



Tonan Talk

Tales *Things* Tell

November 1, 2024, Friday
14:00-16:00 (Japan Time)

**Tonantei (Room 201),
Inamori Center, CSEAS, Kyoto University**



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TALK1

Nazar: Preliminary Notes Towards a Theory of the Evil Eye
By **Balbir K. Singh** (Assistant Professor, Concordia University)

TALK2

New Clothes, New Textiles: Wool Muslin in Modern Japan
By **Yu-Ning Chen** (PhD student, Washington University in St. Louis)



Balbir K. Singh



Yu-Ning Chen

TALK1

Nazar: Preliminary Notes Towards a Theory of the Evil Eye



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This paper conceives a postcolonial theory of sight that invests in reading race, colonialism, and psychoanalysis together. Specifically, I ask: How does Nazar, an amulet or talisman used in warding off the evil eye and attendant feelings of jealousy or envy, offer a way of triangulating race, colonialism, and psychoanalysis in the contemporary? Nazar—as a way of thinking with global Islam—offers a possible mode of conceiving new forms of sight and new lines of flight from the racist gaze and its carceral technologies. If we might understand forms of sight itself as

surveillance, as oversight, as a watching that is harmful, that is potentially violent, then what might it mean to consider forms of protection from such sight as necessary, as potentially having its own kind of magic? Nazar might also consider what it means to situate the psychoanalytics of racism that are embedded in the theory of the evil eye. I explore Nazar as a mode of warding off the evil eye, the violence of the gaze, through the amulet, building from the work of Ariella Azoulay as a way of structuring how we understand the colonial and imperial foundations of our relations to art, archives, and their repositories.

Balbir K. Singh

Balbir K. Singh is Canada Research Chair in Art and Racial Justice, as well as Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History at Concordia University. She is the Director of Dark Opacities Lab, a hub for BIPOC political and aesthetic study and strategy. Using anti-colonial methods of reading and sensing, Singh builds on theories of opacity in her in-progress manuscript “Militant Bodies: Racial/Religious Opacity and Minoritarian Self-Defense,” which takes a materialist feminist approach to explore questions that center post-9/11 racial and religious hyper-policing of Muslim and Sikh bodies. Currently, she serves as Reviews Editor for *Art Journal* and is part of the *Journal of Visual Culture*’s Editorial Collective.

TALK2

New Clothes, New Textiles: Wool Muslin in Modern Japan



In this presentation, I will talk about the various roles played by the textile known as wool muslin in Japan from 1868 to 1945. Originally, muslin was a cotton-based fabric with a long history of use in India, Bangladesh, and Europe. However, in modern Japan, muslin was not cotton-based, but wool-based. In the 1910s, wool muslin in Japan became a mainstay of Japanese consumerism and thus was absorbed into Japanese fashion as textile merchants successfully acquired the techniques needed for mass production and dyeing. At the same time, wool muslin entered modern Japan’s print media ecosystem. Muslin played a strikingly visible role in the textual production of imperial Japan, appearing in texts associated with the economy, with social movements, with popular culture, with literature, and with colonialism. In both print media and in department stores, wool muslin functioned as a symbol of the grandeur of Japanese imperialism on the one hand,

and as a representation of the Japanese empire’s transnational linkages within capitalist modernity on the other.

Yu-Ning Chen

Yu-Ning Chen is a PhD student at Washington University in St. Louis and guest research associate at CSEAS. She works on fashion and textiles in literature. Her recent publication includes: “Reading Mosurin in Imperial Japan” *The Textile Museum Journal*, Vol 50. November 2023. 90-103. and “The Rise and Fall of Japanese-Made Worsted Muslin in the Early Twentieth Century” *International Journal of Fashion Studies* (forthcoming).

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