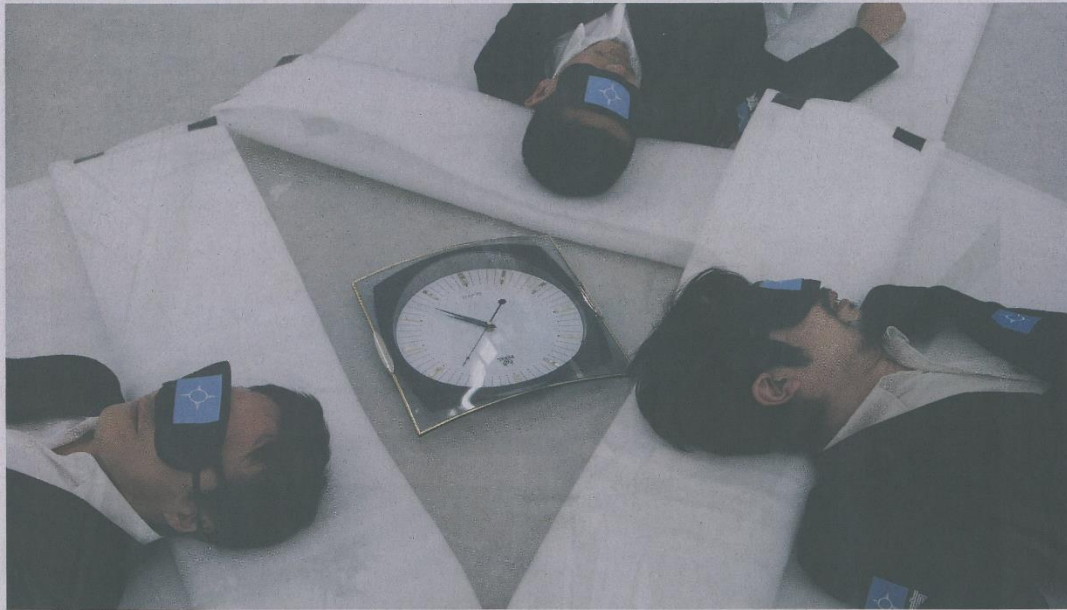


Welcome to 'Xijing'

9 May, 2016 | Kwon Mee-yoo



A scene from "Welcome to Xijing — Xijing Olympics" (2008), a project of the Xijing Men, which consists of Gim Hong-sook of Korea, Tsuyoshi Ozawa of Japan and Chen Shaoshong of China. Courtesy of the artists

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Three Asian artists construct fictitious western capital



"Welcome to Xijing — Xijing Olympics" (2008)



"Welcome to Xijing — Xijing Winter Olympics" (2014)

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KANAZAWA, Japan — In Asia, there is Beijing, which means northern capital, Nanjing, southern capital, and Tokyo, eastern capital. Then where is the continent's western capital? Three Asian artists from Korea, Japan and China built it at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan.

Xijing Men is a collaborative project of three Asian artists — Gim Hong-sook, also stylized as Gimhongsok, of Korea, Tsuyoshi Ozawa of Japan and Chen Shaoshong of China.

The project began in 2006, around the time when preparations for the 2008 Beijing Olympics were underway. The three artists contemplated the transformed status of Asia over the past decade and explored identity and the relationships between their respective home countries through the fictitious city state Xijing.

After a retrospective of Xijing at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul in Korea in 2015, the artists joined again at the Kanazawa museum to take the city state to another level. Chen of China was unable to attend the opening due to health problems.

Titled "Xijing Is Not Xijing," therefore Xijing Is Xijing," the Kanazawa exhibit includes the trio's previous works "Xijing Olympics/Xijing Winter Olympics" and "I Love Xijing — The Daily Life of Xijing Presidents" and their latest installment "I Love Xijing — School in the Nation of Xijing."

Upon entering the exhibit, guests receive a small flag adorned with the logo of Xijing Men and complete with the map of the exhibit. The exhibit covers seven galleries and even hallways of the museum and the map is handy in exploring the fictitious city state.

The museum, designed by SANAA (Sejima and Nishikawa Architects and Associates), is poles apart from the traditional white cube museum with geometric yet minimal design.

"This museum has a great building with lots of natural lights. At first, I was confused by its unconventional design, but as soon as I wandered



Artist Gim Hong-sook poses in front of his works at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan on April 29. Korea Times photo by Kwon Mee-yoo

"It almost immediately came to my mind that we won't be appearing in the new video. Instead, we invited new people. It gives a totally new context to the project."

around the museum, installing works, I felt rather organic. It is like a human body," Gim said. "So there is no set routine for watching the exhibit, but viewers can go in and out of the galleries as they want to."

The Xijing Men project is juxtaposed with each artist's works, to provide better understandings. Gim has been long interested in the gap between communities and non-Western modernity that spawned a hybrid culture in Korea and other Asian countries through rapid modernization.

"It has been almost 10 years since we started 'Xijing Men' and it has become a kind of family business. Our families appear in the work and we watched each other's children growing up as we got older," Gim

said. "The same work we did a decade ago can be seen from a different perspective over time."

Though Xijing is fictional, the contents of the Xijing Men are realistic. "That is where we find the sense of freedom, liberation. At first, I was awkward to appear in video works, but soon I started to enjoy it as an artist," Gim said.

"When we gather for the Xijing project, we produce a lot of drafts and sketches. One throws away a draft and another picks it up. As long as at least one of us wants to have it, it will be a part of the project and can be displayed at the museum. It was the point where the project became more interesting."

Gim picked "The Daily Life of Xijing Presidents" as the most serious work among the project.

"That was the first time when we thought of Xijing as a country. Before then, Xijing was more of a city or a space for us," Gim explained.

In the video, the trio deals with various elements of Xijing such as urban planning, finance and economy, national defense, education, construction, agricultural production and historical transformation.

"We picked one as the president of the day and made him govern the remaining two, establishing the state," the artist said.

The three artists began the Xijing Men project aiming to create five chapters. "We didn't want to start the fifth chapter because it was going to be the last. However, it will evolve and spawn different versions, making this project never-ending," Gim said.

The theme "Xijing is NOT Xijing" extends the possibility of the project almost infinitely as it redefines the Xijing Men.

"All things are possible here. The title, suggested by Chen, was inspired by 'Art is not art,' one of the classic disputes about art. It could be something about Xijing Men or not. It could include the term Xijing or not. We three could be the artists or the spectators," Gim said.

In their latest video "I Love Xijing — School in the Nation of Xijing," produced in Kanazawa and Toride, Japan and Seoul, Korea, features people who are not Xijing Men as main characters for the first time. Instead, the artists cast art professors of each country and captured their lectures and the reaction of students.

"It almost immediately came to my mind that we won't be appearing in the new video. Instead, we invited new people," Gim said. "It gives a totally new context to the project."

The exhibit runs through Aug. 28. For more information, visit www.kanazawa21.jp.