

ADDRESSING TRANSNATIONAL LEGACIES OF
COLONIALISM IN EAST ASIA:
CASES FROM CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART

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INTRODUCTION I

- Examine the contested legacies of colonialism in East Asia through the examples of contemporary Japanese art.
- Japan was a former imperial power, which invaded neighbouring countries and regions from the late 19th century to WWII.
- The colonial legacies in East Asia are essentially transnational.

INTRODUCTION 2

- “Site-specificity”: a keyword in the field of art history and critique since the emergence of “minimalism” and “public art” in the 1960s USA.
- A watershed: in the 1990s, more and more artists began paying attention to the social, political, and historical implications embedded in the particular spaces around which they worked.
- “the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes that organize urban life and urban space” (Miwon Kwon)

TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO CONTENTIOUS LOCATIONS

Motoyuki Shitamichi's *Torii* (2006–2012)

Mitsuhiro Okamoto's *The Reconstruction of Japanese Stone
Lantern* (2004–2005)

MOTOYUKI SHITAMICHI (LEFT)
MITSUHIRO OKAMOTO (RIGHT)



MOTOYUKI SHITAMICHI

TORII (2006–2012)

- *Torii*: a traditional Japanese gate commonly found at the entrance of a Shinto shrine
- *Torii* is a remaining symbol of imperial Japan's assimilationism.
- In addition to the East Asian countries and regions, including Manchuria (a puppet-state in the northeastern part of China created by Japan in 1932), Shitamichi also visited other territories occupied by Japan in the past, such as the Northern Mariana Islands (a current American territory) and Sakhalin (a current Russian territory).

MOTOYUKI SHITAMICHI
“TAICHUNG, TAIWAN” FROM THE *TORII* SERIES



MOTOYUKI SHITAMICHI
“SAKHALINSKAJA, RUSSIA” FROM THE *TORII* SERIES



MOTOYUKI SHITAMICHI

“MOKPO, SOUTH KOREA” FROM THE *TORII* SERIES



OKAMOTO MITSUHIRO
*THE RECONSTRUCTION OF JAPANESE STONE
LANTERN (2004–2005)*



THE AIR IN A DISPUTED TERRITORY

Meirō Koizumi's *Rite for a Dream (Today My Empire Sings)* (2016)

MEIRŌ KOIZUMI
RITE FOR A DREAM (TODAY MY EMPIRE SINGS) (2016)



THE YASUKUNI SHRINE



MEIRŌ KOIZUMI
AIR #1 (2016)



CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Art's ability to visualize transnational connectivity is instrumental to dissect the vexing territoriality configured through the cross-border expansions of Japan's colonialism in East Asia.
- A common thread: all artists regard a contested site as an integral medium for art making.
- The mutually beneficial relationship of visibility and spatiality in their artworks