

KEY NOTE SPEAKERS' ROUNDTABLE

December 1st 2002, Monash University, Australia

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Iwabuchi

Now, teaching, researching within Japan one of the crucial issues from a Japanese point of view, as Kuan-Hsing and others argued, what we are observing now is maybe a kind of mobilisation of an inter-Asian dialogue. I would question how Asian studies in the Western countries can be situated in this mobilising dialogue. This is a very interesting issue for me. Because of course I used to here [in Australia], I studied Japan and Asia in Australia, so I shared a lot of concerns with many of you. But now back in Japan it's so rare to see any connection between Japanese academia and the Japanese public in Japan and Japanese studies here. Because we don't have any chance to listen to what you [Western academics] have found or what you have written except maybe Tessa, a notable exception because she has written in Japanese. I think this is crucial for any of you, to present and even publish if you can your own work, with your own findings, your own research into other non-English languages. Then, go to other places in Asian countries where you are studying and then express your ideas in public. Of course I'd like to help you all of you to do this particularly in the Japanese context or other East Asian contexts whichever possible. But also let me add just one thing. Next June 27th and 28th we are having the first Japanese cultural studies conference in Waseda, so if you are interested in presenting your paper either English or Japanese please do come to Tokyo to Waseda and share. It'll be an exciting dialogue. Many people from other countries. Thank you.

Morris-Suzuki

Just some quick impressions. First of all, flows. I think it was really nice that this was a conference all about flows and I think it's indicative of where we're going in Asian studies that people are not thinking about static cultural units, they're thinking about flows across borders and the trans-local which was a word which kept coming up in our discussions. I think another of the things that's come out of the discussions is the fact that in re-thinking, in thinking about things in terms of flows, the trans-local and so on, we're encountering some really fundamental problems, some really fundamental needs to re-think the vocabulary with which we discuss the world. There were some very interesting ideas about that which came out of the discussions. I found Mandy Thomas' ideas about embodiment and about the sensual and its political meaning was extremely rich and enlightening and some of the things that Kuan-Hsing was talking about in terms of the need to re-think notions of civil society and so on in the Asian context. And many ideas

from other papers as well. Another issue which struck me at the end of the conference is that in thinking about flows it's always important to think about what varies the standards of flows. I think we heard a lot about flows of culture and so on between particularly the metropolises of Asia, particularly the metropolises of East Asia, but maybe there are a whole lot of areas that we haven't thought so much about. I think about rural China, rural India, Laos, Cambodia and so on and what's happening there. It's important to keep those in the picture. In terms of where we go from here, I think that some of the issues that have come out of the conference are maybe about the politics of knowledge and the knowledge of politics but in trying to generate new concepts relevant to the world in the twenty-first century we need to think about the place that we stand as scholars, we in academia, and how that shapes the way that we form knowledge. How we 'make talk' across the boundaries of academia in order to generate new ways of thinking. And, just by way of a non-conclusion I suppose, listening to all the talks today and listening to what's been going on in the world recently it seems to me that we're in a really difficult situation not only in the Asia-Pacific region but around the world. Visions of future are no longer clear. There used to be a whole lot of political visions of the future. But we don't have that just now and again when listening to Kuan-Hsing's paper these questions of civil society have come back to the fact that we don't know really what (society) means any more, we don't have a vision of democracy, we don't have a vision of an alternative. And I think that one of the key issues for Asian scholars in the future is to talk to our counterparts around the Asian region in order to search for new visions, in search of new ways of filling the gaps left by the death of the visions that we had previously.

Chen

Just quickly to pick up on Tessa's last point. What I'd like to do is think that what is democracy cannot be prescribed. How do we think new possibilities after at least a century or two of experience? What are the conditions of possibility? Things are emerging. Maybe there no one over-arching prescription we could hold on to democracy. But in each different place what are the new possibilities emerging? So in that sense it's linked to the so-called cultural flow. Cultural flow, at least in my view, is not only about the flows though. What are the conditions of possibility of the flow? It's through the flow that we need to cut into, if you wish to talk about the base energy. I mean how does that cut into that? So it's an entry point for us to grasp or get hold of contradictory forces at work which generate flow or no flow. In that sense, let me say this. For me, Australia is actually an interesting site. I have been trying to argue without going right into it, I have been trying to argue that Australia is part of Asia, rather than think of it as something somewhere else. Because it never really has been in a hegemonic position in the

global structure. So in that sense to argue or suggest – the system of reference or referencing is actually a very simple practice in the sense that you read not because you are doing this research or that. How do we begin to know other places without having that sort of instrumental agenda in your head? So in other words, how do we reference each other so to speak. So what I'm trying to say is that to be able to become part of our references things have already entered into our cultural subjectivity. But academically, at least, once we see the references at the back of the paper which have generated the material out of the great spaces into a single heading or single body we might be able to show something, to generate new possibilities. I don't know what that will be, but I think the interesting thing is precisely the uncertainty and the whole goddam world's uncertain anyway.

Yoshino

I want to make an additional remark about what Kuan-Hsing said about the dichotomy between Euro-America and Asia. In the early eighties, I was doing my PhD in London and that experience made me an Anglophone. And when I went back to Japan I was dying to watch BBC but at that time only CNN was available. And I hated CNN because of the American accent. One night I was listening to what I thought was BBC – I started subscribing to cable television – but it turned out that it was actually CNN because CNN hired one of the former BBC newsreaders. And since then, I began to watch CNN and then they added one British and Australian news presenter. So I have become a fan of CNN. Which is quite interesting because their tactic is this. CNN had the accent of American-ness. I know Koichi has a word 'odour'. CNN has lost the American odour, the accent on American-ness. So CNN today doesn't sound like America – it sounds more British than American. And then if you watch CNN, BBC, CNN/BBC Asia and the channel News Asia which is based in Singapore they all sound more or less the same. They take in various types of accents from all over the world including Asia. They even have, the BBC has in fact recently acquired a Filipina, Filipino who has a fairly obviously Filipino accent. What I'm trying to say there is that what is Asia and what is not Asia is not at all clear. The boundaries between what is Asia and what is not Asia have become less and less clear. And this has come about by – I think CNN has made a very clever move by taking in differences, taking in hybridities, taking in many local flavours, accents, and odours. And here I was reminded about what (Michael Hart?) and (Daniel/Donald McCaughey?) wrote about empire. In the 1980s when I hated CNN we were still living in the Asia of a colonialism or an imperialism where you have the centre which dominates the periphery. But today maybe we are living in the age of empire where the parts are decentralised and de-territorialised. And this is where a lot of the multinational corporations come in. CNN is a very good example of an empire-like

multinational corporation. And then if you think about what kind of jobs university graduates in Japan today, for example, want to take. When I was an undergraduate Mitsui was the most popular of trading companies but today many of the graduates are looking for jobs in multinational companies. It is a big thing to get a job with a multinational corporation and globalisation is involved, so my conclusion is that do we have to keep concerning ourselves with Asian studies or what is Asia? Don't we have to pay attention to something broader, something like empire or whatever?

Makarand

I think, like Professor Iwabuchi said, Asian studies should be more about how Asians understand themselves than about how the West understands us. For that to happen, the borders of what constitutes Asian studies will need to be changed because as a person from South Asia it is not at all clear whether South Asia is a part of Asian studies – it normally isn't. People stop at Burma. So it's not surprising that this is my first Asian studies conference and I would have never have come here had it not been for the fact of the shifting borders of my own discipline which is post-colonial studies or my own region that is South Asia from where I'm speaking. So much so that post-colonial studies intercepts with what one might perceive as the shifting borders of Asian studies itself. To me, then, it is this idea of the border which could be the key to the future of Asian studies. Whatever is going to happen to this discipline. And this is a key trope. But to me border studies is not about the study of borders as we saw yesterday in Prof. Morris-Suzuki's speech about policing borders. But to me the border is a space which I occupy myself or to put it differently the border is a space which can be the subject position of the discipline of Asian studies itself. Now, what do I mean by that? I think that this means that the discipline of Asian studies itself becomes a kind of border. Clearly, it has the possibility of paradoxically finding itself at the centre of a lot of conversations and a lot of exchanges so that this will not then be a border that needs policing or which enforces certain protocols of knowledge. But it will in fact be a borderless border which problematises what constitutes the so-called mainland of scholarship about Asia itself. And I think that it is this kind of border positioning or re-positioning which will unlock the creative possibilities of Asian studies.

Neustupny

I lived here about thirty years ago – actually it was exactly thirty years ago in 1972. I was invited to a university in Australia up in Sydney to ask students with the selection of their graduation thesis. And what I found out was that actually the method had already been decided. They were sent to the library and they found a collection of local histories in the library – a book about the Kanagawa Prefecture, another one about another prefecture – and they were given each of them one of

these books and on the basis of that book they were supposed to write their graduation thesis. Quite apart from the fact that it was linguistically not always accessible there was also the fact that the city in which the university was located was already full of Asia, it was already full of Japan. There was a very large Japanese community there. But the tradition of Japanese studies and Asian studies in general was studying Asia apart from Australia. What, of course, happened later was that contact situations – the concept of contact came in – and that Australia in general and perhaps particularly at Monash it was contact between Australia and Japan that became the basic topic of study. It is still believed today that there is little justification still at this moment for the study of Asia in other valid contact situations. Contact between Asia and Australia – that is the topic, that is the primary aim of Asian studies in Australia. The second point I would like to make is that what we need is the study of interaction. Not just contrastive studies but the study of interaction what is actually happening in contact. And that is very important in considering the requirement of micro-methodology rather than macro-methodology which can't really catch all those things. Another point that I'd like to make is that we also need a better theory of power because obviously the relationship between Asia and the rest of the world is a relationship that is very much marked by power. There are at this moment different theories of power which are everywhere, in linguistics – we have got a lot of that. And I'm thinking we have to get across this to get a conception of power which is more realistic which is more suitable for scholarship in the twenty-first century.

Mouer

Thank-you very much. I'm not sure how best one can tie these together. Maybe that one doesn't need to and that it might be good just to flow over to the questions. But I thought something that came through was this – maybe I can just start out with the notion of power. Someone mentioned that we need a new concept of democracy. The old concept – there was agreement about what it was. Having grown in the United States in the 1960s I never saw democracy as a coherent concept and I think that one of the debates that was always there and always has been 'what is democracy'. That seems to be ongoing I don't see that as new. But that problematisation of democracy is an ongoing problem, the question of power is an ongoing problem. It relates to the whole question of inequality. Nobody's really touched upon the question of inequality and how does inequality both outside and inside Asia relate to Asian studies. And I just wanted to see if there was anyone here who wanted to comment on that just briefly.

Makarand

Actually, the question of power and the question of inequality are really tied together, so all the people that wonder about questions of inequality and how best to articulate enabling struggles against inequality start with the very construction

of Asian studies

- Audience** There was a word which came up in Rommel's presentation earlier. I'm not sure if it was a misspelling or not but it sounded particularly apt with relation to Makarand's statements about being in the edge of the mainland which was 'rapturing borders'.
- Makarand** I shall write that down!
- Audience** Just a general comment really. The whole discussion has been quite abstract in many ways. I was just wondering on a more practical level how universities need to change. We were talking about a lot of the developments in Australia, Tokyo University was mentioned, how that's changing, becoming more bureaucrat, form-filling and that sort of thing. Now, from a postgraduate student's point of view who's looking for work in a year or two the situation seems very bleak. Now if we're talking about how to reinvigorate or revitalise Asian studies I guess you need some new blood, new ideas. The flow of post-graduate students will be important. Any comments on that, on the future of the university system.
- Yoshino** I don't have to worry about Asian studies because I'm in the sociology department. You have to worry about Asian studies because as a student of Asian studies it's your vision so it's an important question. What is Asia, what is Asian studies. It is firstly linked with the financial constraints imposed upon the university system. So I think it's very important to (look at the funding).
- Neustupny** I left Monash – perhaps not everybody in the audience knows – I left Monash in 1993 and compared with the period before I can see little development in Asian studies since then. There are individual instances, for instance we never had anything like the possibility of the panel which took place this morning. Otherwise, I can't see much development and this is, if it's true...
- Tokita** Well, I'd like to counter that observation in a way because although it's because of the government's closing down of funding over the previous flow of money – we've been rationalised into different structures. Whereas before we had Japanese studies as a fairly solid kingdom in the faculty we were forced to merge into Asian studies. Now that I think has some effect on the Japanese section that was merged in. It's hard to say exactly what happening, but myself definitely I've opened out into some more Asian studies things. From this year we've been forced by economic exigencies again to merge with European studies and linguistics so we're no longer Asian studies except in a slightly unofficial way. We're actually something more like international studies or Eurasian studies, it's hard to say.

We're still language and area studies but it's much less confined to the Asian context and although we didn't choose it – we were forced into it – in fact we're in a different place, a totally place I think from ten years ago.

Morris-Suzuki I just thought that I'd like to pick up on some of those points in a ASAA hat briefly. Because we have been doing this survey over the past few months anyway among Australian universities. And what we've generally found is that there have been some interesting developments in the sense that there's been a sort of diffusion of knowledge. But also there's been a lot of stagnation and a lot of decline in many areas. And the solution to that I guess is, first of all, to go out and knock on your MP, the government, the state government – we've been trying fairly hard from the ASAA's point of view. We've published a report which is called, 'Maximising Australia's Asian Knowledge'. But also I think that one of the things that we tried to say in the report is partly to do with lobbying government, but also things that can be done within the constraints of universities. I think more exchange between graduate students in Australia and graduate students in Asia is really important and we've done a little bit of that again here and it's been fantastic. More exchange amongst scholars of Asia within the Asian region and again some of the things we've been trying to promote, we've had a couple of conferences with other Asian scholars in the region. And maybe more collaboration that goes not only across the border between Australia and other parts of Asia but also across the border between academia and non-academia. So, just to give one concrete example, at the ANU we've had a couple of really interesting conferences around national security and human rights issues bringing in scholars from around the region but also lawyers and NGOs and things like that. And I think that there are possibilities for those sort of things.

Kuan-Hsing Actually, basically, for post-graduate students or PhD students, you are the ones actually shaping the field. Well, let me try to specify what I mean. My generation of scholars – we didn't have any sense of working for your job. You do what you're interested in, in which you have commitment intellectually. If you're good enough you will surpass – they can't block you. Within the discipline itself you're able to insert yourself into other spaces. And cultural studies – what's that? There was no research body called cultural studies. In general, not only in (England) but across Asia. So, if you believe in what you're doing rather than following the limits or the boundaries. I think if you've doing that then you just have to break the existing possibility and commit. I think you really have a strong commitment you can develop your own possibility. And that's what I mean by graduate students are actually shaping. In my experience, actually graduate students are on top of things. Once you become faculty don't have time to go through all the

library journals and all that, right?

Yoshino Meetings

Kuan-Hsing In the last several years of [being] a post-graduate student you are really on top of your research field. Much better than any of the faculty. To some extent better than your supervisor. You read all this stuff – reconstruction of the discipline, constraints on funding, constraints on the university. But I think that this is also a ????. If you are doing rigorous good work you will be there

Yoshino Don't you agree that it would be more exciting to discuss with PhD students than amongst ourselves. I had a wee chat with you [points out member of audience] and you have a fascinating research topic. Would you like to comment a little bit about it?

Audience [explains research topic]

Yoshino I just wanted to say that some of the students are doing more interesting things than we are

Iwabuchi What is the relationship between Asian studies and Asian-Australian studies? We are talking about a kind of Asian-Australian studies and Asian studies location

Tokita Yes, because it included Diaspora

Iwabuchi I haven't seen a paper about [the relationship between] Asian studies and Asian-Australian studies. Where Asian-Australian comes in.

Tokita Well, we've been for about five years or so doing a series of annual things on Australia-Japan relations. Quite a strong group, usually bringing people from interstate or sometimes Japan. So it's an occasional thing just once a year but people are publishing in that area. But it's not Asia. It's still rather a bilateral not a multilateral study, focusing on Australia and Japan.

Iwabuchi In the ANU they have students doing Australian-Asian studies?

Morris-Suzuki Yes, it's an expanding area we do have a number of students working there. Also, one thing we're doing next week is having a conference which is bringing together people from the Asian studies association and from the federation of ??? just to talk about how those in Asian studies can collaborate best with ???

Audience If I could just make a point. I was really interested in the idea of the boundaries between Asian and non-Asia blurring. And kind of linking that to the point of

Australia being part of Asia. And I liked Kuan-Hsing's point about trying to sell this idea about Australia being part of Asia. And just on a personal level, I try to sell that point myself whilst travelling in Asia and I haven't got very far at all. You know 99% of people you talk to, people you meet wherever in China or in Malaysia or Indonesia or wherever will say 'no' – Australia is not part of Asia. I just wondered if anyone had any comments about that.

Yoshino Isn't Australia becoming more and more part of Anglo-American English-speaking environment

Audience Yes, I think culturally it's not part of Asia in a lot of ways. But I personally would like to see it and presumably Kuan-Hsing's arguing for Australia as part of Asia. I guess the idea of having a conference like this is perhaps to make some of those connections stronger.

Kuan-Hsing The economic part. Seventy-percent of Australian overseas investment is in East Asia. This might see a kind of political shifting within Australian national politics – kind of re-locating itself. I don't know that story. But from the other side. For me it would be more interesting to have Australia to be part of Asia. It would make it more sort of fluid. More what? Actually, most of us don't know too much about Australia at all. We know if you want to imagine Anglo-America but you came to Australia we probably know nothing. But I think that Australian intellectual work is different. When I read them. I'm not saying that they don't follow certain theoretical concepts because they do. But there is that difference to be realised and also self-realised. And so in that sense reading Australian work is much more different than reading work generated out of England or the U.S. That's what I've been trying, I guess imagining possibility. Whether (vice-versa) it can be the same thing.

Audience Yes, to push your point you made in your talk earlier this morning about within Asian context the West is up here. Perhaps reversing that for Australia, like Asia is up here. Rather than something 'out there'. Which is just the sense I get of being here over the past few days is that Asia is something 'over there'.

Neustupny Someone who has lived both in Australia and in Asia for decades, I'd be inclined to say that Australia is not Asia at all. Possibly it is the understanding of Asia [in Australia] – up to what extent this will develop. That's a matter I think for the next decades. Perhaps in one of the coming decades Australia can apply for associate membership in Asia but at this moment I doubt very much that we can truly say that it is Asia.

- Mouer** I think coming through with students studying the language, from here learning about Asia that's probably true. I just wondered what's the role of living in Asia. One comes back with a very different point of view living in Asia for fifteen, twenty years as you yourself have done. Also relates to the sites of references. You can't have those sites of references really without living somewhere. I guess exchange programmes are a very simple form for one year. But more interconnectedness between Asia and Australia opens up the possibility of getting a better feeling for those different sites.
- Neustupny** Yes, of course. And another side of the issue is the fact that Asia – it's not only Australia which is changing it's also Asia which is changing. If one wants to base one's attachment on personal experience it's probably necessary not to go and come back but to be going and coming. And then one can say more about it.
- Kuan-Hsing** Can I quickly follow upon that. My point is for you to be in Japan and then you will say you will say that Australia is not part of Asia is like me going to India and saying it's not part of Asia. There is no cultural unity. You know, you can't say. So that does that mean?
- Neustupny** That's of course a question which should be discussed. There are people like you who say that there is no unity but there are people who say 'yes'.
- Kuan-Hsing** But what is the common ground between India and China? Where is the unity?
- Yoshino** I think the title of this conference illustrates that, like you say, that cultural flows with and in Asia. I've been doing a fair amount of work on CNN and CNN East Asia and I went to CNN East Asia in Singapore. And as they said, there are several feeds they can choose. There's an Asian feed which is directed to South East Asia/Singapore and then an Indian feed because the Indian audience is interested in different things. The like debates and they like argumentations. And then there's an Australian feed. Because they said that basically Australians are not interested in Asia but they are interested in Australia's relationship with Asia. So does it make sense to you? Is that what you're arguing?
- Mouer** Probably in terms of feeding the masses it fits in
- Audience** I just think there's a big gap between consciousness on the part of the Australian public. An overwhelming majority of Australian citizens don't think Australia is a part of Asia. But I think there's a strong tendency certainly amongst the academic elite to push this notion that we are. And I'm just wondering why this huge gap exists between the two. If we're looking at revitalising Asian we need to sort of go beyond the ivory tower and try to rationalise and make the general public

understand what we're doing. If we don't it's going to be very difficult to try and use the public as a source of that revitalisation.

Mouer Prof. Morris-Suzuki has been involved might like to comment on that

Morris-Suzuki I might do but...

Audience Just briefly. I think those moves are already happening. I mean I really do. I think there is a public engagement and use of Asia – I find those bigger structures, this ivory tower idea and even the ideas of trade flows lagging behind a lot of the more everyday engagements and contacts with what could be broadly termed Asia-Australia. Maybe even popular culture. I mean there's so much happening in popular culture that's really interesting and really far ahead of anything that's happening between governments or multinational corporations. And the links that seem to be forming and the friendships and the languages that are being spoken. New languages I think in terms of languages of music, karaoke box or karaoke pub in Australia, languages of drawing – I certainly have done really interesting lectures for design classes at my university in UTS where the class has been full of Asians and Australians and their engagement. Learning this medium of drawing and flash animation they're really interesting. Animating Japaneseness and Asian-ness. I think there are these new languages, mediums, and technologies that are superseding those older structures of government and even multi-national corporations.

Mouer Perhaps Tessa would like to comment on that?

Morris-Suzuki My response to that was yes, on the one hand, I think that we need to do much more about getting education about various aspects of Asia into schools. But maybe one of the most important tasks of that is deconstructing the monolithic image of the Asia 'out there'

Audience In the context of all that discussion I was very much reminded of what appeared to me as a falling away from the idea of Australia wanting to be a part of Asia about ten years ago when governments changed in Australia. I don't know if my perception of that is correct. I can't properly remember but I seem to remember that there was an awful lot of extremely positive rhetoric coming from federal government level at that time that suddenly saw a complete reversal with the change of government. I think that was really profound.

Mouer I wonder if there's any comments? I'm aware of the time just carrying on. Some of the speakers need to leave to catch flights elsewhere. If there's no other pressing questions I think we'll bring this session to a close. I think before we go

off we should all thank Alison for bringing us together [applause].