

BEIJING JOURNAL

YOUNG SOON MIN



As a result of the vision of WCA members to obtain NGO status in order to be able to participate in the 1995 4th World Women's Conference, I stand proudly with the women in gaining a progressive global awareness and solidarity from our role in this event. Given the significance of the three previous international women's conferences and of this conference in my life, I am saddened and disappointed at the outset to confess that my memory in general is short on details plus my inability to check on notes due to misplaced old Zip discs that had 90s information.

I have a faint recollection of a large pre-conference gathering in April, I believe, that was held at a major sport arena where the official announcement was made that the NGO conference would be held in Beijing. We started planning with high anticipation. But as it got closer to the opening day, September 4, the Chinese government decided that NGO event would be held in Hairou while attendees will be housed in hotels in Beijing. The official UN event will still be held in Beijing. The scuttlebutt was that the government was fearful of Beijing to be full of radical women. Hung Lui, a renowned artist from China refused to attend the conference as we had hoped, because she had been sent to Huairou (a countryside farming area more than an hour north of Beijing) to be reeducated during the Mao regime.

WCA was based in a hotel based in the northern area of Beijing and was bussed to Hairou and back on a daily basis. Also, the Chinese govt didn't manage to finish with the infrastructures on the site, so for instance one of the multistory building that had some events scheduled there functioned without walls, only cement floors. Also several days were rainy that made for a muddy experience. In spite of all the numerous inconveniences, the overall conference proved to be exhilarating due to all the many diverse events, gatherings, music and panels and discussions. Women showed up from all parts of the world and made the conference meaningfully successful. There were controversies that sprung up here and there: two competing sites were set up for Tibet, one set up by the Chinese govt and the other by a Tibetan group. With regard to music, I happened one morning upon a Riot-Grrrl-like group from France that had the audience and myself grooving to their vibrant sounds.

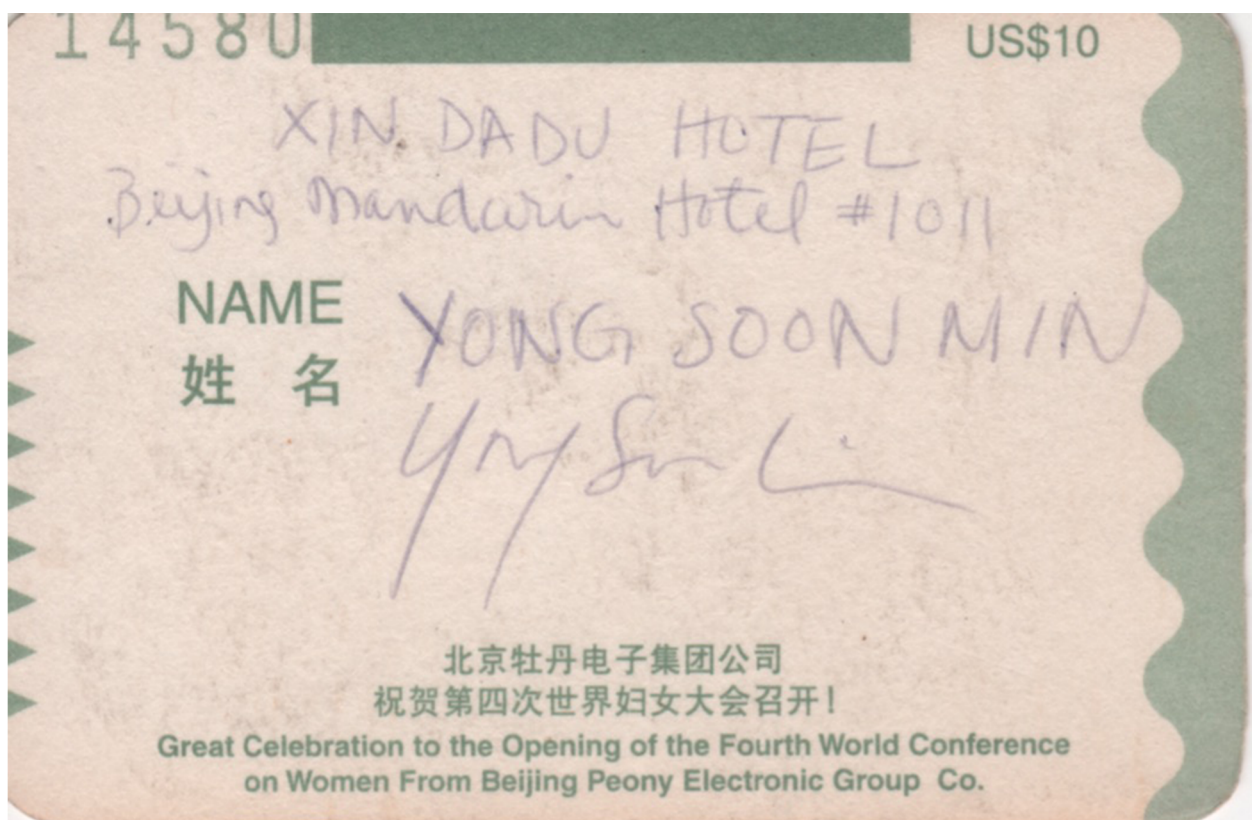
I had several contacts who were part of the Korean NGO activist group that dealt with Comfort Women issues, that strove to obtain justice for women who were coerced to be sexual slaves to the Japanese military during their military advancement through Asia during the Pacific part of WWII. I eagerly attended the several events that dealt with Comfort Women issue, including a tribune that voted to hold Japan accountable for this war crime; a moving performance in a theater; a panel discussion that was held that addressed in part as to why Chinese and North Korean victims didn't participate. I also attended a rally to support Comfort Women in the rain and felt swept up by the solidarity I felt from the other women.

As part of WCA events, and as Vice President, I organized and chaired a panel exploring current issues concerning women in their specific country/area and what women artists consider significant locally and globally. It dealt with the perspective of Third World women artists. One of the participants was from Seoul Korea, Kim Sun Jung, a major artist in Korea.

I joined a small group of WCA artists who paid a visit to the Beijing East Village, named after New York City's very own east village. Here a community of artists, many performance artists had settled in the early '90s. They soon came under attack from the government as a result of some controversial works that were performed by two performance artists, Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan who would go onto become famous for their performances. We found out afterwards that the govt dismantled the community soon afterwards. Our visit occurred at a very tense period with only a few artists who could talk to us but under a cloud of concern of being watched. As we started to leave, we were accosted by a community watch group and taken to a tea shop where it seemed we were asked endless questions. After a lengthy period, we were allowed to leave. This experience left feeling incredibly shaken by the closely controlled society and how artists' actions can have direct consequences.

I was thrilled to be able to attend the conference's official UN address given by Hillary Clinton in Beijing. She spoke brilliantly about the issues facing women globally and what tasks remain for us as we prevail in our futures. There was a fare well gathering of the NGO participants at a sports arena that tried to sum up the conference and had the fanfare to end with a celebratory note.

On a personal note, I made a day-long bicycle riding partner with whom we traded opinions on the OJ Simpson trial that was waging at the time. He had lived in Beijing long enough to know how to ride fearlessly with the massive cycling crowds that dominated the streets in Beijing those days. He taught me how to enjoy riding bikes in the flow. When I returned for a conference in 2011, the streets are no longer dominated by the massive biking crowds. They have been taken over by cars.







BIOGRAPHY

Born in a village near Seoul the year the Korean War ended with armistice without peace, and the continued division of the country, Yong Soon Min calls herself a Cold War baby. At age seven, she immigrated with her mother and brother to join their father in Monterey, CA. Min became Asian Pacific/Korean American in New York City during the 80s where she cut her political teeth. Most notably, Min received Fulbright Senior Research Grant, COLA Individual Artist Fellowship from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, Korea Foundation Grant, Anonymous Was a Woman Award, Guggenheim Foundation grant and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Visual Artist Award in New Genre. Significant exhibitions have been The Decade Show; decolonization, Bronx Museum; Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art, Queens Museum and Kumho Museum, Seoul; Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art, Asia Society and travelled; Bride of No Return- solo exhibition that travelled to three spaces including Art in General; the 4th and 10th Havana Bienal; 7th Gwangju Biennale; 3rd Guangzhou Triennial; Museum of Modern Art, NYC; Smith College Museum; LACMA (Los Angeles); Seoul Museum of Art and Commonwealth and Council gallery. Among exhibitions she has curated are: Memories of Overdevelopment: Contemporary Art in the Philippine Diaspora; THERE: Sites of Korean Diaspora for 4th Gwangju Biennale and transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix held in Seoul, Ho Chi Minh City, Irvine, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. Min served on the Board of Directors of Asian American Arts Alliance, national Board of Directors of CAA, and Korean American Museum. She currently serves on Artists Board of Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA LA) and the steering committee of GYOPO. She is now Professor Emerita at UC Irvine, with MFA from UC Berkeley, followed by a postdoc at Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program.
