

RESEARCH STATEMENT

The systems, conceptions, and histories we apply as universal norms today remain largely tied to one dominant paradigm of thought. Consequently, perimeters of creative inquiries are often pegged to what is in vogue in Europe and North America; artists/theorists feel the pressure to legitimize their practice through fashionably-Western philosophies; the study of other indigenous traditions are circumscribed to disciplinary silos; and cultural specificities existing beyond the dominant worldview are often flattened or glossed-over during theoretical expositions.

Such legacies of cultural imperialism have been critically unpacked since the mid-twentieth century via frameworks such as postcolonialism, decoloniality, and subaltern studies, raising critical awareness in various disciplines from sociology to AI development. However, since these theories emanated from distinct colonial experiences of their respective regions, postcolonial debates regarding Western imperialism in East Asia are relatively sparse. Further, while the last century's avant-garde movements such as Gutai, Mono-ha, or Dansaekhwa invoked East Asian lineages of thought to indigenize Western conventions of art, much work remains in transposing such critical and substantial discourses into the more nascent fields of new media art.

PhD RESEARCH

My doctoral dissertation therefore advocates for a decentralized and ontologically pluralistic art-world, while envisioning experimental art praxis as a laboratory to reflect, experiment with, and nurture practices and theories from alternative metaphysical worldview. It is to this end that my four-pronged approach weaves together media art practice, theory, festival organization, and teaching. This reflexive methodology begins by examining recurring tendencies that emerge in my own art practice, with which I identify other artists/scholars showing similar inclinations. These autoethnographic dialogues progress alongside interdisciplinary and medium-agnostic research, becoming fodder for theoretical reflections that are then applied in conceptualizing and producing exhibitions, festivals, and publications, as well as curriculum building. Each iteration of this reflexive process helps finetune the approach while building necessary alliances.

To be clear, these efforts to surface metaphysical orientations that became exoticized and overlooked in discourse is neither an attempt to eulogize their idiosyncrasies, nor to merely emancipate them from subjugation. Rather, it is to bring these discussions into the capacitating context of experimental art for critical evaluations, towards shaping a more judicious body of discourse that is better aligned to local realities, as well to expand future possibilities of our shared world.

I have, therefore, surveyed why and how certain epistemological bias underlie the systems and conventions of the art-world via Postcolonial theory, alongside more recent studies with specific regional focus. These include works by: Inter-Asian cultural studies scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing, Sinologist Francois Jullien, Asian studies scholar Naoki Sakai, Philosophers Byung-Chul Han, and Yuk Hui, Psychologists Takahiko Masuda and Richard A. Nisbett, Art historians Joan Kee, and Reiko Tomii, Political theorist Kim Sungmoon, as well as Comparatist Shu-mei Shih, amongst many others. I have also consulted theories of *Academic Imperialism* by Malaysian sociologist Syed Farid Alatas, as well as *Coloniality of Power* by Peruvian Decolonial sociologist, Anibal Quijano, as supplementary horizons arising from fundamentally disparate geo-political and historical contexts. I have then identified the complex institutional and psychological barriers that maintain the dominance of a particular episteme. These include the departmental segregation of "Oriental painting" from "Painting" in general, the linguistic barriers that privilege native English speakers, or the discursive eclipsing of other ways of interpreting worldly phenomena. I have also surveyed how various contemporary artists from the region engage or eschew their indigenous worldview in their art practice, to assess the pitfalls and potentialities of these varying approaches.

This groundwork is followed by contrapuntal analyses of two case studies to bring undiscussed cultural underpinnings to the foreground and to highlight the repercussions of such omissions. Chapter two problematizes historian Martin Jay's theorization of works by Japanese American sound

artist Ken Ueno as Somaesthetical based solely on Roland Barthe's ontologically disparate view on vocality (1987). Chapter four problematizes the uncritical transposition of Tactical Media strategies, which emerged from the highly confrontational twentieth century European avant-garde movements, into the culturally disparate and politically sensitive context of Hong Kong today.

The alternative readings I offer as additional interpretive frames are built upon research that span across cosmologies, religions, meditation practices, philosophies, and landscape painting genres, amongst others. This approach tethers the research to real-world practices while identifying resilient cultural propensities that require critical cross examinations. Interdisciplinarity is of essence here, not only to remedy the scarcity of academic texts that engages contemporary (media) art praxis in tandem with East Asian metaphysics, but to transcend rigid disciplinary silos that often obstruct radical experimentation. The dissertation thus concludes by identifying experimental art praxis as a conducive site for surfacing, articulating and experimenting with cultural modalities that have often been left unvoiced and misunderstood by the dominant narratives of our shared world.

RECOGNITIONS

This research has garnered significant support and endorsement even before the completion of my dissertation. The membership to the East-Meets-East Research group is a capacitating example, through which the advocacy outlined in my thesis can be actualized in practice through forums, exhibitions, and networking events we are planning to organize through to 2025 at key international venues. Besides this project with Art Centre Nabi in Seoul, I am currently organizing a series of art-tech salons in Hong Kong this year in collaboration with Professor Jeffrey Shaw for Hong Kong Baptist University, and consulting for a festival being planned at Videotage. Projects as such materialize in a wealth of tacit knowledge that considers both their theoretical propositions as well as their contexts of reception, which will result in future publications.

I am also grateful to have been invited to present my research and art practices at: a symposium entitled *Posthuman Art: Robots, Aliens, Chess, and Tokens* at Ars Electronica Garden Hong Kong 2021; a panel discussion for the *New Vision Arts Festival, HKACTION! Act 10. DAEDALUS DRONES* at Asia Society Hong Kong; a Clubhouse panel entitled *Can AI be as good as Beethoven?*; and an artist talk at the *Open Systems PhD Salon* for the International Symposium on Computational Media Art. The fact that most of these recognitions materialized in the past year is an encouraging sign that my research has matured, that I have found my capacitating allies, and that this advocacy is ever more relevant in today's socio-political contexts. I believe that my recent nomination for the International Advisory Committee (IIAC) for International Symposium of Electronic Arts (ISEA) is an example of this enhanced interest in pluralizing the art-world discourse.

An early version of my research was presented at ISEA2016, analysing how Confucian framing of human-tech-art relationship underlie predilections towards inter-media hybridization and popular culture. In 2018, I have co-authored a publication in the Leonardo Journal, which warns against uncritical application of Western art-movements in disparate cultural contexts, based on my intimate access as the exhibition facilitator. Also in 2018, I have co-authored an article based on an EEG-driven collaborative artwork, *Performing Hypo-Linguistics*, in Technoetic Journal.

At the time of this application, there are two accepted projects currently in the works. One is a co-authored piece for HCI-Games 2022 conference that envisage video game platforms, such as Minecraft, as potentiating arenas for dialoguing between HCI, the art-world, and urban environments. Another is a panel presentation for RAI2022: Anthropology, AI and the Future of Human Society, entitled *Envisioning a Future of Inclusion, Equality, and Diversity: the role of LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and PWD communities in human-machine co-creativity*. Both of these works will be presented in June this year.

CONCLUSION

My dissertation research was highly enabling in bringing together a diverse array of interests into a cohesive and synergizing whole. The interdisciplinary research and inward-facing reflections opened up an exciting trajectory that is meaningful on both personal and societal levels, which will be applied in my academic research, art-making, and event organization, as well as pedagogical endeavours.

Moving forward, I would like to establish a substantial framework for interdisciplinary action research in collaboration with my students, colleagues, and strategic allies. One specific direction would be to research how distinct value systems and conceptions influence the development trajectories of ground-breaking paradigms such as Artificial Intelligence, or the Metaverse, while paying critical attention to East Asia as its context. Possible research outcomes include publications, experimental events, and artworks, as well as academic courses that instil critical cultural awareness toward expanding our global frames of reference.

It is especially pertinent for this project to be located in the unique socio-political context of Hong Kong today, where its hybrid realities reveal complex interconnections, similarities and discrepancies amongst the various cultures therein. In view of envisioning a more pluralistic, equitable and expanded future possibilities that are better suited to the region, there is a need to create epistemologically novel dialogues between science, technology, and the arts. This positions Creative Media as a conducive mediator of the two worlds. It is my hope that my intimate, yet objectively removed position as a culturally hybrid artist/scholar of South Korean descent, can contribute to articulating the multiple worldviews coalescing in this beautiful Global city I now call home.

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