

Artist Residency in Antenna Media Kyoto
Research and artistic production
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PART I

I am not a historian, nor an academic person. But I am very interested in history and experiences. History from the distant and the not so distant past, history and experiences of my family, my city, country etc. This essay/presentation is based on my knowledge and encounters. My practice as an artist leads me in different ways on presenting and showing my art- which are mostly based in stories and experiences and the instant confrontations made with different relationships- directly and indirectly and can create facts and fiction or in between. This are relationships with people, texts, places and the different senses. This stories will lead me to create another form of narratives, which is in my own voice- as an observer, as an interpretation of my sensibility, and I am aware that the facts will be blurred and ambiguous- not creating concrete ideas but asking questions and theories that is more interesting for me.

There is a saying that history repeats itself, but you cannot really repeat history or stories. You cannot repeat the same experience and no perfect data of the past is fixed- maybe only dates and numbers but not the particular moment that existed. We can use the fragments of this experiences that can show different interpretations for the present and how you want to view it. You can create the future because of the past, and through the present state, an idea of the unknown future will lead to an unexpected outcome. Thus my projects try to be in that speculative direction. Taking risks and I don't know what each project will do but I have the past and the present in my hand as a material or medium.

I am from a small town in Lucban, near the mountains and grew up to a tradition of community gatherings and public participation in town-wide festival. I travelled to Manila to study art. I have stories to tell and this are all part of my history as a person and as an artist. I remember things, people and events and I also forget... things that don't have any traces and marks in my mind. And I want to make a mark, as a sign that I am alive. This is how I develop projects and works, thru an accumulated experiences and stories and connecting it to a bigger and familiar or unfamiliar histories that are connected to a bigger picture.

As an artist "visual" is my language- working with images, objects, experiences and stories and thru these images I want to create my own meaning. I make art to make aware of things and of course myself, and having history and past as part of me becomes an important aspect in relating myself to the world. Moving from one place to another since 1997- from my hometown, different apartments in Manila and different cities around the world, I am now married and have a son. My wife is Japanese and my son has Filipino and Japanese citizenships. And it is now part of who I am as a person and as an artist. A totally different culture and tradition both for me and my wife, and we are still trying to create different ways of communicating and trying to understand and misunderstand both our histories, traditions and backgrounds. A basic

way to be open to the similarities and differences and trying to blur cliché's and preconception of what is Japanese or what is Filipino. And slowly I am trying to learn on my own, about Japan through different encounters from histories and stories found on books, internet, from people I meet - especially my in-laws, artworks, films, objects, photographs, clippings etc. Its also the same with my wife- trying to learn thru this casual concurrence. Starting from zero I am trying to build my own story that has its own value and importance in this current moment. And through experience with each other, it can make new relationships or can also separates us.

Philippines and Japan relation as we have known has a very complicated history. Most of us learned its history thru books about the occupation for 3 years during World War II and sad to say that's the only history that stuck in our mind when we talk about Japan. A very short period of colonization that its influence has a very small impact in our tradition and identity compared to the 300 years of Spanish rule and 50 years of US occupation- which has very obvious influence in our religion, language, politics, educational system etc.

Jumping to the 80's and 90's, we also knew about the rise of Filipina entertainers who worked in Japan we call Japayuki. It was also during this time that the exodus of Filipinos going abroad to work was a government policy to bring in dollars to the Philippine economy. Now there are a lot of Filipinos in Japan either working or a spouse of Japanese nationals that creates new relationships in a family or economic level and not thru policy or diplomatic relations. This created new forms of influences and images in both countries thru the movement and exchanges of people, ideas and commodities. This circulation changes our perception of history and builds new direction of society or a country.

Uncommon to most Filipinos, before the Japayuki's, in the pre-war Philippines, there were already Japanese prostitutes living in Manila called Karayuki-san (meaning Gone Abroad) and it became an image of Japanese (as prostitutes) with the locals. These Japanese who were trafficked were from poor areas in Japan. Like the Japayuki's, we somehow can compare this matter of the movement of people and how it changes values and meanings- Filipinos regarded as domestic workers or seamen an image made thru media and literature that represents reality, building a circulation of trade and altering different tendencies of survival.

PART II

Looking back to my previous and current projects and works, its does not have a very distinct image or style and I am very aware of that. I see these works as pieces of myself with different experiences and these fragments I want to put together to become a whole. And since everyday I experience differently and I guess it's the same for most of us, I use this as my source to create works. This includes my family, city and society etc trying to create significance and relationships.

When I was in college back in 2000, I happen to visit a Brahma Kumaris center in Kamuning in Quezon City with my cousin. I am not really interested but my cousin insisted me to accompany

her out of curiosity. We don't know what to expect but when a lady in all white opened the gate and welcomed us the first thing she told me was that in my past life I was a Japanese. I am surprised and doubted her, but we were polite and just asked her about the center and its services. I cannot forget that encounter because it was surreal and I don't really believe in past life or any other mystical meaning not until I found this while visiting a museum in Osaka earlier this year. An illustrated picture of Emperor Meiji. I know its just maybe a coincidence but its very interesting for me to wonder as an artist to develop projects with myself and connection to Japanese history. A gradual research and investigation of the connection that these images and objects tries to create meaning.

A few years ago, I read about a mysterious jar written by historian Ambeth Ocampo in his column in a local newspaper. I got interested on it and try to find out more about this object because it has relation to the Philippines and most of Filipinos and Japanese were not aware of this story. It is about Ruzon Tzubo or Luzon jar, pronouncing "R" with an "L" and its humble form made of earth but a big influence in the development of Wabi-cha tradition and the political rule of Imperial Hideyoshi Toyotomi in the Nanban trade period in Japan- this is the period when Japan opened their ports to Europeans for exchange of goods.

The story of its origin was not clear, the only fact is that it was named after the island of Luzon where a merchant from Sakai changed his name to Rusun (Luzon) Sukezaemon who went to the Philippines and found this simple jars as a type of vessel or storage just like a packaging for various products. I asked my wife about it and she has a very limited knowledge about this vessels, what she know is the fact that the merchant from Sakai was an important trader having been to the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia bringing this jars as a gift to Hideyoshi and my curiosity leads me to trace this trade by asking people especially artists and professors on what they knew about the tzubo.

It does not have any value but once brought to Japan and appraised by a tea master named Rikyu for the most powerful person in Japan that time, the jar became an important and valuable object. It's the best storage for tea leaves because of its dark to light brown earth color, perfect to preserve the leaves. Its simplicity and rustic aesthetic compliment the tea ceremony tradition in which Rikyu is promoting its philosophy.

I try to articulate this change in meaning in value the same with art, how it is perceived or viewed and really change the context once its presented in a different situations or circumstances- the same with the Japanese prints called Ukiyo-e. The Japanese prints on paper used as wrappers for porcelains were discovered by French and gave value to this important art works. This is the same with the jars, it was just a normal container in the Philippines but since Ruzon Sakezaemon (the trader) is a smart businessman he made a fortune from this humble jars and became a hot commodity with wealthy Japanese families and kingdoms. In art, how objects are presented that has value, and who has the power to make value and importance. Questions on the contemporary value making.

Another layer on this story was that in 1978, NHK, a national TV station produced its first drama series shot outside Japan. It was called *Ogon No Hibi* or *Golden Days*. It showed the trade of the Ruzon Tzubo from the Philippines (Agoo) to the port of Sakai in Japan. And during this time in the Philippines was under martial law, and upon the invitation of Aimee Marcos to shoot some parts of TV series in the Philippines, we can see how image making and identity making was the main concern or policy of the Marcos regime. Creating an image of the Philippines a very nice country, the same as Imelda Marcos commissions Gina Lollobrigida as a photographer for a coffee table book about Manila and the Philippines.

In the contemporary society, because of globalization and the creation of free trade, travel and access to different information created by media, internet and other means, culture is now very open to be welcomed by everyone. And the influence of Japanese culture and any other cultures - traditional or popular has a big effect worldwide especially for the youth. For instance, Japanese pop-culture from anime, J-pop, video games, manga, cosplay etc. these became the first introduction for them to learn about Japan or Japanese culture before learning the history. Filipinos in their 30's or 40's were already familiar with *Voltez-V* in the late 1970's, *BioMan*, *Shaider* and *Ultraman* in the 1980's, *Cedie ang Munting Prinsipe* and *Sarah ang Munting Prinsesa* in the 90's though it was aired in Japan in the 80's. I grew up watching this and it's a common after school habit to watch by elementary and highschool students. I also remember when I was teaching Fine Arts in UST CFAD, most of the students were making drawings in manga-style compared to our time when we were influenced by American comics this builds a new shift in the direction of image and visual making. It can also be a form of colonization and propaganda.

This research is just an initial material for an artistic output that I want to present in the future. Like an abstract proposal that I share to you for more possible leads to this research and connecting it to the current state of the society. As a report on glazing history and creating a new perspective about the past as part of my fellowship under Asia Center, I want to continue this inquiry about image and value making of objects and ideas.

Part III

While doing the research project on Luzon Tzubo, I am always comparing the vase or the jar as a space- specifically like an artist space. As an artist, I see the importance of space aside from his/her studio or own home. These spaces are different from where we stay and live but as a third space wherein we meet people who have the same ideas and visions in one way or another. The idea of third space or third place was developed by Ray Oldenberg in a form of community building. He argued that the third space or place is the social surroundings separate from our home (first place) and workplace (second place) – and the third space is a place where people gather – like barber shops, coffee shops, public parks, basketball courts or sari-sari stores (convenience stores owned by families and usually located in the entrance or window of their houses). These spaces can create a sense of community because people gather and meet here regularly, they talk, discuss and maybe do something worthwhile. These exchanges are very organic in places like the Philippines and these spaces build a sense of community and create

new relationships. There was a need for that kind of space in Manila in the past few years where the direction of Philippine art is heading towards the art market only, thus we created 98B COLLABoratory. A space that started in my apartment in 2012 with my wife, Mayumi Hirano and other artist friends. Opening our living area as a place for casual presentations, discussions, screenings, dinners etc. for artists, creative individuals, students and professionals with diverse disciplines. The space is an open platform to have spontaneous conversations that can lead to future projects and collaborations. The three main objective of 98B is to be a place for experimentation, creating a community (existing and new) and sustainability. These gatherings gradually developed into more regular projects and programs with different organizations and individuals. 98B as an independent initiative and space is a laboratory for us to make different possibilities and presenting art in various forms outside the concept of white cube format creating new forms of engagements. And as the founder and artistic director of 98B, it's a good way to establish new networks in Kansai to share and discuss the similarities and differences of artist-led initiative and projects.

While in Japan specifically in Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe, I was meeting and visiting different artist-run spaces that gradually developed as a place of exchange and collaboration. There were not so much artist-run spaces in Kansai and I can feel its still closed and inclusive, but there are a lot of shared studio spaces where artists have their individual space to work on. I was hosted by an artist-run space called Antenna Media, a multidisciplinary space in Kyoto. As a host, they let me do my research in a very flexible and very independent way. Antenna guided me, specifically Eiko Tanaka to meet different people that might help me in my research having my own phase as a researcher and more free in directing my project. Since the art scene in Kansai is not that big, almost everyone is connected to each other and I didn't had the hard time to meet other artists.

The self-directed research created a more organic way to meet people by visiting exhibitions and performances and having dinner and drinks. As an artist, my research process is through meetings and casual encounters, forging new forms of connections. I think the language barrier is one factor that makes the meetings more meaningful and as artists we try to understand and misunderstand each other. It develops new bonds by mistranslation and the charm of a new language that was established during that exchanges is the most substantial. Most of the spaces I visited or artists I met slowly see the importance of initiating exchanges outside Japan. Some artists told me, Japanese tend to look at the West for their art making and practice- they travel to Europe and America, but why not in their neighboring countries which is closer and has a lot of potential to be an artist. In the last few years running 98B in Manila, we saw a number of Japanese artists, curators, researchers visiting the Philippines. Some artists don't just visit but create new works and eventually exhibit the final outcome of their project for the local Filipino audience. The Japanese not only learn new things in the Philippines but also the local artists whom they worked with were exposed on how artistic practice are different or similar to each other, thus creating different layers of exchanges.

The idea of creating a temporary space is one way to opened up the gap and as an experimental method, rather than I go to each spaces and presented myself as an artist from

Manila. This is good way on how we measure people's interest in the space by coming and showing up in the space. There is a famous saying from a movie called Field of Dreams that "If you build, they will come". Is there a need for this space? Will people come? Who will come?

Moving my base of research from Kyoto to Osaka, with the help of my wife and other artists specifically FIGYA, a space run by sound artist named MIZUTAMA, we managed to develop a space wherein we can meet and create new possibilities using art as a medium to connect. Renting a small space in Konohana area was the starting point, it was also my studio in the beginning. Comparing the the new space to a jar as an empty vessel that has no meaning and content and we slowly put various ideas to develop value and importance. You will do something and keep something important in the space – to discover different capabilities of the space and the people involved even though its temporary. I think this is a very organic gestures for artists, they are not waiting for someone to do it for them and in this case the space is the starting point to create exciting and meaningful dialogues.

Temporarily we called the space "Load Na Dito", it's a Filipino system of top off in your cellular phone. You put value, a certain amount of money to be able to call or text using your cell phone. You can add value to your credit from 30 Pesos up to 500 Pesos. This system also is very convenient because there are loading stations almost everywhere, from the street vendors, inside the malls and sari-sari stores.

We created simple events and exhibitions in the the space and invited local artists to present their works. The same format we made in 98B Manila, as an experiment on how people will view the space as a platform of exchange. The one-month temporary space established new connections and interests on how we present and view art. What is also important is the sharing of ideas while seeing the works. The research and my stay in Kansai was short to be able to produce a valuable outcome, but it made a strong commitment to develop further projects even the space is no longer there.

The space as an incubation might not be there but the value that was imparted with the people who were part of it will continue and expand to more potential collaborations.

PART IV

As a summary of my fellowship in Kansai, I will not call it as a conclusion rather I would like to call it as an ongoing activity that I would like to continue even the grant is over. I myself now has a connection to Japan in many ways and I see how we can develop more projects and exchanges in the future and thru arts and culture which is more open and crossing different boundaries. This projects will not be limited to artists or people working in art and culture but also the broad society in general. My plan is to continue promote the idea of collaboration with our space in Manila and Japan and other countries to form a network of sharing resources not only financially but sharing information that can help each other's needs. The fellowship helped me established two things- 1) My individual research on forgotten history of Luzon Tzubo that I

will further develop and 2) Establishing new connections between Manila and Kansai thru art spaces. As of this writing, 98B will host MIZUTAMA's residency in Manila for 3 months in 2017.

Having an independent spirit and working thru collaboration by artists really made a lot of difference when organizing different projects. For artists, it is more smooth, organic, and no bureaucracy which happens a lot in institutions. Artists also see what is important to them and also the society they live in; we don't only show artworks but also see the importance of sharing by disseminating information thru artist talks, workshops and publications that is open for all. These artists don't only think about their art but they see the importance of working together and using whatever capabilities they have. This spaces will stay and some will be gone, it's a reality that each spaces must face due to different circumstances and one factor is financial constraints. But artists don't see it as a burden rather it can be the motivation to create projects that don't really need funding. Through this new formed networks that started by friendship- as artist to artists, I am looking forward for a more fruitful collaboration in the next few years.