

ROUNDTABLE ON

Rethinking the Asian Century with the Arts

26 November 2012 | Monday 2:00 - 6:30 PM |
Asian Civilisations Museum | Ngee Ann Auditorium, Basement 1 |
1 Empress Place | Singapore 179555 | [MAP]

What role have the arts played in the shifts – especially in the contemporary tectonic shift – in the balance of power, widely conceived? The rise of empires until the most recent of times has said to be accompanied by the expansion of ‘soft power’. But, as Edward Said and others showed, there is much more to imperial hegemony than the attractiveness of imperial culture. It has to do with ways of knowing and thinking, with how subject peoples come to think of what it means to be human or the very idea of culture itself. In turn, it shapes the organization of society (for instance, into nations as a natural unit) and ideals of justice.

The ‘arts’ have historically played an important role in creating the meaningful foundations of these subjective orientations or dispositions. Does this mean that they have contributed to the hegemony of empires, whether by inspiring awe or reflection? Few will doubt that a great power produces and defines ‘great art’ over the long run and that popular culture – especially in the age of commodification – often reveals an uncritical attitude towards existing structures of domination. At the same time, the arts have also presented means of thinking, acting or going beyond the limits of present structures. They can also communicate worlds that cannot be grasped by familiar language. In other words, they have historically possessed a critical and transcendent function.

The interdependence of different societies in Asia has been increasing and the region (variously conceived) is becoming more and more interactive, including in the area of culture and the arts. This is often expressed in rather pre-mature celebratory expressions such as the Asian Century or the Rise of Asia. The dangers, pitfalls, and violence of these interactions have to be grasped as well as the opportunities and desires for greater exchange with spaces within and beyond Asia. The legacy of the last few centuries of Western domination has arguably left more awareness of the critical and transcendent functions of the arts, but also powerful institutional and market forces that limit the capacity of artists, writers, and other performers to shape their ethos. We hope this workshop will begin to probe the new role of the arts in our time.

PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS

SPEAKERS

AMITAV GHOSH, Writer and Author of *The Calcutta Chromosome*,
The Glass Palace, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Ibis Trilogy*

C. J. W.-L. WEE, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

CHUA BENG HUAT, National University of Singapore

GAYATRI C. SPIVAK, Columbia University, USA

MEAGHAN MORRIS, University of Sydney, Australia

PHENG CHEAH, University of California - Berkeley, USA

PRASENJIT DUARA, National University of Singapore (CONVENOR)

RAJEEV S. PATKE, National University of Singapore

TANSEN SEN, The City University of New York, USA (CONVENOR)

WENDY LARSON, University of Oregon, USA

REGISTRATION: Admission is free, however, registration is required. Kindly register early as seats are available on a first come, first served basis. We would greatly appreciate it if you register with Ms Valerie Yeo via email at valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg by providing your name, email, organisation/affiliation and contact number.

DESIGN: RINKOO BHOWMIK

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