

# Editor's Notes

## HAIL TO CULTURE, art and expression!

These three themes link the articles in this volume through their respective explorations of artistic forms, pedagogy, socio-cultural functions, and narratives ,as well as issues concerning continuity in change and change in continuity. In decidedly interdisciplinary ways, the authors of these articles engage Philippine and Asian (in this particular case, Japanese) culture and society through processes of creative examination of *art*, *artistry* and *artifact*.

Dinah Sianturi looks at literary expression and its power to construct specific images of peoples, places and things. In this particular article, Sianturi discusses the effects and impact of travel writings or narratives on the “image” of Japan as viewed by individuals from other countries, especially from the West. A well-known poetess in her own right, Sianturi does not underestimate the power of the word to create images and other mental constructs that sometimes outlive the phenomena they seek to capture. True enough, one can end up captured by travel writings from the past, smitten by nostalgia and yearning for what has come to pass. Sianturi points out that travel writings should be approached as “problematic sources” that should be understood in a specific context and culture, which in turn is reflective of the writer’s biases, prejudices and values. This aspect of being problematic particularly rings true in Japan’s “old/new” binary image that is often conflated with descriptions of the “vanishing,” “lost,” “hidden” and, “modern.”

Lisette Robles examines the contemporary Japanese *bunko*, which may be seen as a community library operating at a small scale. In recent times, the phenomenon has come to be known as a privately funded and volunteer-operated library for children. The bunko provides children access to a wide range of literature and a good reading environment. Robles identifies two variables that are distinctively present in the bunko: the spirit of volunteerism and the strong presence of bunko women. She sees the bunko as a venue of social and cultural transformation at the level of

the local community, reflecting larger changes within Japanese society. The bunko emerged from the perceived needs of the community appears to facilitate the establishment of a sound foundation for the development of cultural as well as functional literacy.

Rachmi Diyah Larasati's piece is decidedly political in context and content. Larasati examines how dance as an artifact of "engendered culture" is used to pursue the needs of the state. The state in Larasati's case is that of post-Sukarno Indonesia, a state that needed to recover its bearings after a spate of anti-communist violence. It seems that after the so-called 1965-1967 debacle, a period that saw indiscriminate persecution of individuals and groups that suspected of communist leanings, the Indonesia state sought to deflect attention from its violent tendency to quell dissent by supporting culture. Larasati notes that a "choreographed national identity" was promoted to secure the trust of the international community. Although enjoying various degrees of success in portraying a benign Indonesia rooted in ancient cultures, mainly that of Bali and Central Java, the Indonesian state also opened avenues for women to participate in this process of re-creating the nation. Larasati's piece underscores the limits of state power in the face of highly unpredictable forces of cultural and national transformation.

Art in Edric C. Calma's piece comes in the surprisingly unique form of a lamb sculpted out of potato preserve. This is the *Cordero*, the local interpretation of the *agnus dei*, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, made collaboratively and sponsored each year by a different *hermano mayor* (literally: big brother). Calma notes the Cordero refers to all of the following: the potato-based local delicacy, the procession that snakes through the town exhibiting the potato lamb, the ritual of sharing it among participants, and the feast held on Maundy Thursday. He examines the Cordero in aesthetic terms and situates it within social context of the community. He then proceeds to shows how it "reconstitutes" the community from which it emerges through processes of collaboration, performance and assignment of roles.

Carmita Eliza J. Icasiano interrogates art education in the Philippines through the lenses of craft studies. Icasiano observes that in contrast with other Asian countries such as Korea and Japan, crafts are not well integrated in the Philippine education system. Instead, the fine arts, more particularly western genres like painting and sculpture, are privileged in schools and public spaces. To treat this seeming imbalance, Icasiano turns to Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) which she incorporates into craft studies. DBAE focuses on four so-called art disciplines: art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. She opines that the great variety of craft traditions across regions, combined with this approach, can make art education in the Philippines more meaningful, effective, and embedded in the local community.

Fame Pascua revisits the theme of the Philippine jeepney as art and yields very interesting, if not “radical” results. Effectively, Pascua’s study casts doubts on the appropriateness of jeepney art when seen only from a visual arts point of view. From a visual perspective, she takes to a different site of inquiry and relocates what can be interpreted as a “performative” or even a “performance art” perspective. Through an empirical study of the Cubao-Montalban route, and thorough interviews of drivers, passenger and manufacturers of the so-called “patók” jeepney, she brings attention to heretofore unstudied aspects of “jeepney as art,” such as attention to forms or distinct vehicle silhouettes, colors and illustration, auditory experience based on specific sound designs made by jeepney drivers, and the kinetic movement of the jeepney itself that is at times demanded by certain passengers. Indeed, the jeepney has, in terms of appreciation and criticism, moved from the level of “seen” art to experiential “artistry.”

This issue through the contributions of its authors celebrates the power of culture to shape and re-shape social discourses, to create new forms of expressions and categories of knowledge, and to interrogate emerging notions art, as well as ideas of nation in fluid and overlapping contexts of local, regional and global orders.

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