## New Staff Member

**Yamamoto, Dr Tadashi** joined the Museum in July 1997, and will continue his work on social and political systems as complex systems. In his research, he uses mathematical modeling to investigate social structure, social composition, and processes that generate societies. He is also studying the variety and types of information systems in the world.

## Visiting Scholars

The following visitors have been sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Monbusho):

### Keyes, Professor Charles F.

is Professor of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA. He has also been chair of Anthropology and director of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Washington. His work has focused on religious and ethnic identity in mainland Southeast Asia. Among his recent works is *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia* (1994), of which he was the senior editor. While at the National Museum of Ethnology, from 15 October 1997 to 16 January 1998, he and Shigeharu Tanabe (at Minpaku) will edit a book on 'Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Politics of the Past in the Thai World'. He also plans to continue work on a long-term project on 'Buddhism and Modernity in Thailand'.



### Smith, Dr Wendy

is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Japanese Studies, Monash University, Australia. She will stay at the Museum from July 1997 until the end of January 1998. She is an anthropologist specialising in modern organisations in intercultural contexts, and has done extensive research on the transfer of Japanese management practices to the multi-ethnic workforce in Malaysia. She is currently studying the growth of Japanese new religions in Australia and Southeast Asia.



### Tesema, Dr Ta'a

is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He received his BA and MA in history at A.A.U. and completed his PhD in history and anthropology at Michigan State University, USA, in August 1986. As an Oromo scholar himself, his area of interest has been the study of the Oromo, one of the largest ethnic groups in northeastern Africa. He has published articles dealing with Oromo-culture and oral history. He is currently working on a book entitled 'The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation: The Case of Macha Oromo (Ethiopia)'. He will stay at the Museum from 1 October 1997 to 31 March 1998.



## Publications

The following were published by the Museum during the period from July to December 1997:

◇ *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, Vol.22, No.1, August 1997. Contents: Kazuyoshi Sugawara, 'A Name as a Mnemonic Device: An Ethnographic Study of Personal Names among the Central San (|Gui and ||Gana)'; Mitsuhiro Shinmen, 'Social Change and Religious Conflict in a Romanian Village'; Akira Goto, 'Technology as a Process of Practical Problem-solving: Pottery Making in Tidore, Northern Maluku, Indonesia'; Bachamiya Abdul Hussainmiya, 'Aspects of Ethnicity among the Sri Lankan Malays'; Brian A. Victoria, 'The Role of Nationalism in the "New Buddhism" of the Meiji Period'.

◇ *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, Vol.22, No.2, November 1997. Contents: Naoko Sonoda, 'Basic Study on the Analysis of Synthetic Materials in Museums: PGC and THM Applied to the

Characterization of Alkyd Paints Containing Synthetic Organic Pigments'; Yoshitaka Terada, 'A Charismatic Musician as a Site for Caste Rivalry: T.N. Rajarattinam Pillai and Music Culture in South India'; Wen-Bin Xiong, 'The Style of Wall Painting and Its Artistic State in Gyantse Monastery in Tibet'; Junzo Uchiyama, 'Jomon Fishing Activity in the Kanto District in the Late Phase (4,000-3,000ybp): Spatial Analysis of Prehistoric Subsistence Using GIS'; Yukio Kuchikura, Kenichi Nonaka, Kazuhiro Suda, and Kazuyo Suda, 'Subsistence Strategies of the Immigrant Households in a Coastal Village of Seram, Indonesia'; Xiaotong Fei, 'Investigating Ethnicity: My Studies and Views of Ethnic Groups in China'.

### MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter

The MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter is published semi-annually, in June and December. 'Minpaku' is a Japanese abbreviation for the National Museum of Ethnology. The Newsletter promotes a continuing exchange of information with the 'Minpaku fellows' who have been attached to the Museum as visiting scholars from overseas. The Newsletter also provides a forum for communication with a wider academic and anthropological audience.

MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter is accessible through our homepage at: <http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/>

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