

Dr KIM HONG-HEE:

Thank you for your kind introduction, thank you. Good morning, everybody.

As I introduced now, I'm Kim Hong-hee, director of Ssamzie Space and artistic director of 2006 Guangzhou Biennale. It is a great pleasure for me to have an opportunity to deliver my presentation for 2006 ACCF symposium cultural ecologies. I like to thank you, all the organization team, especially to Oscar and Clare for inviting me as a speaker and I feel very proud to be part of this event.

I would like to discuss today about the alternative space, one of the most influential factors to change the cultural ecology these days in Asia, under the title of the significance of alternative spaces as seen through the characteristics of Korean alternative spaces and the challenges they have.

One of the new cultural phenomena witnessed in contemporary Asia since the 1990s is the emergence and the burgeoning of alternative institutions such as alternative art spaces and biennales. As was the case in the U.S. in the 1970s, the alternative spaces in Asia emerged largely in the spirit of challenging modernistic culture and the status quo led by minority community groups. These non-profit organizations emerged as an anti-hegemonic force that transformed the order of existing art world by advocating cutting edge and post-genre art neglected by public art museums and commercial art galleries and thus suggesting new institutional and aesthetic paradigms.

However, more important than these pursuit of alternatives in general is that -- is the fact that these spaces were aware of the temporal and geographical differences of Asia in the 1990s and have defined new goals that are different from those of the western alternative spaces in the past. That is to promote non-western values along with efforts to remap Asia in the world of contemporary art.

These attempts start from the reflection on what Asia is. The repeatedly changing contemporary Asia, the dynamic Asia in the global domain has not just one single face but various ones. Asia exists in the various spectrums from Asianistic Asia with its undeniable identity, to trans-Asia features no longer the existing Asia.

Certain perceptions on Asia are represented as various differences in the work of artists today who are struggling with the identity problems with the -- between the two axis, tradition and reforms, originally globalism, past and present and east and west, homogenic heterogenic, purity and hybridity.

Here, alternative space serves as a cognitive signifier as well as a partial metrics of their works. Korean artists share the global vision to expand Asian effect into new cosmopolitanism establishing the history of alternative space. However, they have acquired their own features and set specific goals amid careers unique social, political circumstances.

In my presentation in this symposium, I will examine the salient aspects that characterize alternative spaces in Korea, the challenges they face and the role they play. In doing so, I would like to reflect with the participants on the meaning of the alternative and the legitimacy of the alternative spaces.

The presentation will first cover this spatiotemporal context of alternative space in Korea which emerged in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, IMF crisis, and located mostly in the Seoul metropolitan city. I will then discuss the structural and systemic characteristics of these spaces which are alternative, independent but at the same time, dependent on government and corporate funds to survive, from the perspective of institutional and policy changes. Next, the orientation and the aspiration of Korean alternative spaces which are typically characterized by new generation artists and leading globalization of the art world in Korea will be examined. The presentation will be concluded with the suggestion that through international -- international networking, alternative space in Korea would function as a conduit for spreading the popularity of

South Korean popular culture in other Asian countries, otherwise known as hallyu, in the form of visual art.

This, the section that is called the spatiotemporal context of the emergence of Korean alternative space. Korean alternative space emerged in the end of the 1990s, to be more specific, in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, IMF. The Korean economy which enjoyed the skyrocketing economy growth in the peak of the 1980 Seoul Olympic Games certainly faced a financial crisis at the end of the '90s inevitable to be cast to below packaging from the IMF.

However, the circumstances in turn triggered the artistic circle in Korea to come up with the idea of emergence of a new space to overcome the crisis. The so-called alternative space, the small-scaled independent and the progressive space emerged as a driving force to transform the landscape of Korean art work -- art world.

The first example of this was SSamzie Art Project launched by SSamzie Company in 1998. As its model is genuine artist praying from crisis, Ssamzie operated its practical and concrete artistic programs by providing studios and supporting domestic and overseas exhibitions for young artists who faced the severe hardship of artistic activities, especially in the period of financial restraints.

In 1999, Loop, Sarubia, and Pool, the artists-formed community-based non-profit alternative space were founded. Loop was established by the joint investment of the artists created from the Chicago Art Institute, while Pool, which carried on the spirit of the history Min-jung art, that is people's art, was launched as an art people's association, including artists and critics. Lastly, Sarubia was opened in the famous cafeteria named Sarubia in Insa-Dong, Seoul, in the investment of the then artists and sponsors.

In 2000, SSamzie Art Project was moved to Hong-ik University area, where -- and relaunched as SSamzie Space, a multi-cultural space equipped with rt studios, galleries, theatres and clubs. SSamzie Space, now, stepping over from the specific-based support to financially-struggling artist, had the aim of discovering creative

young artists who could serve as growing spot in the Korean art world and providing them with opportunities of domestic and overseas activities. It's sprouting various advanced programs. It played the role of incubating youth art, cutting-edge art and post-genre art.

In the same year, Insa Art Space and Ilju Art Center opened with a similar agenda which signaled the era of alternative space in full flexion. Insa Art Space, a national institution had transcended itself from bureaucracy, leads formation of national and international networks via exhibition, seminar and symposium. Ilju Art Center, under the Taiwan Group acted as a media center, leasing space on a free of charge, equipped with a gallery, theatre and editing room in the Hung-Guo Life Insurance Building, located in the center of Seoul.

All these spaces emerged in the huge metropolitan city of Seoul which has more than a six hundred year history tradition as a capital city passed down from the Chosen Dynasty. At the same time, it has become the birthplace of alternative space as a metropolis, as a leading modernized city.

True, the words city and modern art seemed like synonyms by their reciprocal relationship. But the former acts as the backdrop of birthplace and a special cradle for alternative space and biennales. This is exemplified by the fact that most biennales are given a city name or the fact that alternative space ritualized the specific site or the specific region as the site venues.

In particular, given the fact that Asia's modernization process is based on construction of new cities and flourishing all one cultures and that art culture is fully dependent on the locality and dynamism of modern cities, one can understand the spread of alternative space that repeatedly develops in many cities in east Asia since the '90s, including Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei and Tokyo.

Representative alternative spaces in Seoul, including SSamzie Space, Loop, Sarubia, fully justified the importance of the localities from all of east Asia by locating themselves in

Insa-Deong or around the Hong-ik University. The significance of the site specificity, that is to instrumentize the place where it is located and to guarantee the alternativeness from the place itself is clearly emphasized by specializing the well-known places such as Insa-Dong, the place of traditional culture, and Hong-ik University area, the originating source of the youth culture.

In particular, SSamzie Space and Loop observe cultural nourishment and given the special identity from the culturally-unique environment of the Hong-ik University area, which is the university zone where artist practices and critical intellectualism is melted in autonomy and it is the fusion culture district where high art and popular art and entertainment criss-cross. And it is the professional site which leads fashion culture and night culture of rock cafe and techno bars. And it is also the underground district where the prototype of alternative space such as power plant and the draw had already existed.

And next section is the structural and systematic characteristics of Korean alternative spaces. Unlike Loop, Sarubia and Pool, the community and friendship-based alternative space built based on voluntary will and specific needs of artists, SSamzie Space and Insa Art Space and Ilju Art Center are organizations managed by public funds or sponsorship under the umbrella of government or companies. These organizations, along with SK media center, Ya-koos gallery, You-dok, PosKul Gallery of Poskul, and Chong-Dong studio and Goi-young studio supported by minister of culture and tourism serve as new spaces, diversifying the configuration of alternative space in Korea.

These organizations are free from financial burden as they depend on sponsorship from the -- from their foundation to basic management stages but that is what put their identity into doubt as alternative space.

However, as government-sponsored policy toward alternative space improves and as the organizations like Pool, Loop, Sarubia are more highly dependent on government funds, the line between the affiliated organization and the independent space has become blurry.

As long as the alternative feature is maintained, there is wide-spread awareness that their justification as alternative space is guaranteed, regardless of the form of the organization.

Improvements in government support and corporate sponsorships imply how the national policy and business minds have changed and at the same time, the possibility of establishing a new corporate relationship between the art world and the government as well as the art world and the business circle. The government develops artistic and communal values and acquire cultural competitiveness as added value without forward-looking art policy, targeting non-institutional, non-mainstream, especially marginalized new generation artist, transcending from the bureaucratic and the institutional art form.

At the same time, business boosts the charities period focusing on seeking for talents in creating a communal environment and encourage mutual cooperation among the art and business worlds to upgrade the corporate image. They also explore a new concept of art marketing as a new promotion strategy, linking the corporate image and the innovative artist image as in the case of SSamzie Space.

Under these circumstances, national and public modern art museums, private art museums and some commercial art galleries are seeking for transformation, narrowing the gap with alternative space. By lowering the existing barriers, national and public art museums invite young and non-mainstream artists and host progressive exhibitions. In particular, private and commercial institutions such as Rodan Gallery, Kuksa Gallery and Pekane Gallery, sharing visions with alternative spaces, select the artist, grown up through SSamzie Space, Sarubia and provide them with opportunities to exhibit their works, thus generating a sacculating change for the growth of emerging artists.

In short, alternative spaces in Korea have an ambivalent position, while they are confrontational, critical, again it is the deep-rooted values of the government agencies and business. They align with them at the same time. Furthermore, by siding with

public and private art museums and commercial art galleries and by blurring the line between the established and alternative space and by expanding the alternative activities scope, they transform the order of the existing art world. They fulfill the task of communication and participation, not provided by the mainstream art galleries and give the opportunities to young artists, less privileged regions and experimental projects. That is, their mission and programs are independent and alternative but their alternative creativity is applied to government policies over cultural marketing. When new strategies in such a way to maintain symbiotic relationship and not a hostile one with the public institution or establishments. And this section deals with the orientation and aspirations of Korean alternative space, characterized by new generation artists who are leading the task of globalization. As is suggested above, the emergence of alternative space boosted new generation artists and transformed the landscape of the Korean art world.

In fact, one of the major characteristic of alternative space in Korea is that it is characterized and represented by new generation artists who lead a fast adaptation to changes and become the driving force to change. The other forms of alternative space in the west were diversified in specific directions based on the consciousness of the minority communities, such as feminism, the third world and the homosexuality, et cetera. By contrast, the alternative space in Korea including SSamzie Space uniformly focus on exploring experimental young artists and supporting them. There is nothing like space for women, space for gays in Korea. Ilju Art Center has been characterized as the center of media but as is the feature of media, it serves as a center for young artists as well.

Alternative space and new generations may be compared to the two sides of a coin. As such, they are connected together based on mutual synergy effects where the development of alternative space goes hand in hand with the emergence of new generations as a new force and alternative space have become more and more mainstream for them together, their force.

Furthermore, this phenomena is deepened as some artists find prescriptive meaning for alternativeness, in individual creativity rather than in social communication or publicity and subdue the subversive impulse into parody. As long as the relationship between new generations and alternative space is concerned, it goes back to the early 1990s which is the time frame prior to official history of alternative space at the end of the '90s. Only new generation artists like Lee Boo and Chek Hung-wa, who led the underground artistic movement via small self-activities, utilized everyday spaces such as coffee and live club as alternative space and challenge it, the existing art circle, with post-modern sensibility where kitsch-like conventionality, mass media friendliness and avant-garde criticism co-existed.

The information artist, who are now the international artist, representing the Korean contemporary art started from -- started off as underground artists. By contrast, the post-new generation artist who emerged from the scene of the official alternative history from the late '90s, are joining the mainstream in the names of overground, starship, internationalization and globalization from all the stage of their career. In particular, advancement into the international stage for the post-new generation artist has become their biggest aspirations and final goal to achieve.

Here, one needs to pay attention to the fact that the mission of internationalization and globalization function as the creative inspiration and motivation which provided them as contents. Amid the symptom of diversification of centers, normalism and global village, they strive to converge with others and outside world based on care-free and intellectual open-mindedness and the normal energies. By doing so, they suggest a new vision which is global and local at the same time and try to manifest themselves and their works as local hybrid model. The hybrid dynamism, cultural normalism, cosmopolitan Asia and the new Asia identity become the collective sensitivity of the emerging artist in the late '90s.

In their works, one can recognize the various views and differentiated points of view toward Asia along with the vestige of aesthetic and cognitive struggle, conflicting between tradition



and new identity, Asianist and trans-Asia and new Asian and cosmopolitan Asia. Some artists such as Choi Jung-hwa, Lee Su-kyung and Ham Kyung-ah, utilize Korean traditions and Asian spirit as the motivation for subject, style and medium, thus creating a new aesthetic identity. This is Choi Jung-hwa, this is Choi Jung-hwa.

And others, like Kim Hong-suk, Jung Yeon-doo and Yang Hye-kyu come up with a complex idea transcending Korea and Asian locality and establish their own cosmopolitan aesthetics. These two pieces by Kim Hong-suk, and Jung Yeon-doo and Yang Hye-kyu.

There are other veins of artist like Park Chan-kyung, Flying City, and Mix Rice, who criticize and reflect on socio-political realities concerning the inter-Korean conflicts, urban development, diaspora, and migration labor from the post-colonial perspective, changing and expanding the Min-jung art spirit of the late '80s into a new dimension. Park Chan-kyung, Flying City, and Mix Rice.

At the same time, many alternative space artists who grew up with the SSamzie Space, Loop, Insa Art Space, exercised their capacity as global artists by being invited to overseas residency programs and international exchange exhibitions or participating in domestic and other symbiosis, while showing differences not only in style, medium themes but also in concepts in visual and social tendencies. As conclusion, so we would like to propose alternative space in Korea to serve as a conduit for spreading hallyu, creativity and exhibition activities as new generation artists gain forceable power from international networking. International networking creates hypertext-based on transterritorial activities and suggest a new vision for globalization and cosmopolitanism as a testing ground for international exchange which leads to possibilities of global symbiosis. The lessons learned from the '80s on are numerous, experience with biennales international conferences were the globalization is not a confrontation with what is local but is a significant encounter between the Asian artist world and also the globalization has to return to roots eventually. However, in order not to mislead too popular exhaustivism or colonialist orientalism, we need to establish a new criticism which analyzes the difference

among Asian countries with ambivalent cause. Based on openness, flexibility, diversity and more intellectual aesthetics which go beyond the national boundaries and the east-west dichotomy, Asia could move the center of gravity from western powers and become a subject of transformation, subverting the order of world hierarchy.

In particular, alternative space in Korea via Asian network promote opportunities for direct exchange and information, sharing among Asian neighbors whom they only knew through the west in the past. Especially when we consider that what is appealing to the new generation of east Asian countries, who try to expand their own traditions and native culture into cosmopolitanism, is a new quality of contemporary Asia, coming from the subtle mixture of culture hybridity, the combination of Koreanist and westernist which is represented by hallyu, the Korean wave.

We may carefully proposing the possibility of continuity of a hallyu of a pop culture and hallyu of a visual art. That is to expect to see hallyu in visual art moving Asia art from periphery to center, along with the popular hallyu trend where new Asian icons emerges -- emerging replacing stars from Europe and hallyu in America.

Here alternative space and biennale could serve as a conduit for spreading hallyu. Whether or not those are to spread as hallyu, alternative space in Korea would be able to achieve the task of alternative space in Asia to search for non-western values and realize democratic communication via international networking and by aligning with other intra-Asian institutions.

Thank you very much.