

AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998

Symposium "TRANSITION: Changing Society and Art"

■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions: From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 1: *The Dialogue Between East and West*

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Cultural Memory for the Future

In this century, the pull of tradition has acted like gravitational force on all non-western countries embarking on the project of modernity. As impediment to flight of progress, traditional culture has been looked upon as the status quo to be overthrown, and yet for finding bearings it has acted as the blueprint for each nation's own futures. Visions of modernity, like visions of all things perceived as desirable, were first all based on actual models of success and therefore have centered around European/American examples, where the idea originated. By the end of this century, most Asian cultures have developed beyond this initial stage of enchantment, even though many of them have been locked into governmental policies that continue on an irreversible program of antagonism with traditional values and their own histories. The diversity of perspectives from creative arts reflect needs to reckon with the past and offer creative solutions to urgent problems facing the demise of heritage. In the case of China, the separate modern histories of the politico-geographical domains of Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong have developed different approaches to this issue, offering alternative solutions and varying levels of engagement with tradition and cultural identity. On the other hand, the fact that Chinese culture was perceived as a seamless coherent whole only until the beginning of this century makes it possible to approach the question of Chinese modern identity as a single general topic, and in this essay I intend to explore several themes irrespective of geographical affiliations of the artists. Apart from one or two examples, all are artists currently active.

1.
Emblem of heritage and problems of continuity
2.
Investigations of the modern spirit in traditional idiom (examples of artists active since the 1960s)
3.
Cultural identity as creative strategy and global identity
4.
Recent reinterpretations of Chinese cultural spirit and modern Chinese identity.
5.
The modern heritage and colonialism as heritage
6.
Tradition as a new destination