JONATHAN DE HART

pop, politics and modern asia

YASUKUNI SHRINE, PHOTOGRAPH BY LEE CHAPMAN (TOKYOTIMES .ORG)

Asia has a long way to go in addressing its past and present political baggage. A more progressive spirit in the region's popular culture could help change the conversation.

Pop, Politics and Modern Asia

JONATHAN DEHART

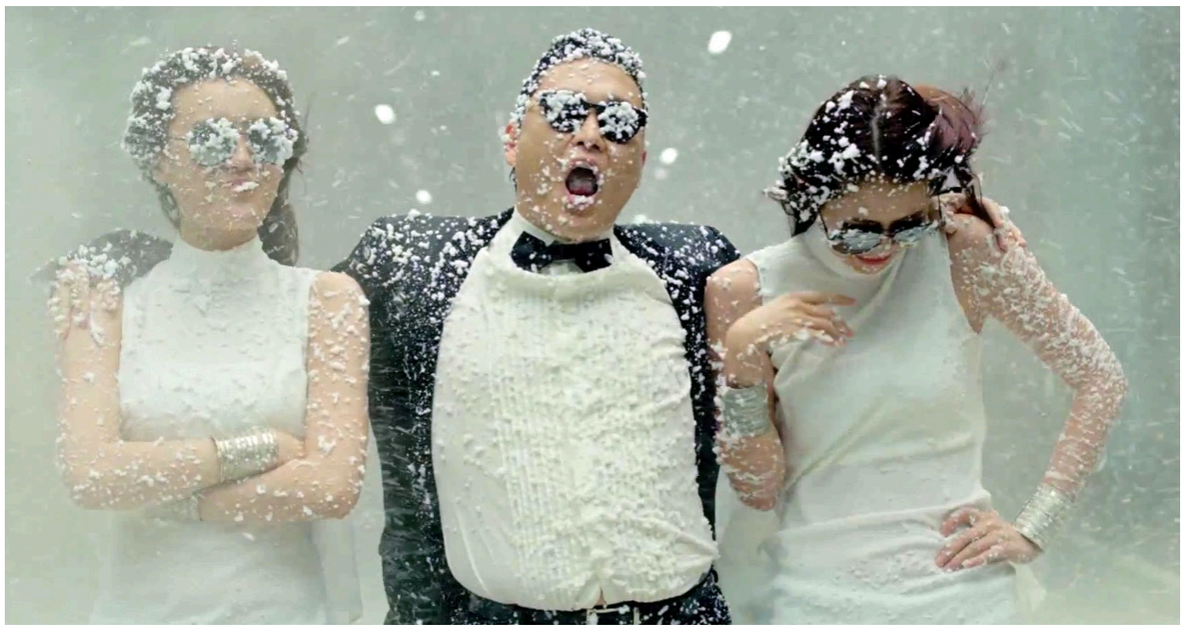
From Thailand's domestic meltdown and Myanmar's touch-and-go democratic transition to multiple territorial disputes emerging as flashpoints in the South China Sea, political tensions run high across Asia today. Chinese troops have massed near the Vietnamese border to send the message to Hanoi that Beijing means business in its quest to find oil in Vietnamese waters, and every trip by a Japanese politician to the contentious Yasukuni Shrine twists a knife into long-festering historical wounds. Recently, in defiance of widespread public opinion, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has radically departed from the nation's post-war pacifist constitution by lifting the post-WWII ban on Japanese forces fighting in conflicts overseas. The move was met with public outcry, with thousands demonstrating in front of Abe's residence and one man even setting himself alight in Tokyo's Shinjuku district in the ultimate act of protest.

An often-overlooked aspect of political tension is the way it tends to elicit a range of responses from artists and other cultural figures. From K-Pop and *manga* to cinema and the visual arts, the drama playing out in the political sphere also shakes thew pop edifice. Growing numbers of artists and cultural ambassadors are speaking out in favor of reconciling traumas past and present through dialog, and forging a new way forward.

To be sure, the reach of culture has its limitations. Mark Schilling, film critic for *The Japan Times*, asks: "Can something like Doraemon really transfer into an affection for Japan? Or how about the film *Pacific Rim*? I think you can say young anime fans from Europe or the US are really affected by pop culture. Some kids from France, for example, may feel a bit friendlier towards Japan. But is that really going to change government policy?"

Maybe not—but if you look closely enough, across the region culture can be seen not only mirroring the more regressive tendencies, but also hinting at a larger awakening.

K-Pop to K-Fizzle



To grasp the tenuous way pop culture can exert a positive influence across borders plagued by political tensions—as well as the way such tensions can spoil the buzz—the rise and fall of the "Korean Wave" (*hallyu*) offers a good case study. The peak of the Korean wave is perhaps best seen (and heard) in Psy's ubiquitous K-Pop track *Gangnam Style*—accompanied by its whacky "horse dance"—which had racked up more than two billion views on YouTube at the time of writing. That's more views than any other video on the video-sharing site has ever attracted. But long before Psy's video antics entered global pop consciousness, hallyu, from music to televised dramas, was already wooing Japan.

"In the early 2000's Japanese people would go to Korea to take tours devoted to K-Dramas (they still have them)," Patrick St. Michel, a Tokyo-based music critic, told *Kyoto Journal*. "Anecdotally, I knew lots of students who started learning about Korean culture, or the Korean language itself, after becoming interested in Girls' Generation, while I knew lots of older folks who traveled to Korea too because of TV shows."

This exercise of soft power did not only flow one way. St. Michel added: "I think the reverse is true in Korea, too, after Japanese pop-culture products were finally allowed into the country. I think, ideally, this sort of pop-culture exchange can help people become interested in cultures unfamiliar to them, and even encourage them to step out of their comfort zones to learn more."

Ideally, this sort of pop-culture exchange can help people become interested in cultures unfamiliar to them, and even encourage them to step out of their comfort zones to learn more.

Alas, the honeymoon was short-lived. While trends have a natural ebb and flow, in the case of hallyu, many have suggested that once hard political realities increasingly came to dominate headlines, the wave began to crash. "If you want an example of how the territorial disputes have been reflected in popular culture, just look at how the Korean Wave came to screeching halt in 2012 when the Dokdo/Takeshima and comfort women debates started heating up," Tokyo-based music writer James Hadfield said. "It's worth remembering that Girls' Generation had one of the best-selling J-pop albums of 2011—what happened?"

St. Michel explains that in the hallyu heyday of 2010-2011, groups like Girls' Generation and KARA were breaking music records and blowing up in the Japanese media. "That changed, though, first because following the March 11 earthquake/tsunami there was a swing back to Japanese music that only became stronger as political tensions with Korea (and China) intensified," he said.

In 2012, the long-contested Senkaku Islands (Diaoyou in Chinese) became the center of media attention when China intruded on the territory and former Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara said he would personally buy the uninhibited rocks, triggering anti-Japan protests across China. Around the same time, former South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak visited the disputed Liancourt Rocks, fueling tensions between Japan and South Korea.

St. Michel says a notable example of the ensuing blowout could be seen in Japan's 2012 *Kohaku Uta Gassen* year-end music program. "In the last few years, more and more K-Pop acts had been invited to perform, but it was a big deal when NHK decided to not invite any that year (carried over to last year)." This was followed by "a really drastic drop" in K-Pop media coverage and invitations to play in weekly music shows.

"There remains a devoted K-Pop fanbase in Japan, but they have become just a larger niche, whereas it

GIRLS GENERATION

To this day, it is illegal to broadcast Japanese music or television programs on terrestrial channels in South Korea

KYARY PAMYU PAMYU

was once a heavily promoted, inescapable trend," St. Michel adds. "There are also instances where concerts by Korean and Chinese performers have been cancelled due to tensions. I think that's all because of the political atmosphere in Japan, and because the media is so ready to embrace it."

While the rise and fall of the Korean Wave reveals the dance of culture and politics in an indirect way, a number of Japanese acts have made more explicit comments on the unfolding territorial crises. While St. Michel concedes that many of Japan's more nationalistic artists thrive on the fringe, he says that a few notable examples exist in the mainstream too.

"The closest things I can think of are uses of the Rising Sun flag by Japanese artists, often times accidentally—or at least that's how they play it off," he says. "Kyary Pamyu Pamyu posed with the flag for a New Year's greeting 'card' posted to her Twitter account, and that made many South Koreans angry." Unsurprisingly, Kyary canceled a concert in Seoul soon after the media firestorm that followed, although no one openly acknowledged that the cancelation was due to the tarnishing of her image in South Korea.

St. Michel explained that the Rising Sun flag sometimes pops up in bands' merchandise. A prime example is the hardcore band Maximum The Hormone, which has emblazoned the flag on items such as t-shirts. St. Michel says, "I'm not sure how political it is, [vs. it being] a case of people thinking it looks cool or not knowing the meaning behind it."

AKB 48 member Haruka Shimazaki in a recruitment commercial for the Japanese military.

Most recently, Shimazaki Haruka, a member of J-pop girl's idol group AKB 48, joined Abe's effort to revamp Japan's military by appearing in a rosy recruitment ad for the nation's Self Defense Force. The commercial, which avoids depicting even a trace of combat, debuted on the same day Abe overturned Article 9. That day flyers also arrived in the mailboxes of high schoolers across the nation inviting them to mull a military career, which viewers of Shimazaki's cheery pitch are told "abounds with unlimited dreams".

These seemingly minor provocations in the pop world have repercussions, and authorities are sensitive to their influence. While J-Pop culture is permitted to trickle into South Korea, the government in Seoul limits the footprint of Japanese media in the country. To this day, it is illegal to broadcast Japanese music or television programs on terrestrial channels in South Korea.

While these "Gangnam Squabbles", as St. Michel called them in *The Atlantic*, dance around the edges of popular political discourse, no billboard-topping hit or TV show has come close to making an artistic statement as provocative as the varied perspectives offered in another wildly popular medium: manga.

Correcting History One Illustration at a Time

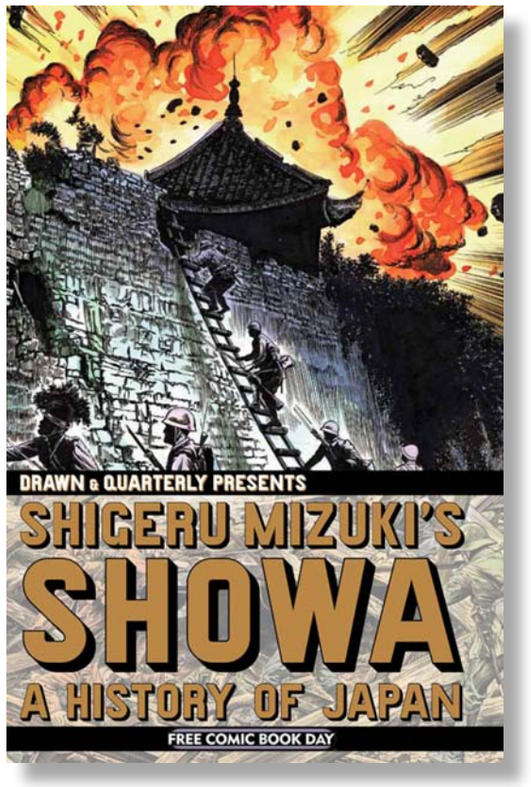
Kyoto Seika University, home to a renowned Facuty of Manga, receives a deluge of almost daily inquiries from wide-eyed high school (and even younger) manga fans from around the world—with manga-style email IDs like "Sharuul the Destroyah"—eager to join its manga and animation degree courses. Preferably on a scholarship.

Indeed, Japan has a unique gift for visual characterization, with its drawn (manga) and animated (anime) output being devoured by fans from every corner of the globe. Even the Japanese government has harnessed the cultural pull of manga and anime through the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's (METI) "Cool Japan" initiative. From J-Pop and fashion to sushi and *kawaii* (cute) icons like Hello Kitty, METI has done its best to promote Japan by wielding the nation's "soft power." And when it comes to manga, teenagers with overly active imaginations are not the only ones being courted. While pop music fads may have a tendency to reflect what is happening in real time, manga often challenges widespread views on the past.

In 2010, The Guardian singled out *The Legend of Koizumi*, a manga penned by Owada Hideki, for glowing praise. The tale features a heroic version of former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro—leonine locks and all—solving diplomatic issues by battling it out on the mahjong table with world leaders ranging from Kim Jong-Il to "Papa Bush." The former PM also performs heroic acts such as personally blasting nukes out of the sky over the Sea of Japan.

THE LEGEND OF KOIZUMI

A growing number of Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian manga artists are emerging from the very regions once invaded by Japan



Many notable manga artists have depicted Japan's actions in East Asia during World War II in a very honest and blunt way

The Guardian commends the storyline for its nuanced exploration of modern Japan, including its inferiority complexes concerning its standing in the international community. The unabashed use of any means necessary to achieve desired outcomes is exposed, as well as the sadness of modern Japan and its leadership vacuum. According to *The Guardian*: "… it's a great example of how the highly visual manga format can integrate cultural threads seamlessly with a speed a novel would struggle to match."

The *Legend of Koizumi* is not a one-off, and the subject matter addressed in the manga canon is not limited to the domestic malaise of the recent post-bubble past. A number of Japanese manga artists and writers have powerfully challenged deeper historical issues that have much larger implications for the region.

"Certainly, many notable manga artists have depicted Japan's actions in East Asia during World War II in a very honest and blunt way," Frederik Schodt, author of *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, told *Kyoto Journal*. "In his long fictional work *Adorufu ni Tsugu* (*Message to Adolf*), Tezuka Osamu, perhaps the most famous Japanese manga artist of all, has a very frank section on Japanese atrocities in China."

Schodt also recommends the "documentary manga" of Mizuki Shigeru, a WWII veteran now in his 90s who was severely wounded in combat and lost an arm. Mizuki's eight volume *Showa: A History of Japan* expounds the artist's personal take on the war and offers an in-depth portrayal of brutality perpetrated across Asia by the Japanese military during WWII.

"His history of the Showa period is one that I think more people should read, in Japan and in other countries," Schodt says. It is currently being published in English by Drawn and Quarterly, based in Montreal, Canada.

"The manga artist Kobayashi Yoshinori sought to correct history books with his work *Sensoron* (*War Theories*), among others. Schodt says, "If I were to make a generalization, I would say that the generation that directly experienced the war has tended to be far more critical of what Japan did than the current generation. But perhaps that is to be expected."

Schodt points out that a growing number of Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian manga artists are emerging from the very regions once invaded by Japan. Some of these artists have even won the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' International Manga Award, which honors "people with a love of manga, even in nations where Japanese manga are very popular but governments may take a strong anti-Japanese line," says Schodt, himself a recipient of the award. "Several Chinese and Korean manga artists have become quite successful in the huge Japanese manga market."

Of all the powerful examples of manga that challenge the historical status quo depicted by the media and taught in the nation's textbooks, perhaps best known is the series *Hadashi no Gen* (*Barefoot Gen*),

BAREFOOT GEN

by Keiji Nakazawa. The story of Gen, loosely based on the author's own experiences in Hiroshima on the fateful day of August 6, 1945, became the subject of a brouhaha in August 2013 when school board officials in the Japanese town of Matsue, Shimane prefecture, banned open display of the series on library shelves at the town's 35 public elementary schools and 17 public junior high schools, due to its disturbing content.

According to news reports, one citizen had suggested that the *Gen* series contained factually inaccurate descriptions of WWII atrocities that the disgruntled citizen claimed Japan did not commit. It is not surprising that the narrative ruffled rightist feathers. Gen carries his father's anti-war views with him throughout the series, which criticizes Emperor Hirohito and contains graphic images of beheadings carried out by Japanese soldiers, among other disturbing imagery.

The ensuing media backlash propelled a massive increase in sales of *Gen*, while 44 of 49 school principals in Matsue spoke out against the school board's decision and American cartoonist Raina Telgemeier championed *Gen*. Although the school board withdrew its ruling last summer, the fact that the situation occurred at all was a troubling reminder that Japan is still haunted by the ghosts of its past.

Japan's Zero Fighter Takes the Box Office by Storm

Manga has a huge following across Asia, and even globally, but arguably no artistic medium in the modern world has the reach of film. Perhaps it is no surprise that pop culture's biggest political statements in recent times in East Asia came from two Japanese films set in the very period of history at the root of so many regional problems today. *Kaze Tachinu* (*The Wind Rises*), said to be Miyazaki Hayao's final animation, tells the story of the engineer who designed the Zero fighter plane used in WWII, while the special effects laden *Eien no Zero* (*The Eternal Zero*) tells a story about *tokkotai*, the "special attack force" of kamikaze pilots.

Both films elicited strong responses from audiences and critics alike. While *The Eternal Zero* has been judged by many to be regressive, *The Wind Rises* has sharply divided critics. David Ehrlich of Film.com called it "perhaps the greatest animated film ever made," while *Village Voice* film critic Inkoo Kang went so far as to call it "morally repugnant."

Kaze Tachinu weaves together the real-life stories of Jiro Horikoshi, who designed Japan's WWII Zero fighter plane, and novelist Tatsuo Hori, who wrote a novel called *Kaze Tachinu* during the same period. Through their stories, Miyazaki explores the theme of following one's purpose in life.

Some say, however, that the film does not make sufficiently explicit the horror that resulted from the deployment of the Zero fighters in WWII.

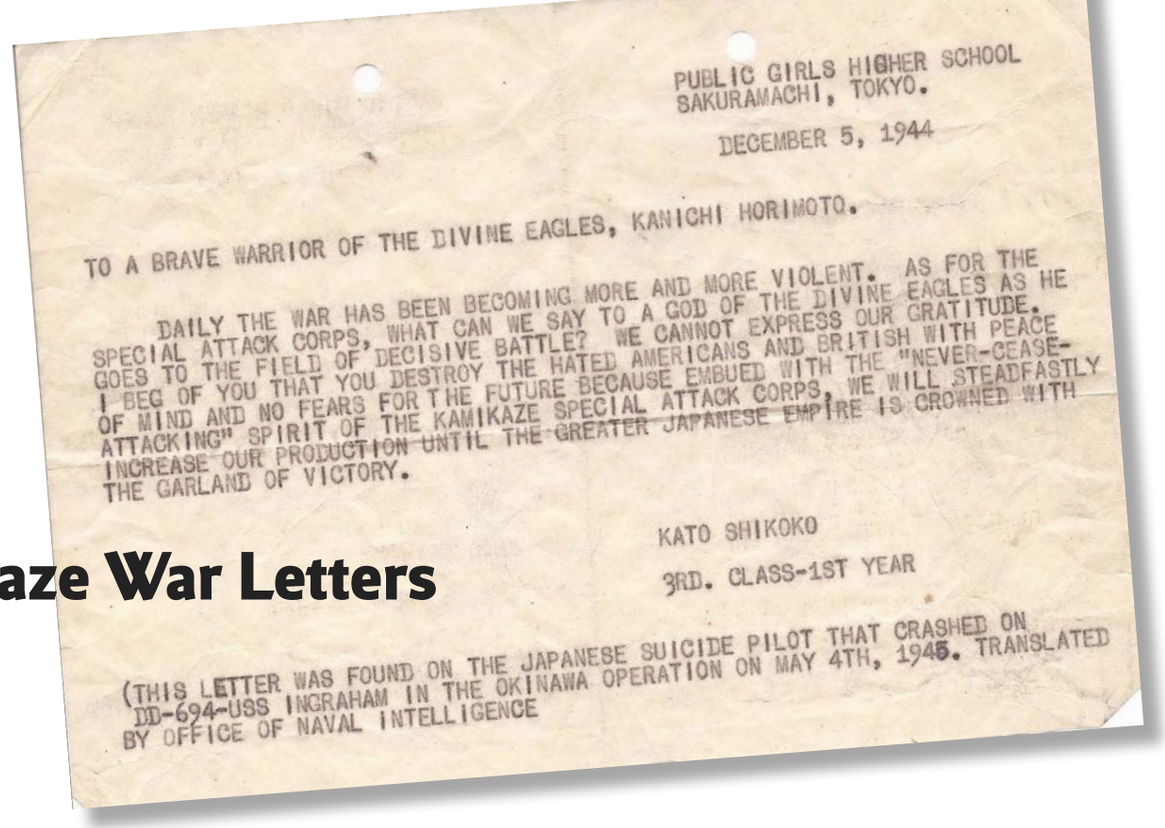
When Kang of *Village Voice* addressed the Boston Film Critics Society before the vote for Best Animated Feature she said: "The Japanese Imperial Army killed 30 million people—a fact that is barely alluded to by the film. Miyazaki's film is wholly symptomatic of Japan's postwar attitude toward its history, which is an acknowledgement of the terribleness of war and a willful refusal to acknowledge its country's role in that terribleness."

Kang added, "To me, the fact that the film glosses over the true purpose of those planesand never mentions the fact that those planes were built by Chinese and Korean slave labor—is morally egregious. The beauty of Miyazaki's film is obscured by its moral irresponsibility."

Mark Schilling, film critic for *The Japan Times*, sees it differently. "If Miyazaki is going to make a statement—being 73 years old—it's the time to do it now more than later," Schilling told *Kyoto Journal*. "Miyazaki put a statement in the film. It's ambiguous, but he's also a WWII buff who loves aviation. So he made this film from his own conflicted feelings towards the story. There is a strong tension between his romance with the air and these wonderful machines that are ultimately built to kill people."

Perhaps a more nuanced approach is called for. Miyazaki has many times denounced Japan's role in WWII and has even been labeled a "traitor" for his views. The ambiguity lingers.

Meanwhile, *The Eternal Zero* has elicited more uni-



PUBLIC GIRLS HIGHER SCHOOL
SAKURAMACHI, TOKYO.

DECEMBER 5, 1944

TO A BRAVE WARRIOR OF THE DIVINE EAGLES, KANICHI HORIMOTO.

DAILY THE WAR HAS BEEN BECOMING MORE AND MORE VIOLENT. AS FOR THE SPECIAL ATTACK CORPS, WHAT CAN WE SAY TO A GOD OF THE DIVINE EAGLES AS HE GOES TO THE FIELD OF DECISIVE BATTLE? WE CANNOT EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE. I BEG OF YOU THAT YOU DESTROY THE HATED AMERICANS AND BRITISH WITH PEACE OF MIND AND NO FEARS FOR THE FUTURE BECAUSE EMBUED WITH THE "NEVER-CEASE-ATTACKING" SPIRIT OF THE KAMIKAZE SPECIAL ATTACK CORPS, WE WILL STEADFASTLY INCREASE OUR PRODUCTION UNTIL THE GREATER JAPANESE EMPIRE IS CROWNED WITH THE GARLAND OF VICTORY.

KATO SHIKOKO

3RD. CLASS-1ST YEAR

(THIS LETTER WAS FOUND ON THE JAPANESE SUICIDE PILOT THAT CRASHED ON DD-694-USS INGRAHAM IN THE OKINAWA OPERATION ON MAY 4TH, 1945. TRANSLATED BY OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

Kamikaze War Letters

While *The Eternal Zero* has drawn sell-out crowds to watch Japan's infamous kamikaze pilots fly into battle on the silver screen in what could be seen as a final, contentious blaze of fictionalized glory, the real men who once flew suicide missions in the name of the emperor are fading into the annals of history.

In an effort to ensure that these controversial WWII icons remain in our memory, and with the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII approaching, the southern Japanese town of Minami Kyushu, where hundreds of these pilots were based and trained, has applied for hundreds of final letters penned by kamikazes to be included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. If accepted, the letters would be listed alongside seminal documents such as Anne Frank's diaries, the Magna Carta, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

Unsurprisingly, the move has caused a furor, particularly in South Korea and China, where bloggers, professors and politicians have decried the effort. Questions of morality aside, some of the letters speak for themselves, putting the plight of the doomed kamikaze in a dire light. As one wrote on the eve of his final mission:

"The whole place turned to mayhem. Some broke hanging light bulbs with their swords. Some lifted chairs to break the windows and tore white tablecloths [...] While some shouted in rage, others cried alive. It was their last night of life. They thought of their parents, their faces and images, lovers' faces and their smiles [...] Although they were supposedly ready to sacrifice their precious youth the next morning for imperial Japan and for the emperor, they were torn beyond what words can express."

versally negative reviews among critics, but audiences in Japan have raved about the kamikaze-inspired human drama. The film is directed by Takashi Yamazaki and based on a 2006 novel of the same name by Naoki Hyakuta, a close associate of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (who gave the film two thumbs up) and a Nanking Massacre denier.

The Eternal Zero tells the story of Miyabe Kyuzo, a veteran Zero pilot who bucks the spirit of kamikaze sacrifice and aims to survive until the end of the war. In Miyabe's view, a surviving soldier returning to a postwar Japan is of more value than another hero dead in the Emperor's name—an outlook that causes many fellow pilots to brand him a coward. After portraying the horrors of war for most of the film, however, *Zero* takes a dive into much murkier political waters in the end when Miyabe has a change of heart and ultimately agrees to fly in a suicide mission.

The film allows the reasons for its protagonist's shift to remain opaque, spurring audiences to interpret the film in a number of ways. Unsurprisingly, Abe's endorsement of the film did not please Japan's neighbors. Chinese media outlets and legions of microbloggers condemned the film, one calling it "propaganda for terrorism".

One of Japan's top 10 box office hits of all time, *The Eternal Zero* wowed audiences with its special effects and moved them emotionally with Miyabe's heart-rending story. This response was not limited to Japan. The film won the audience award at the 16th annual Far East Film Festival, held April 25-May 3, in Udine, Italy.

However, it elicited a very different reaction from many critics. No less than Miyazaki himself has given the film an unfavorable review. "They're trying to make a Zero fighter story based on a fictional war account that is a pack of lies," the director of *The Wind Rises* said. "They're just continuing a phony myth, saying, 'Take pride in the Zero fighter.' I've hated that sort of thing ever since I was a kid."

Schilling concedes that "the author of the original novel the film is based on is obviously a rightist. It's easy to assume the film is also rightist." But he adds a dose of perspective. "The hero Miyabe, his wife—their story goes beyond ideology. And with the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII coming up, many people are thinking this could be the last time some of the war generation could give some input."

With the passing of this generation, the time may be ripe for a shift in the cultural dialog surrounding these historical issues.

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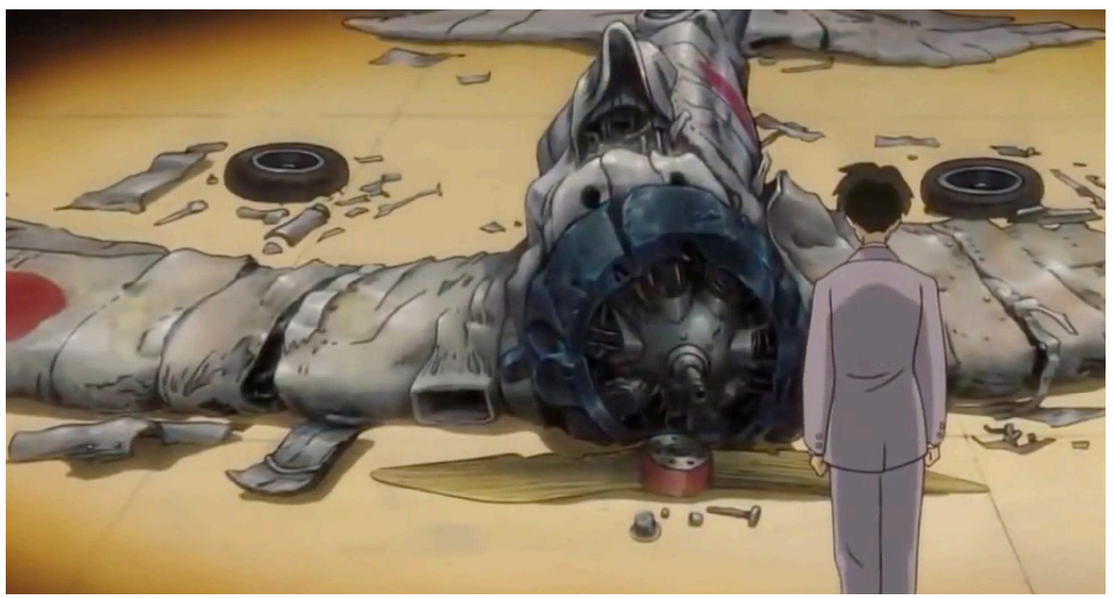


THE WIND RISES

Thailand's Coup and the Art of Conversation

With its political crisis unfolding in real time, Thailand illustrates how hungry its young generation is for a new conversation. In an effort to directly engage this situation, WTF Bar and Gallery in Bangkok recently held an exhibition titled *Conflicted Visions*. The pioneering project brought together works by artists from the country's highly-divided two main political camps to start a dialog unlike any held in the kingdom to date. WTF co-founders Somrak Sila and Christopher Wise see what they are doing at WTF as their small contribution to a much bigger conversation.

The exhibition was "inspired by frustration," Sila told *Kyoto Journal*. "There's no dialog. There is hate speech, using Facebook to make statements against the other side. We wanted to challenge the taboo that artists on both sides could be in the same room."

Thailand is once again under martial law, following the recent deposal of former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of self-exiled ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra, himself ousted by an army coup in 2006. Once again, Thailand is at a crossroads and its demo-

We wanted to challenge the taboo that artists on both sides could be in the same room

Prakit Kobkijwattana
Instant Democracy
Acrylic on pinewood
65 x 111 x 1 cm

Manit Sriwanichpoom
Obscene Mantra, 2014
Inkjet print(edition of 9)

cratic system is under threat. The division between its “red shirts” (Thaksin supporters) and its “yellow shirts” (royalists) is stronger than ever. The timing of *Conflicted Visions* was prescient. It opened on April 2, a little more than a month before Yingluck was removed from office.

Wise said: “We wanted to use the gallery as a neutral zone. But there was a surprising amount of resistance among artists both about the gallery’s intentions and about having their art featured alongside artists they disagree with.”

According to Wise and Sila, one of the artists received significant backlash from his political community for participating in the exhibition. “There were even rumors that a fist-fight or some kind of attack could take place due to the work.”

Wise said, “We didn’t want a shouting match of political ideology. We wanted to show work that reflected their feelings about Thailand being split or about being ostracized. Not propaganda, a conversation. Some of the artists were putting more controversial work on Facebook and elsewhere, but that wasn’t our purpose.”

Following the coup, dialog has been curtailed by authorities. People are self-censoring on Facebook and Twitter. If someone simply “likes” a Facebook post that criticizes the military junta they could face prosecution. This has led many artists to change their names and their accounts. Wise said that military authorities in Thailand—home to 24 million Facebook users, Bangkok having the most members of any city in the world—have even considered the possibility of putting all of the nation’s internet traffic through one gateway and creating its own Twitter-like network, similar to

China's Weibo microblogging platform.

"They've sort of stopped mentioning it, but it was being discussed," Wise said.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. Images went viral of flash mobs doing the *Hunger Games* three-finger salute—since banned and now a prosecutable offence—students have gathered to read George Orwell's *1984* in silent protest, and a film club was intimidated into cancelling a screening of the film version of Orwell's dystopian masterpiece after word of its plans reached authorities.

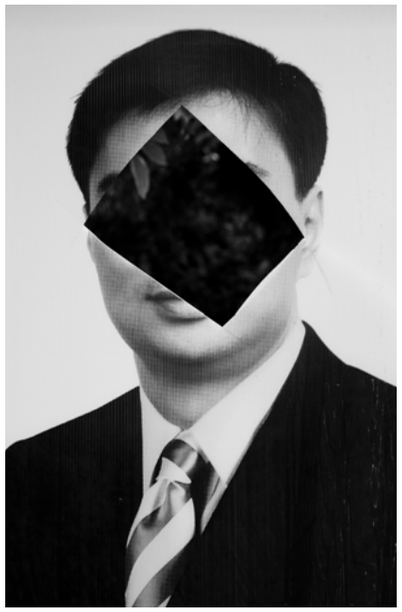
These setbacks have only strengthened the resolve of Thais eager for change. "Seeing the art galleries and bookstores in Chiang Mai raided was a real wake up call. We're all in this together," Sila said.

Far from shying away from Thailand's political realities, WTF only plans to go further, albeit in a roundabout way. The gallery's next show may ostensibly address nationalism or absurd nationalist movements from other countries, while indirectly critiquing things at home. "Thais are quite clever and quite creative in their modes of satire and resistance, but it's still early days in terms of figuring out what they can get away with," Wise said.

While there is always a chance the government could interfere with such efforts, each person who wakes up through open dialog brings the nation one step closer to a larger shift. It all begins with breaking down walls—something that has already started to happen at WTF and beyond.

Nationalists may continue to stoke territorial and historical flames, which some aspects of pop culture

Pisitakun Kuantalaeng
Imagine Death, 2014
Water color on paper, Chair, Book
350 x 85 cm



Miti Ruangkritya
Thai Politics No 1, 2010
Inkjet Print
60 x 90 cm

Anonymous Artist
(Detail) Manee has a chair, 2013-2014
Digital Print, books
Variable size

Sutee Kunavichayanont
Reversed Motherland (Yellow-Red),
2nd version, 2014
(remake of 2012 version)
Foam sheet cut
58 x 55 cm (edition of 10)

may fan further—wittingly or not. But culture itself is inherently neutral; it can be used to divide or build relationships, however tenuous.

Wise tells the story of one young artist who contributed to *Conflicted Visions* who had been ostracized by older artists and his teachers because of a provocative performance piece he had done. Although he was a rising star in the local art scene, he was pushed aside due to politics.

"Many of the artists were concerned over whether they should be in the show with him," Wise says. But a tiny victory was won by the simple act of holding their art together in a shared space. "After the show, the younger artist ended up having a beer with one of the older artists. They began talking about art, talking about politics in a friendlier way and putting aside the heated rhetoric that had been bubbling up over the previous year. That was quite cool."

The gallery's next show may ostensibly address nationalism or absurd nationalist movements from other countries, while indirectly critiquing things at home.

JONATHAN DEHART is a Tokyo-based journalist and editor. He has written for both print and online media, primarily about culture and social trends in Asia. Previously, he worked as a journalist in Shanghai and served as associate editor for *The Diplomat* in Tokyo. For well-researched additional exploration of the cultural ties between China and Japan, see his article on **Storytelling, Cultural Spheres and the Senkaku Dilemma HERE.**