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## **Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary: New Era in Hungarian Lexicography**

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### **Abstract**

The Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) represents a pioneering achievement in the documentation of Hungarian as a pluricentric language, shaped by post-Trianon sociolinguistic realities. Following the fragmentation of the Hungarian language area, distinct state varieties emerged, characterized by lexical divergence under conditions of minority bilingualism. Established in 2007 within the Termini Hungarian Language Research Network, TOHD systematically collects, classifies, and analyses the lexical specificities of Hungarian used in minority contexts across the Carpathian Basin. The dictionary's database-driven digital structure enables the continuous expansion and refinement of entries, incorporating authentic written and spoken examples, visual and audio materials, and rich metadata concerning regional, stylistic, and etymological dimensions. Functioning both as a sociolinguistic corpus and a lexicographical resource, TOHD provides empirical data for studying language contact, borrowing, and regional standardization processes. Its open-access format supports not only scholarly research but also pedagogical applications, facilitating awareness of lexical variation within Hungarian. The dictionary thus constitutes a dynamic platform for examining the interplay between language, identity, and technology in a pluricentric linguistic environment, while exemplifying innovative practices in digital lexicography and minority language documentation.

*Keywords:* Hungarian language, Termini, dictionary, lexicography, dictionary use, dictionary skills

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## Introduction

Following the Treaty of Trianon, the Hungarian linguistic area was divided among the neighbouring successor states of Hungary. Consequently, millions of Hungarian speakers found themselves in new political and linguistic environments, becoming minority populations, whose mother tongue assumed minority language status. In these contexts, Hungarian-speaking communities developed various forms of bilingualism, as Hungarian no longer possessed the political authority or institutional support it had held previously. This sociopolitical and linguistic configuration fostered active bilingualism and contributed to the evolution of Hungarian as a pluricentric language. Distinct state varieties of Hungarian gradually emerged, each developing its own standard variety. These varieties differ primarily in their lexicon, while their syntactic and grammatical systems remain largely uniform, thus ensuring mutual intelligibility across the Hungarian-speaking world. Before the political transitions of the late twentieth century, there was little systematic effort to document or standardize these lexical divergences, partly due to the limited number of Hungarian dictionaries and the absence of coordinated lexicographic initiatives.

Institutionalized and collaborative research on these varieties began only after 2001, when the Hungarian Academy of Sciences established a research centre to coordinate linguistic research communities in the neighbouring countries. This initiative led to the formation of the Termini Association in 2013. One of the Association's primary aims has been to reaffirm the linguistic unity of Hungarian throughout the Carpathian Basin, a process referred to as the “debordering” or “detrianonization” of the Hungarian language.

Within this framework, linguists began compiling a dictionary to record lexical items characteristic of bilingual Hungarian communities. This effort resulted in the establishment of the Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) in 2007 – a continuously developed, specialized resource. TOHD documents and classifies contact-induced phenomena (primarily direct and indirect loanwords) as well as independent lexical innovations found in the state and minority varieties of Hungarian (further information on the Association and its activities is available at <http://termini.nytud.hu> or via the accompanying QR code).



## Documenting the Lexicon of Hungarian Varieties in Minority Contexts

From the very beginning, one of the principal research objectives of the research stations affiliated with the *Termini Hungarian Language Research Network* has been the systematic collection, investigation, and analysis of the distinctive lexical features of Hungarian language varieties spoken in minority settings. TOHD serves not only as a snapshot of the borrowed and contact-induced elements characterizing the lexicon of Hungarian used beyond the borders of Hungary, but also as a dynamic tool enabling both temporal (including synchronic–diachronic) and spatial analyses. Within this lexicographical framework, the dictionary seeks to collect and document – accompanied by regional labels, visual illustrations, and authentic audio samples – those lexical items, word meanings, and idiomatic expressions that diverge from standard Hungarian as used in Hungary. These include both foreign-origin and internally developed

elements attested in the speech of Hungarian communities throughout the Carpathian Basin, primarily outside Hungary's present-day territory (cf. Csernicskó et al., 2022; M. Pintér et al., 2023).

Consequently, the dictionary encompasses region-specific items from the Hungarian-speaking areas of the seven neighbouring countries – Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. Its corpus includes regionally specific words, direct and hybrid loanwords, semantic and stylistic borrowings, calques and loan translations, as well as internally coined neologisms and preserved archaisms of the former common Hungarian lexicon.

The “life cycle” and development trajectory of the dictionary and database are multifaceted, extending beyond the strictly lexicological and lexicographical domains into the realm of computational linguistics and digital humanities. A significant milestone in the project's evolution was reached in 2015, when the technical capacity to include illustrative images in the dictionary entries was introduced, resulting in the addition of hundreds of visual materials. Another major advance occurred in 2019, when the infrastructure for uploading audio files was established, allowing for the inclusion of authentic spoken examples derived from field recordings conducted in minority Hungarian communities.

The content of the dictionary (and the SQL database beyond) is continuously expanding and improving, and the lexical material is designed to reflect synchronic developments observable in real time. These changes can be traced within the editorial history and revision process of individual entries. The scientific work underpinning the dictionary's ongoing development draws directly upon several practical innovations, and numerous studies – both in Hungarian and in other languages – have analysed various aspects of the project. In recent years, special attention has been devoted to the refinement of etymological analyses of loanwords and to their lexicological and typological classification (pointing out the fact that the editors are sociolinguists and not lexicographers).

In parallel with this theoretically grounded lexicographical work, a nuanced system of lexicological and lexicographical categorization has been elaborated, encompassing dialectal, register-based, stylistic, temporal, affective, and frequency-related dimensions. The digital and informatics solutions implemented in the Termini project represented, for a long time, a unique innovation within Hungarian lexicography. Importantly, the platform continues to facilitate sustained scholarly and technical development, ensuring that the dictionary remains a living and evolving linguistic resource (for the lexical documentation of newly emerged lexicon, see Váradi & Csernicskó, 2025).

### **The Digital Nature and Structure of the Termini Hungarian–Hungarian Dictionary**

TOHD is published exclusively in an online environment; consequently, none of its entries can be regarded as closed or finalized. The data contained in the dictionary remain open to continuous expansion, revision, and correction. One of the principal advantages of digital publication lies precisely in this flexibility: the editors face no constraints of space, allowing for the inclusion of a virtually unlimited number of illustrative example sentences and images. Similarly, there are no limitations regarding the number of entries that can be incorporated – any lexical item deemed relevant by the editors may be added to the dictionary.

From the user's perspective, the online format offers further benefits through the customizable and adaptable nature of the interface. During search operations, users may filter results to display only the types of information they wish to see (for example, only equivalents, only data from specific regions, or even aggregated results of several queries). Such functional and ergonomic considerations have shaped the design of the interface, where clarity of presentation and user-directed customization are of primary importance.

A further significant advantage of database-driven lexicography is that it offers analytical and research possibilities unavailable – or only with great difficulty – in traditional print dictionaries. For instance, users and researchers alike can access and analyse the entire dataset simultaneously or generate statistical summaries based on the corpus (just like it was done on the lexicon for Hungarian as the language of the Carpathian Basin – see Váradi, 2024).

As of October 2025, the dictionary contained 5,615 entries. While this number would conventionally classify it as a *small-sized dictionary* in quantitative terms, the highly detailed structure of the entries provides far greater linguistic and user-oriented potential than typical concise dictionaries. The dictionary documents the distinctive lexical elements of the contact varieties of Hungarian spoken throughout the Carpathian Basin. It focuses on both the *standard* and *substandard* elements of Hungarian used outside Hungary – that is, on the overall linguistic repertoire of Hungarian-speaking communities beyond the borders rather than on regionally confined dialectal lexicon. These varieties remain mutually intelligible with standard Hungarian.

The dictionary is primarily intended for researchers studying *living language use*. Beyond its sociolinguistic relevance, however, its practical applicability is equally significant: the editors aim to make the specific vocabulary and meanings of Hungarian regional varieties accessible to a broader audience. The lexicological and lexicographical processing of the material – including the structural organization of entries and the elaboration of inter-entry relationships – allows the dictionary to be interpreted on multiple levels of use. It can, for instance, be regarded as (1) a descriptive dictionary of present-day Hungarian, (2) a general-purpose dictionary, (3) a dictionary of foreign words, and (4) a database-oriented digital lexicographic resource.

The lexical material primarily reflects *synchronic* language use, incorporating a wide range of neologisms. At the same time, it also includes lexical items characteristic of earlier historical periods, such as the interwar years and the socialist era. When selecting entries, the editors apply a key criterion: any word, phrase, or sense included must be attested across a broader geographic area of the Hungarian-speaking communities outside Hungary, rather than confined to a narrowly local, stylistic, or register-specific variant.

Since many of the words and meanings recorded in the dictionary represent lexical units originating from the majority (state) languages of the respective regions, but which have since become integral components of the local Hungarian usage, TOHD can also be regarded, in part, as a dictionary of foreign words. Furthermore, it includes headwords that are also in use in Hungary but exhibit distinctive meanings characteristic of the minority Hungarian varieties, differing from those in standard Hungarian.



## Lexicographic Structure and Editorial Principles of the Dictionary

In several respects, TOHD departs from traditional lexicographical practices, both in conception and in implementation. Its innovations include the exceptional level of detail in its microstructure, its synchronic compilation from multiple regions, its web-based presentation and editing environment, and its database-driven design. From a lexicographical standpoint, the database possesses an exceptionally rich internal structure, seeking to offer a precise and detailed representation of each lemma's lexical and conceptual content.

Each entry comprises three typographically distinct parts: the head, the body, and the foot. The head section contains two categories of elements. The *mandatory elements* include the headword, part of speech, grammatical categories, and key inflectional forms. The *optional elements* appear only where linguistically justified, such as alternative spellings or pronunciation variants. The complexity of the entries is most clearly reflected in the richness of information contained within the main body. This section encompasses two distinct types of information: (1) the semantic description of the lemma, and (2) usage-based examples that illustrate and refine meaning. Additional features such as domain labels, regional designations, and stylistic qualifiers further support the interpretation of the headword. As a monolingual explanatory dictionary, TOHD provides three types of interpretive equivalents: synonymic, explanatory, and paraphrastic definitions. The example sentences play a dual role: beyond elucidating meanings and nuances, they also serve to illustrate the lemma's stylistic and pragmatic value across a variety of usage contexts. The digital format allows editors to include as many examples as desired, enabling the display of a richly typologized set of examples – something that would be impossible in a print dictionary.

Since the dictionary documents *living language use* and is designed primarily for *sociolinguistic research*, the primary criterion for classifying example sentences is *authenticity*. Editors endeavour to use attested examples – either spoken or written – while avoiding artificially constructed sentences. Accordingly, the examples are grouped into three main types:

1. authentic written examples (attested in written sources),
2. authentic spoken examples (attested in speech data), and
3. non-authentic examples (with uncertain or unverifiable sources).

The majority of examples in the dictionary are authentic (meaning not written by the editors). An additional noteworthy feature of the annotation system is that, for authentic examples, editors record the regional origin of the speaker and, where applicable, the exact source of the data.

The foot of each entry contains etymological information about the headword, as well as cross-references to other lexemes belonging to the same word family and attested elsewhere in the dictionary.

A central goal of the dictionary is to enrich the empirical foundation for lexicological research on the Hungarian language by incorporating lexical data from Hungarian-speaking communities beyond Hungary's borders. In doing so, it also documents the lexical differences between Hungary and external regions and maps the network of lexical relations across the Carpathian Basin. The project aims to open new dimensions in Hungarian etymological, contact-linguistic, and bilingualism research, while also pioneering technological innovation in Hungarian lexicography – such as the integration of audio and visual materials.

The dictionary's primary purpose is the monitoring of Hungarian language varieties outside Hungary. However, recent developments have expanded its scope to include (1) the documentation of specifically Hungarian lexical items and meanings – modern *realia* (see Váradi, 2024; Váradi & Csernicskó, 2025) – and (2) the inclusion of words used with identical meanings across all regions of the Carpathian Basin. The significance of TOHD for linguistics lies primarily in its sociolinguistic value, but also in the wealth of information encoded in the microstructure of its entries. These data include stylistic, dialectological, etymological, and contact-linguistic information, which make the resource highly relevant for diverse branches of linguistic research. Furthermore, the dictionary offers valuable material for *realia* studies, as its illustrative elements – both textual and visual – provide culturally embedded representations of meaning.

The dictionary serves as a particularly rich research field for linguists. While its public interface allows any user to browse and perform searches, the more complex data queries and statistical analyses of the underlying networked dataset are currently available only to researchers. Nevertheless, the dictionary also has educational and outreach value: non-specialist users can explore the specific vocabulary of a given region and gain insight into its linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics, such as conceptual domains, regional or stylistic distribution, temporal usage, affective value, and relative frequency (cf. Karmacs et al., 2022).

Beyond these explicit data, the example sentences contain a wealth of implicit information about spoken language use. Since the dictionary imposes no restriction on the number of examples per entry, each lemma can be accompanied by numerous sentences revealing untagged but linguistically relevant features of speech. The examples thus not only provide a finer-grained representation of the lemma's denotative and connotative meanings but, when sufficiently numerous, also allow for relatively reliable assessments of its stylistic and pragmatic value.

A further noteworthy feature is the inclusion of illustrative images associated with meanings, typically presented in context, which visually reinforce the semantic content of the lemma or its specific senses.

Having now operated for nearly two decades, the dictionary's structure and editorial principles have remained largely stable. The time has come, however, to introduce primarily technical innovations. Conceptual modifications are naturally constrained by the existing lexical framework, since any changes to the structure of entries would affect the already processed material. Accordingly, future developments will primarily concern the user and editor interfaces – for instance, through the adoption of modern XML-based architectures.

### **Standardization Efforts**

As the dictionary is edited by linguists residing in several countries, certain measures for standardization are necessary to maintain linguistic consistency, since editorial work is not a common daily task for all editors. Online meetings and shared documents are used to ensure the unity of editorial practices and lexical content. However, as the editors are not professional lexicographers and online communication can be cumbersome, standardization tasks must periodically be undertaken.

In 2024, a major effort was carried out to identify errors and inconsistencies in the microstructure and to integrate new knowledge into the editorial process. Following extensive unification work, several aspects of the dictionary were revised.

At the level of the entry headwords, grammatical forms were corrected and inconsistencies in their representation resolved (e.g., order of forms, representation in compound words, and use of the tilde). Within the body, example sentences were revised where the affected word was part of a compound rather than the headword itself, and bibliographic references were elaborated. In the footnotes, erroneous etymologies and malfunctioning cross-references were corrected. In the final stage of the process, new functionalities for the website were defined, including localization into English.

In 2025, the work was consolidated, resulting in a more coherent lexicon with fewer inconsistencies.

### **Educational Use**

TOHD holds particular educational significance, as it provides learners with authentic examples that reflect the linguistic diversity of Hungarian across regions. Its inclusion in the National Curriculum highlights its role as a key pedagogical tool for developing vocabulary, language awareness, and dictionary skills. By integrating its use into classroom practice, educators can foster students' understanding of linguistic variation and promote a more comprehensive, modern approach to language learning. Generally, the use of dictionaries constitutes an essential component of language learning and teaching (P. Márkus, 2023), as they enable learners to understand the precise meanings of words and recognise their appropriate usage across various contexts. This aspect is particularly significant in the case of Hungarian, where the various state varieties have developed distinct standard norms and differing patterns of usage within minority language communities. These differences have emerged as a result of close interaction with the respective majority cultures, as well as differing institutional and legal frameworks. Consequently, Hungarian can be regarded as a pluricentric language, characterized by several national varieties that coexist and influence one another.

In such a linguistic environment, dictionaries play a crucial role in documenting these contact varieties and supporting users in navigating between regional and standard norms, thus promoting a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the language. TOHD significantly contributes to vocabulary development by providing authentic example sentences, grammatical information, and pronunciation guidance (see Karmacs et al., 2022). Its integration into education can take several forms, depending on the linguistic and pedagogical objectives. For instance, teachers can use the dictionary to demonstrate regional differences in word usage, helping students understand variation within the Hungarian language. The entry structure enables learners to compare meanings, registers, and usage across different Hungarian-speaking regions, fostering critical awareness of linguistic diversity. In grammar instruction, example sentences from the dictionary can be employed to illustrate the syntactic and pragmatic functions of specific constructions in real-life contexts. Additionally, as it is an open dictionary, it provides opportunities for collaborative, project-based learning, where students can collect and discuss regional expressions under teacher supervision. Such practices not only enhance lexical and grammatical competence but also develop digital literacy and promote an active, research-based approach to language learning.

In the following, a few effective practices are outlined that demonstrate how TOHD can be successfully integrated into educational settings. The first classroom activity focuses on exploring regional semantic variation through the dictionary's search functions. The dictionary allows users to search not only by headword but also by meaning and example sentence, which makes it particularly suitable for comparative lexical analysis. For instance, when students look up the headword "letér", they discover that in Hungary it means "to leave the proper path", while in Slovakia it means "to turn into a street". This activity encourages learners to observe how meanings can shift across different language varieties and to reflect on the cultural and geographical factors influencing language use. By guiding students to compare and discuss such differences, teachers can promote both linguistic awareness and critical thinking.

In another exercise, students can focus on the use of geographic labels to explore the regional distribution of particular words and meanings. The dictionary applies such labels to indicate where a headword or sense is used, for example, *Fv* for *Felvidék* (part of Slovakia where Hungarian is spoken) and *Ka* for *Kárpátalja* (part of Ukraine where Hungarian is spoken). By examining these labels for the headword "letér", learners can identify in which regions specific meanings occur and compare regional lexical patterns. This type of activity not only deepens students' understanding of linguistic variation but also enhances their ability to interpret lexicographical information critically and to discover the many sides of lexicography, including how detailed and context-sensitive dictionary descriptions can be.

Another useful practice involves examining differences in usage between general and specialized meanings. When students search for the headword "abszolvál" in the online dictionary, they find that in Slovakia the word is used broadly with the meaning to finish something, whereas in Hungary it has a narrower, context-specific meaning, referring mainly to completing studies or passing an exam. This exercise helps learners recognize how the same lexical item can develop distinct semantic ranges depending on the linguistic environment. Such comparisons raise students' awareness of contextual appropriateness and encourage reflection on how social and institutional settings shape the meanings of words.

Another, completely different aspect of dictionary use is highlighted in the following exercise, which focuses on searching by meaning rather than by headword. Students are asked to find the regional varieties corresponding to a given standard Hungarian word, such as "autópálya" (motorway). Through this search, they discover that different words are used across regions, for example, "autobahn" in Austria and "autoceszta" in Slovenia. This task draws attention not only to lexical variation influenced by contact with majority languages but also illustrates how regional vocabulary reflects social and cultural integration. It also demonstrates how meaning-based searches can reveal patterns of linguistic diversity that might not be visible through headword-based exploration alone.

The final exercise focuses on exploring word families and semantic relations within the dictionary. Students are required to find the standard Hungarian equivalent of a given headword, along with all its related words and derived forms. For example, when searching for "nanuk" (ice cream), learners can find the standard Hungarian equivalent and then explore other related words listed at the end of the entry as hyperlinks (e.g. "nanukszelet" – piece of ice cream); "nanuktorta" – ice cream cake). By clicking on these links, they can easily navigate through the network of connected words, which helps them understand the broader semantic field of the headword. This activity promotes vocabulary expansion and raises awareness of morphological relationships, while also encouraging autonomous learning through interactive exploration.

Contemporary online dictionaries, such as TOHD, further enrich the learning experience through multimedia features including sound files, images, and hyperlinks, which facilitate deeper lexical engagement. Integrating systematic dictionary use into educational practice helps learners become more independent, precise, and effective language users. In this way, dictionaries function not merely as reference works but as indispensable pedagogical tools that foster the development of comprehensive language competence.

## Conclusions

The Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) exemplifies a unique integration of sociolinguistic theory, empirical lexicographic practice, and digital innovation. Over nearly two decades of development, TOHD has become an indispensable linguistic resource for documenting and analysing the pluricentric nature of Hungarian as spoken across the Carpathian Basin. It stands at the intersection of language contact, identity construction, and digital humanities, reflecting both the diversity and the unity of Hungarian linguistic practice in transnational contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint, TOHD confirms that Hungarian, fragmented after the Treaty of Trianon, has evolved into a network of mutually intelligible yet regionally differentiated varieties. These varieties – shaped by differing sociopolitical environments and prolonged bilingualism – have produced contact-induced lexical phenomena that challenge monolithic conceptions of standard language. Through systematic documentation of these forms, TOHD contributes to the empirical foundation of pluricentricity studies, offering a nuanced representation of how lexical innovation, borrowing, and semantic shift emerge in minority language settings.

Methodologically, TOHD redefines lexicographic practice through its database-driven, continuously evolving structure. Its digital architecture allows for dynamic microstructural expansion – unrestricted by the limitations of printed media – and integrates multimodal resources, such as authentic audio and visual illustrations. The inclusion of metadata (e.g., regional labels, stylistic qualifiers, and etymological notes) situates each lexical item within its full sociolinguistic context. Moreover, the annotation of authentic spoken and written examples provides valuable insight into the pragmatics of minority Hungarian usage, enabling researchers to trace variation and frequency across time and space.

The dictionary's editorial model – collaborative, cross-border, and interdisciplinary – illustrates a sustainable approach to collective lexicography. Although standardization challenges persist due to the participation of editors from multiple regions, recent harmonization efforts (2024–2025) have significantly enhanced coherence and accuracy.

Beyond its scholarly significance, TOHD fulfills an important pedagogical and societal role. Its open-access design enables both specialists and non-specialists to explore the linguistic landscape of Hungarian beyond Hungary's borders. In educational contexts, the dictionary promotes linguistic awareness by exposing learners to authentic examples of regional and stylistic variation, thereby fostering understanding of language diversity and identity. As a pedagogical tool, TOHD embodies the principles of modern lexicography: inclusivity, transparency, and interactivity. It facilitates a deeper comprehension of lexical meaning, contextual use, and cross-regional communication within the Hungarian-speaking world.

Ultimately, TOHD demonstrates that digital lexicography can serve not merely as a descriptive enterprise but as a form of linguistic empowerment. By documenting the living lexicon of minority Hungarian communities, the dictionary strengthens the visibility and legitimacy of these varieties within the broader linguistic ecosystem. It bridges the gap between academic research and community engagement, between standardization and diversity. As it continues to evolve technologically and conceptually, TOHD will remain a cornerstone for the study of Hungarian pluricentricity, language contact, and digital lexicography, which is an enduring testament to the resilience and adaptability of language in the face of political and cultural boundaries.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The authors declare that ChatGPT was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity.

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## Urban Narratives in Literature: Cultural Representation, Resistance, and the Reinterpretation of Cities in the Global South

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### Abstract

This article examines how literature participates in the construction and contestation of urban narratives, treating fiction not as a mirror of the city but as a critical practice that refracts and reshapes urban life. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, it analyzes literary works from the Global South, particularly Brazilian classics such as Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902) and Rachel de Queiroz's *O Quinze* (1930), to show how they dramatize exclusion, resilience, and the uneven geographies of modernization. Alongside these texts, writings by Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo highlight how marginalized voices articulate alternative historiographies of the city. By engaging with the triad of memory, history, and narrative, the study demonstrates how fiction constructs symbolic geographies that challenge colonial frameworks and unsettle dominant spatial ideologies. In doing so, literature manifests itself as a form of urban theory: it documents collective memory, reevaluates historical events, and generates imaginaries that complement and contest institutional accounts of development. The article concludes that urban narratives in literature expand the repertoire of urban studies and contribute to global debates on cultural representation, resilience, and the redefinition of cities in contemporary imagination.

*Keywords:* urban narratives, literature and urban space, decolonial thought, resistance and representation, Global South

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## Introduction

Literature has long functioned as a lens through which societies imagine both themselves and their spatial environments. When read alongside urban studies, the city surfaces not merely as a geographic backdrop but as a dynamic agent that shapes and is shaped by narrative. The literary city is therefore never a neutral stage; it is infused with memory, ideology, and cultural struggle. In the twentieth century, rapid demographic growth, urban expansion, and technological change transformed cities into central arenas of modern human experience. Literary production absorbed these transformations, turning the city into both a source of utopian projection and dystopian critique. As Gomes (1999) observed, the city came to embody promises of technological progress while simultaneously exposing deep social contradictions.

Yet, as most global debates on the literary city have largely privileged Euro-American traditions, perspectives from the Global South have often been marginalized. This imbalance raises the central question of this article: how do literary works from the Global South contribute to reimagining urban narratives beyond Eurocentric frameworks of modernity? Addressing this question requires recognizing that Southern cities are too often portrayed only through lenses of crisis (scarcity, violence, or dysfunction). Fiction, however, reveals them as far more complex: as sites of cultural resistance, symbolic reinvention, and alternative historiographies.

Following Aníbal Quijano's (2005) concept of the "coloniality of power," this study argues that literature from the Global South illuminates how colonial hierarchies persist in urban development and in the production of knowledge itself. Fiction challenges these hierarchies by reframing the city as a contested cultural and political project, opening space for voices historically silenced in official accounts. In the Brazilian context, the literary effervescence of the 1920s and 1930s exemplifies this dynamic, when literature increasingly engaged with political and social struggles. As Antonio Candido (2000) notes, even authors who avoided explicit ideological positions ended up embedding them in their works, shaping the intellectual character of the period.

Building on these historical precedents, contemporary decolonial writing continues to disrupt dominant frameworks, exposing inequalities of class, race, and gender while reaffirming urban peripheries as spaces of resilience and creativity. Authors such as Carolina Maria de Jesus<sup>1</sup> and Conceição Evaristo,<sup>2</sup> among others, exemplify this trajectory (Tremba, 2020; Ultramari & Jazar, 2021). Seen in continuity, these interventions show that literature is not merely an archive of memory but a critical practice that reshapes urban imaginaries across time and space.

## Memory–Narrative–History

The city imagined through literature is never a direct reproduction of physical space. It emerges at the intersection of memory, history, and narrative, a triad that determines how urban life is

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<sup>1</sup>Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914–1977) — Black Brazilian writer and housekeeper, best known for *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada* (1960; translated as *Child of the Dark*). The text, written from her experience in the Canindé favela in São Paulo, documents hunger, precarious labor, and daily struggles, transforming lived memory into a collective testimony of marginalization.

<sup>2</sup>Conceição Evaristo (b. 1946) — Black Brazilian writer, activist, and scholar. She is widely recognized for the concept of *escrevivência* ("life-writing"), which articulates the interconnection between the lived experiences of Black women and literary production. Her work challenges canonical hierarchies and asserts the epistemological value of marginalized voices.

remembered, interpreted, and contested. Rather than treating these dimensions in isolation, fiction weaves them together, producing symbolic geographies that compete with official maps and planning documents.

Memory in literary texts is both intimate and collective. It condenses sensory fragments—sounds of marketplaces, the texture of drought-stricken soil, or the rhythm of popular rituals—into anchors of urban meaning. Carolina Maria de Jesus, for example, framed her *Quarto de Despejo* (1960) through the remembered hunger and indignities of favela life, transforming personal recollections into a collective record of marginalization. Her fragmented notes are not neutral preservation but acts of selection and emphasis, certifying that certain images of the city remain legible to future generations.

Memory operates not as a neutral preservation but as a culturally filtered recollection. As Clifford Geertz (1997/2004) reminds us, meaning-making is always embedded in cultural contexts, and literary representations of the city often privilege rituals, sounds, or images that communities recognize as their own.

History, in contrast, reflects institutionalized accounts of wars, migrations, and planning reforms. Fiction interacts with history by reframing or contesting these official versions. Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*<sup>3</sup> (1902) reinterprets the Canudos War not simply as rebellion but as a confrontation with the state's project of modernization, dramatizing the violence of homogenization. Rachel de Queiroz's *O Quinze*<sup>4</sup> (1930) similarly transforms the drought of 1915 into more than a climatic event: it becomes a symbolic turning point that exposes the fragility of urban reception of migrants. Literature thus refuses to passively repeat history; it recodes it through narrative voice.

Narrative is the mediating practice that binds memory and history into meaning. Choices of metaphor, focalization, and rhythm determine how events are framed and which voices are privileged or silenced. Umberto Eco's notion of the "open work" is particularly relevant here: narrative strategies invite readers to collaborate in meaning-making, ensuring that the city represented in fiction is never closed or singular, but open to reinterpretation across time and audiences. Conceição Evaristo's concept of "*escrevivência*" illustrates this: her narratives merge lived experience with fictional construction, asserting that storytelling is always a political act of positioning. In this sense, the literary city is not only depicted but actively constructed, shaped by the author's social standpoint and ideological horizon.

When memory, history, and narrative converge, they generate what might be called the "narrated city", a version of the urban distinct from material form. This divergence is not a weakness but a critical opportunity: it reveals the anxieties, aspirations, and exclusions that material plans often obscure. Fiction can exaggerate or omit, but in doing so it produces a counter-archive that resists homogenizing visions of modernity.

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<sup>3</sup>Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões* (1902) — Monumental classic of Brazilian literature that depicts the Canudos War (1896–1897), a violent conflict in the state of Bahia between the Brazilian army and the community led by Antônio Conselheiro. Blending journalism, sociology, and literary narrative, Euclides portrays the *sertão* both as geographic aridity and as a symbolic arena of resistance. The massacre that concluded the war left thousands dead and became emblematic of the violent consolidation of the Brazilian Republic.

<sup>4</sup>Rachel de Queiroz, *O Quinze* (1930) — Influential modernist novel addressing the drought of 1915 in northeastern Brazil. Through the lens of individual suffering and forced migration, Queiroz represents the famine and the precarious reception of rural migrants in Fortaleza. The work is both literary testimony and social critique, inaugurating her career as the first woman admitted to the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

Methodologically, this triad enables a layered reading: (1) identifying mnemonic traces embedded in the text, (2) examining how official history is appropriated or contested, and (3) analyzing the narrative strategies that integrate memory and history into coherent accounts. Such a sequence clarifies how literature not only documents but also theorizes urban life, often with greater sensitivity to everyday practices than formal planning discourse.

In the Global South, where colonial and technocratic frameworks have long dominated urban governance, this interplay becomes particularly revealing. Literary counter-narratives challenge institutional historiographies by offering alternative ways of imagining space, whether through drought diaries, testimonies of forced migration, or depictions of peripheral neighborhoods. In these narratives, fiction is not ancillary evidence but an epistemological intervention, giving form to shadow urbanisms that coexist with, and resist, dominant urban orders.

### **Representation, Interpretation, and Appropriation**

To claim that the “narrated city” differs from the “concrete city” is to understand that literature generates its own symbolic geographies. Representation in fiction is not neutral description but a selective act that fuses material and metaphorical dimensions. As Gomes (1994, p. 24) observes, literary depictions of the city combine geometry, imagery, and human entanglement into “sensitive accounts of ways of seeing.” A novel does not reproduce urban form; it condenses experience into images, crowded alleys, drought-stricken landscapes, silent plazas, that often communicate more powerfully than technical documents.

Interpretation builds upon this representational act. Authors bring frameworks (political, cultural, or personal), that guide how the city is narrated. Euclides da Cunha’s *Os Sertões* interprets the sertão not only as barren land but as a metaphor for abandonment and resilience, dramatizing a clash between centralized modernization and local autonomy (Ventura, 1998). Rachel de Queiroz’s *O Quinze* reinterprets drought migration as more than a climatic disaster: it becomes testimony of state neglect and a critique of exclusionary urban reception (Câmara & Câmara, 2015). In both cases, historical events are transfigured into literary statements about inequality and power.

Appropriation highlights how urban narratives circulate beyond literature itself. Texts are re-read, politicized, and mobilized by readers, institutions, or policymakers. The image of the *sertão* as “desert” has been appropriated alternately as evidence of national backwardness and as a symbol of cultural resilience. Dalton Trevisan’s<sup>5</sup> silence about Curitiba, in turn, has been interpreted as refusal, critique, or absence, each reception producing new layers of meaning (Jazar, 2020). Such re-significations show how literature remains vulnerable to shifting interpretations that extend far beyond authorial intention.

This triad — representation, interpretation, appropriation — accents the political mobility of literary narratives. Fictional accounts often blur the boundaries between record and imagination, creating a sense of verisimilitude that compels readers to question official discourses of development or modernity. Appropriation makes these accounts active within

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<sup>5</sup>Dalton Trevisan (b. 1925) — Brazilian short story writer, famously reclusive, often nicknamed the “Vampire of Curitiba.” Known for his minimalist style and focus on everyday urban tensions, his work portrays the contradictions of modern life in Curitiba through fragmented, elliptical narratives. His silence and absence from public life became as emblematic as his prose, reinforcing his aura as one of Brazil’s most enigmatic literary figures.

public discourse: novels become archives for collective memory, resources for cultural identity, or even tools of political critique.

Seen this way, literature is not an embellishment of urban studies but an interlocutor. Its representations dramatize contradictions of urban life; its interpretations embed ideological choices; and its appropriations ensure that meanings evolve across time and audiences. By tracing these processes, we reveal literature as a dynamic participant in the negotiation of urban knowledge, actively shaping how cities are remembered, governed, and reimagined.

### **Narratives of Exclusion and Resilience**

Literary depictions of the Brazilian hinterland (*sertão*) offer some of the clearest examples of how fiction becomes a site where exclusion and resilience are simultaneously staged. Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902) and Rachel de Queiroz's *O Quinze* (1930) stand as emblematic works that reveal how modernization and urbanization unfolded through violence, displacement, and marginalization, yet also produced forms of endurance and collective memory.

In *Os Sertões*, Euclides situates the Canudos War as a paradoxical confrontation. The *sertão* is described as geographically barren yet symbolically fertile, a territory that central state projects sought to discipline, but which resisted incorporation. His portrayal of the region as a “desert” condensed two registers: the material harshness of drought and the metaphorical abandonment of its people (Ventura, 1998). Canudos appears as more than a rebellion; but as an alternative community asserting autonomy, whose destruction exposed the fragility of modernization premised on homogenization. Here, the city's progress is revealed as inseparable from peripheral erasure.

Queiroz's *O Quinze*, written three decades later, translates the drought of 1915 into a narrative of human vulnerability and forced migration. Migrants arriving at the gates of Fortaleza find not sanctuary but exclusion, confined to precarious camps that expose the inadequacy of state intervention. The novel layers personal loss, such as families divided, hunger endured, with collective trauma, transforming structural neglect into lived experience. By drawing on her own childhood memories of visiting these camps (Queiroz, 1972), Queiroz created a hybrid text that functions simultaneously as testimony, critique, and symbolic representation.

Together, these works dramatize exclusion as more than spatial separation: it is a political process that defines who belongs to the city and who remains outside its imagined community. Euclides portrays sertanejos as systematically marginalized for failing to embody modern citizenship, while Queiroz depicts migrants as doubly excluded, expelled from the countryside by drought and rejected by urban elites. Both authors, however, also highlight resilience. In *Os Sertões*, Canudos is remembered as a collective resistance, articulating alternative forms of faith and governance. In *O Quinze*, resilience appears as stubborn endurance, the capacity to maintain memory and social bonds despite displacement.

By foregrounding both exclusion and resilience, these narratives complicate binary visions of “modern cities” versus “backward hinterlands.” They reveal the interdependence of city and *sertão*: one grows at the expense of the other, yet both are bound through circuits of migration, violence, and cultural reinvention. Their resonance extends beyond historical context. Today, *Os Sertões* is revisited as a commentary on state violence and erasure of cultural difference, while *O Quinze* informs debates on environmental justice, migration, and urban precarity.

Methodologically, these texts exemplify how literature can serve as critical urban theory. They expose the contradictions of modernization, dramatize the costs of exclusionary policies, and articulate forms of resilience often absent from institutional archives. Fiction here is not supplementary evidence but an epistemological lens that makes visible the uneven geographies of Brazilian development.

### Conclusions

This article has argued that literature must be read not as an ornament to urban history but as a critical interlocutor. Our analysis has shown that by distinguishing between the narrated city and the built city, we can see how fiction refracts urban life through metaphor, memory, and narrative strategy. These refractive gestures are not distortions but interpretive interventions that expose the fractures of class, race, gender, and power often obscured in official archives.

The central question posed (how literary works from the Global South reimagine urban narratives beyond Eurocentric frameworks) finds its answer in the examples discussed. Euclides da Cunha and Rachel de Queiroz dramatize the *sertão* as both excluded and resilient, revealing the interdependence of peripheral hinterlands and expanding cities. Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo extend this trajectory by foregrounding marginal voices that challenge dominant urban imaginaries. Together, these works illuminate how literature resists homogenizing visions of modernity and articulates alternative ways of inhabiting and representing the city.

From a methodological perspective, this reading demonstrates that fiction functions as a form of urban theory. It records collective memory, reframes historical events, and produces symbolic geographies that complement, and often contest, planning documents and institutional accounts. For urban studies, engaging with literature is therefore not ancillary but essential: it opens interpretive pathways attentive to subjectivity, cultural production, and everyday resilience.

Finally, the implications extend beyond the Brazilian case. Literary narratives from the Global South circulate internationally, reframing debates on development and citizenship across borders. In this sense, fiction operates as a form of global urban citizenship: it connects diverse experiences of struggle and creativity, generating solidarities through shared stories. By recognizing this contribution, scholars and practitioners alike can build a historiography of the city that is more inclusive, plural, and sensitive to the complexities of lived space.

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The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5 model) solely to assist in improving the English translation and language clarity of the manuscript. The content, ideas, structure, and interpretations presented in the article are entirely the author's own.



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## Continuity and Change in Persian Architecture: The Archetypal Heritage

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### Abstract

This paper examines the principle of continuity and change in Persian architecture, highlighting how archetypal spatial patterns persist across centuries while accommodating cultural, environmental, and technological transformations. Drawing on Walter Gropius's notion that architecture mediates between tradition and innovation, the study examines the enduring presence of the courtyard archetype, often centered around a water feature, in residential, civic, and religious buildings. From Sassanid palaces and Zoroastrian temples to Safavid urban squares, traditional houses, caravanserais, and madrasas, this spatial model demonstrates both functional and symbolic resilience. The analysis extends beyond architecture to Persian visual culture, showing its reflection in miniature paintings, carpet designs, and cinematic representations, where centrality and water serve as unifying motifs. Through a Gestalt-oriented perspective, the paper emphasizes how principles of rhythm, balance, and axial order create perceptual coherence across changing forms and contexts. By following the evolution of these enduring patterns, the study reveals a continuous dialogue between historical memory and contemporary adaptation, illustrating how Persian architecture integrates practical needs, spiritual meaning, and aesthetic values. Recognizing these archetypes enables modern architects to connect with a deeply rooted architectural heritage, thereby bridging the past and present while informing future design strategies.

*Keywords:* Persian architecture, central courtyard, architectural archetypes, cultural continuity

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## Introduction: Continuity and Change

Walter Gropius's 1952 Harvard lecture, "*Architecture: A Vehicle for Communication*," though not explicitly titled "*Continuity and Change*," is widely associated with that very theme—an idea Gropius evoked repeatedly to describe one of the central challenges facing modern architecture. For Gropius, the task of the architect was not to break from the past in pursuit of the new, but rather to negotiate a meaningful synthesis between tradition and innovation. Architecture, he argued, must respond dynamically to evolving technological, social, and cultural conditions while maintaining an organic continuity with historical precedent.

From this perspective, the notion of "*continuity and change*" offers a compelling conceptual lens through which to understand the historical evolution of architecture. Though Gropius was speaking from within a Western modernist tradition, the principle resonates deeply with the enduring logic of Persian architectural practice—a tradition marked not by rupture but by persistent transformation, whereby form and space are continually reinterpreted in response to environmental, material, and cultural realities. Persian architecture exemplifies a dynamic system in which formal adaptations are guided not only by practical necessity but by an enduring architectural vocabulary capable of absorbing change without losing coherence. (Pope, 1965, p. 112).

### Figure 1

*Fire Temple (Tappeh Mill), Rey, Iran, 3rd–7th c. CE (Sasanian)*



### Figure 2

*Tarikhaneh Mosque, Damghan, Iran, Mid-8th c. CE; Minaret CA.1026–1029 CE*



A clear example of this is found in the use of earthen construction techniques, which have evolved over centuries in response to regional climates and available materials. These techniques do more than meet functional needs—they draw upon and reinterpret inherited

spatial archetypes, demonstrating a profound continuity in architectural thought. This can be observed in the historical mosque of Damghan, where brick construction reimagines the monumental stone architecture of the Sasanian era. The arches, in particular, do not merely replicate earlier forms; they translate the tectonic and symbolic language of ancient precedents into a new material context, preserving spatial memory while producing something formally distinct. In this gesture, the architecture enacts both continuity and change, offering a visual and spatial manifestation of historical dialogue.

To analyze this endurance beyond surface resemblance, a Gestalt-oriented lens is useful. Persian architecture privileges legible wholeness—ordered courtyards, axial hierarchies, dome–iwan sequences, and clear figure–ground relations—so that parts read as moments of a coherent field (Arnheim, 1974). What persists is not a fixed image but a set of perceptual principles: rhythm, balance, centrality, and spatial enclosure calibrated to climate and use. This constancy enables resilience—an openness to innovation that remains anchored in cultural memory.

The paper proceeds in two moves. First, it clarifies what is meant by “Persia,” arguing that political geography alone is insufficient and proposing a phenomenological reading attentive to the cultural atmosphere of place. Second, it traces one foundational archetype across time, following its transformations rather than narrating a strictly linear history. The aim is to show how a durable architectural grammar accommodates change, allowing Persian architecture to renew itself while staying recognizably itself.

### Where is Persia?

In contemporary terms, Persia is often associated with the region known as the East. But where, in truth, is this “East”? Too often, the term is used to refer to a generalized area, one that glosses over the distinct identities, cultures, and histories it encompasses.

The etymology of East and West is not merely about cardinal directions; each evokes an entire world within cultural imagination. Unlike North and South, which can be more readily explained through geographic phenomena such as the angle and intensity of sunlight, East and West are less tied to physical orientation and more deeply connected to symbolic and cultural meaning. While the natural conditions of light and season may appear similar, their significance only emerges once a point of reference is established. It is this point of origin that imbues East and West with meaning.

**Figure 3**

*Landscape of Persia*



In the traditional Persian worldview, however, spatial orientation was conceived differently. These directions were not determined by external geopolitical frameworks but by a cosmological and cultural understanding of space, rooted in the sun's movement and the perceived boundaries of the inhabited world (Yarshater, 1983).

As Abbas Kiarostami says:

In a bird's eye  
The West is where  
The sun sets.  
And the East is where  
The sun rises.  
That's all.

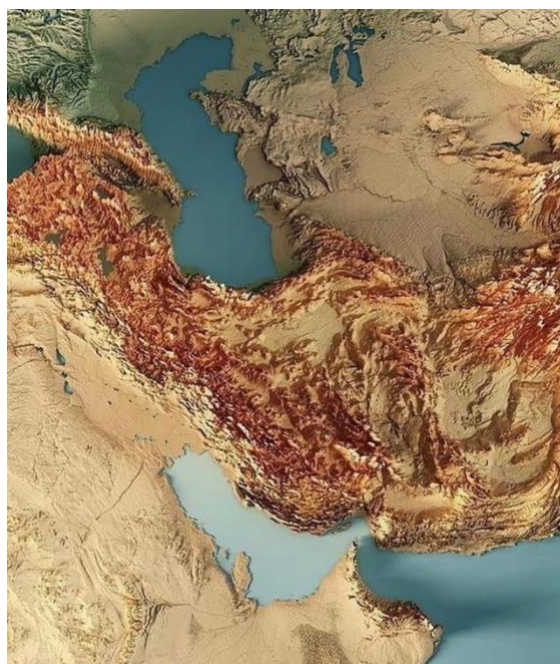
On the other hand, the East draws upon a rich array of spiritual and metaphysical traditions that do not necessarily follow the same dichotomies. Persian philosophy, like other Eastern systems, tends to emphasize unity rather than duality, intuition over reason, and the interrelatedness of being rather than its categorization. Thinkers such as Zoroaster, Suhrawardi, and later Rumi explored the relationship between light and existence, the harmony between the visible and the invisible, and the poetic essence of dwelling in the world (Corbin, 1993). Thus, while the West may look to Greece and Rome as the foundation of its worldview, the East, and Persia in particular, refers to a different lineage—one where wisdom is often poetic, the sacred is intimately woven into the everyday, and architecture itself becomes a form of philosophical expression.

With this introduction, the path of our description and understanding of Persia is determined. Although it pays attention to geography, it also follows a poetic path of understanding.

### Persia as a Cultural Domain

**Figure 4**

*The Greater Persian World*





The term *Persia*, as used in this paper, warrants clarification, as modern political boundaries do not reflect the full historical and cultural extent of the region. Historically, *Greater Persia* encompassed a vast area of Central Asia and the Middle East. This included not only the geographic core of contemporary Iran but also extended to parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, southern Russia, and Pakistan (Frye, 1989; Yarshater, 1983).

While present-day Iran represents the heartland of this ancient domain, Persian cultural and linguistic influence has long extended far beyond its borders. Even in the absence of political control, the imprint of Persian civilization is evident across regions—from Central Asia to the Caucasus and parts of East Asia—through shared rituals, customs, architectural forms, and literary traditions. The widespread presence of Persian manuscripts, poetry, and celebrated figures in these areas attests to this lasting influence.

Persian art and architecture have a rich heritage that stretches far beyond the borders of modern-day Iran, from the Abbasid monuments of Baghdad to the splendid Timurid buildings of Samarkand and Bukhara. This merging of influences resulted in a distinctive artistic style that spread through the Middle East, reflected in monumental architecture and in art forms that range from expressive miniature paintings to sumptuous carpets and ceramics. (Stierlin, 2012, p. 25)

Richard N. Frye (1989) defines Persia as encompassing all lands and peoples where Persian languages are spoken, as well as those influenced by Persian culture. In his view, Persia includes large portions of the Caucasus, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, and even extends to China and western India through cultural diffusion.

### Landscape and Climate of Persia

#### Figure 5

*View of Shazdeh Garden (Mahan, Kerman) – Built c. 1850 (Initial) and Expanded c. 1870 During the Qajar Era – Landscape of Persia*





Persia, a vast and ancient land, unfolds as a living mosaic of natural wonders and a tapestry of light and landscape, where each region tells a story of resilience, beauty, and transformation. From the towering Alborz Mountains in the north to the sun-scorched deserts of the central plateau, the land's diversity is mirrored in its climate.

Rising majestically along the southern edge of the Caspian Sea, the Alborz Mountains are the northern sentinels of Persia. Their snow-capped peaks, including the revered Mount Damavand, pierce the sky, casting their long shadows over the fertile plains below. These mountains not only shape the climate but also the spirit of the land, providing a sanctuary where the cool, moist air nurtures lush forests and vibrant life.

Stretching from the northwest to the southeast, the Zagros Mountains form the backbone of Persia. Their rugged ridges and deep valleys have been the cradle of civilization, witnessing the ebb and flow of empires. The Zagros, with their rich biodiversity and ancient oak forests, offer a stark contrast to the arid expanses of the central plateau, creating microclimates that sustain diverse ecosystems.

To the south lies the Persian Gulf, a warm embrace that has long been a crossroads of trade and culture. Its waters, shimmering under the relentless sun, reflect the golden hues of the desert sands. The coastal plains are characterized by high humidity and scorching summers, where the heat is tempered by the cooling sea breeze, influencing the architectural forms and lifestyles of the region. In the north, the Caspian Sea offers a subtropical climate, where the land is kissed by the moisture-laden winds from the sea. This region is a tapestry of dense forests, verdant hills, and fertile plains, where agriculture thrives.

But, at the heart of Persia lies the vast expanse of the central deserts—the Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut. These arid lands, with their salt flats and shifting dunes, are among the hottest and driest places on Earth. Yet, within this harshness lies a profound beauty, where the play of light and shadow creates a landscape that is both desolate and mesmerizing.

Water, scarce in many parts and is also revered for its life-giving properties. In the arid central plateau, qanats channel subterranean streams, whispering life into oases. Along the Caspian coast, the abundant rainfall nourishes lush forests and fertile plains. In the south, the waters of the Persian Gulf moderate the climate, offering a cool respite from the intense sun.

Although forests and mountain ranges are present throughout the region, it is the vast plains and expansive deserts that most vividly define its characteristic landscape. These open terrains, shaped by centuries of wind, sun, and minimal rainfall, create a powerful impression of space, silence, and light. The sheer scale of the deserts—such as the Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut—establishes a dominant geographical identity, influencing not only the physical environment but also cultural expressions, architectural responses, and modes of habitation. In this context, the landscape is not merely a backdrop but an active agent in shaping the experience of place.

## Birthing an Archetype

**Figure 6**

*Relief of Taq-e Bostan, Figure of Anahita – Dated to the Late 3rd–4th Century CE (Sasanian Period, Reign of Khosrow II)*



As discussed in the section on Persia, a significant portion of the Iranian plateau is characterized by a hot and arid climate, where the availability and preservation of water is not just a necessity, but the foundation of survival. In such an environment, agriculture, livestock, and settlement planning, and even spiritual life, were deeply intertwined with the management of water resources. The significance of water in Persian life extended far beyond its utilitarian value. Across ancient civilizations, water was revered as a divine life-giving force. In the Indo-Iranian spiritual tradition, this reverence was embodied in the figure of Anahita, the goddess of water, fertility, healing, and purity. Anahita's worship predates Zoroastrian monotheism and was often practiced in conjunction with Mithraism. Yet her importance endured well into the Zoroastrian period—unusual for a polytheistic deity in a monotheistic culture—testifying to her profound cultural and symbolic influence (Boyce, 1983).

This enduring reverence is powerfully depicted in the Taq-e Bostan reliefs, where Anahita appears alongside Ahura Mazda, the supreme god of Zoroastrianism. In the coronation scene of Khosrow Parviz, Anahita stands to the left of the king, mirroring the position of Ahura Mazda on the right, both flanking the monarch.

Anahita's symbolism resonates with universal archetypes of water as a source of life, rebirth, and purification—motifs that continue in Hindu rituals in the Ganges, in Christian baptism, and in the practices of the Mandeans of southern Persia, one of the last surviving Gnostic religions, for whom water remains a sacred element in every rite.

Given Anahita's exalted status, it is no surprise that her temples were constructed with the same reverence and architectural precision as fire temples and Mithraic sanctuaries. Among the most distinguished is the Anahita Temple at Bishapur—a remarkable structure that embodies both spiritual grandeur and symbolic clarity.

**Figure 7**

*Anahita Temple, Bishapur – c. Mid-3rd Century CE (Sasanian)*



The temple is organized around a square plan, a layout characteristic of fire temples, featuring a central courtyard enclosed by roofed corridors. Yet, in contrast to the fire-centered design of Zoroastrian shrines, the heart of this temple contains flowing water: a broad, shallow pool fed by subterranean channels. This substitution is more than functional—it is deeply symbolic, placing water, the sacred element of the goddess Anahita, at the spiritual and spatial core of the sanctuary.

In this context, the Anahita temple—and Persian architecture more broadly—becomes a mirror of cosmology, a material embodiment of belief systems, and an architectural response to the physical constraints of its environment. Light, water, fire, and geometry converge in the Persian architectural tradition not merely as elements of construction but as carriers of meaning, shapers of atmosphere, and extensions of sacred thought. These values and sensibilities form the foundation of the Persian Gestalt, in which architecture is never just built—it is composed, revealed, and experienced as a living symbol of the world.

This same conceptual framework is evident in the Takht-e Soleyman Fire Temple complex in Takab, one of the most significant Zoroastrian religious sites of the Sasanian period. Here, a large, natural spring-fed lake occupies the center of a fortified sacred precinct. The complex is carefully organized around this body of water, and the presence of the lake becomes the generative force for the spatial composition of the entire ensemble. The fire temple, although focused on fire as the central element of Zoroastrian worship, is situated in close dialogue with water. The centrality of water in this context is not coincidental; rather, it reflects a deliberate spatial and spiritual decision.

This model is not limited to sacred architecture. It extends to royal and civic buildings as well, such as the Palace of Ardeshir Babakan near Firuzabad. Constructed with a monumental iwan and a domed hall, the palace is organized around a large pool that reflects the architecture itself, creating a powerful sense of symmetry. Just as the water physically reflects the building, it also reflects the philosophical ideals underpinning Persian rulership and cosmology, and one that positions water not only as a practical resource but also as a spiritual and aesthetic center of architectural composition (Huff, 1986).

The architectural pattern of placing water at the heart of the built environment became one of the defining characteristics of Iranian architecture. This timeless concept spans centuries and

various building typologies. This centrality of water is not merely a climatic response but represents a deeper cosmological and metaphysical orientation rooted in Persian thought. Understanding this pattern is crucial for grasping the essence of the Persian Gestalt—a worldview in which architecture, nature, and spirituality are intertwined—and the archetypal foundations of Iranian spatial culture.

### Figure 8

*Fire Temple of Takht-e Soleyman (Azar Gushnasp), Takab, Iran – Constructed During the Sasanian Period (5th–6th Century CE)*



As Christopher Alexander insightfully states in *The Timeless Way of Building*,

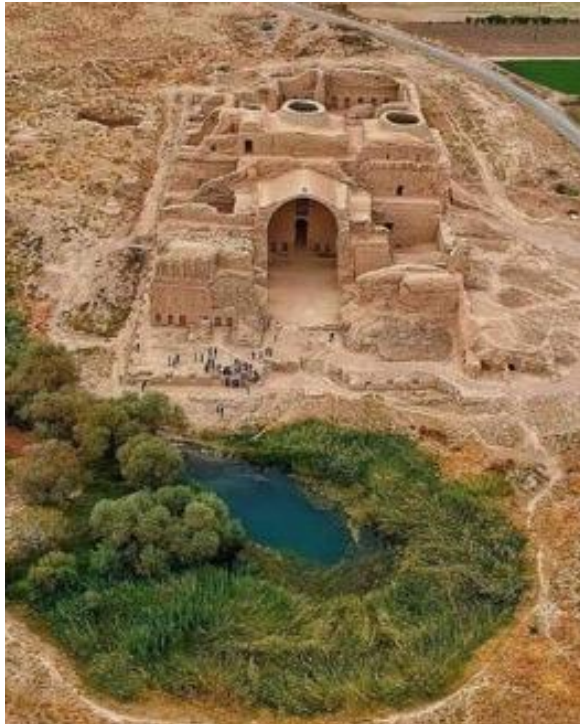
The patterns of events have always been inextricably linked to the place. Every building or city is ultimately made up of these place patterns and nothing else. These patterns are the atoms and molecules that make up the building or city. (Alexander, 1979, p. 65)

The persistence of this archetype is evident in its Gestalt continuity, extending from the Sassanid Palace of Ardeshir Babakan (c. 224–240 CE) to the Safavid palaces of the 17th century, such as Ali Qapu and Chehel Sotoun. Despite the temporal distance and the shifting socio-cultural contexts, the essential spatial logic of a central, ordered structure remained intact, while its expression adapted to new aesthetic, functional, and ideological requirements. In this way, the archetype demonstrates both resilience and flexibility, enabling it to adapt to changing cultural values without compromising its underlying form.



**Figure 9**

*Palace of Ardashir I (Ardashir Babakan), Firuzabad (Fars, Iran) – Built AD 224 (Sasanian Period)*



In this way, the ancient model continually adapted itself to the cultural and ideological needs of its time. This enduring pattern—a central water feature around which architecture is organized—was not merely symbolic. Its success lay in its profound adaptability to ritual, belief systems, natural values, environmental conditions, and functional needs.

### Development of the Arceotype

**Figure 10**

*Ali Qapu Palace, Isfahan – c. 1597 CE (Safavid Era)*



This model evolved across architectural typologies. In residences, it appeared as the *howz* (pool) in the center of traditional courtyard homes, creating a focal point for daily life and providing evaporative cooling in the harsh summer heat. In mosques and madrasas, the central courtyard, featuring water ablution pools, offered both spiritual purification and thermal regulation. In caravanserais, it served as a serene, shaded respite for traveling merchants in the midst of the desert, while in palatial gardens, it reflected paradise itself, as expressed in the concept of *chahar bagh* (the fourfold garden), a manifestation of the Quranic vision of heaven.

**Figure 11**

*The Central Courtyard in Traditional Iranian Houses Across Historical Periods, With a Central Pool*



Architecturally, central courtyards in traditional Persian houses are typically enclosed by high walls, establishing a strong sense of privacy, security, and inward orientation. Within this protective shell, a cool microclimate is skillfully created through a careful interplay of shade, vegetation, and water elements.

**Figure 12**

*Central Courtyard in Urban Caravansaries*



The pools and fountains at the center of these courtyards serve a dual purpose: functionally, they lower ambient temperatures through evaporation, and symbolically, they express ideas of purity, life, and renewal. Water, in this context, becomes both a physical necessity and a metaphysical presence.



Persian residential architecture acts as a vital mediator between the natural landscape and the built environment. This relationship is most clearly articulated in the courtyard house, where the central open space not only regulates climate but also serves as a spatial and symbolic core. Nature is invited in, but always within a carefully structured frame. As noted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “In traditional Islamic and Persian art, the presence of water is not merely for aesthetic delight but reflects metaphysical truths—the reflection of the heavens, the purification of the soul, and the center of order” (Nasr, 1987).

**Figure 13**

*Abbasi House, Kashan, Constructed Late 18th Century CE*



Thus, this architectural logic represents more than a pattern—it is a worldview made spatial, a gestalt that fuses functionality with meaning, and matter with spirit.

The development of the central courtyard archetype is pervasive in nearly all typologies of traditional Persian architecture. One of its most enduring applications is found in the design of caravanserais—both urban and out of the city—which consistently adopt this model. In these structures, the central courtyard serves not only as a spatial and organizational core but also as a practical element. The water basin located at the center provides essential drinking water for weary travelers and their animals, reinforcing the integration of function and symbolic form.

**Figure 14**

*Zein-o-Din Caravanserai, Yazd – Built 1606 CE (Safavid Period)*



This architectural pattern was particularly suited to the extensive network of caravanserais along the Silk Road, which traversed the Iranian plateau. These roadside inns, spaced at regular intervals, offered rest and security for caravans navigating the arduous trade routes, and the central courtyard configuration proved to be an adaptable and resilient typology. Over time, variations in form emerged in response to site conditions, aesthetic developments, and functional needs. However, the essential spatial logic of the courtyard remained intact.

As Walter Gropius (1965) emphasized, the architectural principle of “continuity and change” is observable in the evolution of Iranian caravanserais. A particularly innovative example is the Zein al-Din Caravanserai, located between Kerman and Yazd. While this structure employs a rare circular plan, it nevertheless preserves the defining element of the central courtyard. This continuity highlights the enduring influence of the archetypal spatial organization rooted in Persian architectural heritage. The design of Zein al-Din not only reflects a creative reinterpretation of traditional forms but also underscores the persistent relevance of historical spatial logics within evolving architectural expressions.

The central courtyard typology finds one of its most refined expressions in the architectural layout of mosques and madrasas (Islamic schools). These spaces were not only religious or educational centers but also cultural and social hubs, and the courtyard functioned as the spatial and symbolic heart of these institutions.

**Figure 15**

*The Greater Persian World*



In mosques, the central courtyard (*sahn*) frequently contains a pool or fountain for ritual ablution (*wudu*), an essential practice in preparation for prayer. The physical act of purification is thus performed within an architecturally demarcated and symbolically charged space. As Oleg Grabar notes, the presence of water in Islamic architecture is not merely functional but



also serves a metaphysical purpose, representing purity, paradise, and the divine presence (Grabar, 1987). In schools, the courtyard becomes a tranquil zone for intellectual reflection and scholarly gatherings. It mediates between individual study rooms (*hujra*), lecture halls (*darskhaneh*), and communal prayer spaces. According to Nasser Rabbat, the design of madrasas during the Islamic Golden Age followed a model where “the central courtyard became the space of intellectual community” (Rabbat, 1997, p. 145).

The continuity of the central courtyard model is evident across nearly all typologies of Persian architecture; however, its evolution in two distinct domains—urban public spaces and interior architectural environments—is particularly noteworthy.

**Figure 16**

*Shah Mosque, Isfahan*



A prominent urban manifestation of this model is Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, one of the most significant achievements of Safavid urban planning. Here, the spatial logic of the traditional courtyard house is expanded to an urban scale. The vast open space at the center functions analogously to a residential courtyard, creating an enclosed yet open civic nucleus. Around it, cardinaly oriented structures such as the Shah Mosque, the Ali Qapu Palace, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, and the Imperial Bazaar frame the space with functional and symbolic coherence. As Lisa Golombek has observed, this square integrates political, religious, commercial, and social functions into a unified spatial composition, echoing the gestalt of introverted Persian architecture on a monumental civic scale (Golombek, 1992).

**Figure 17**

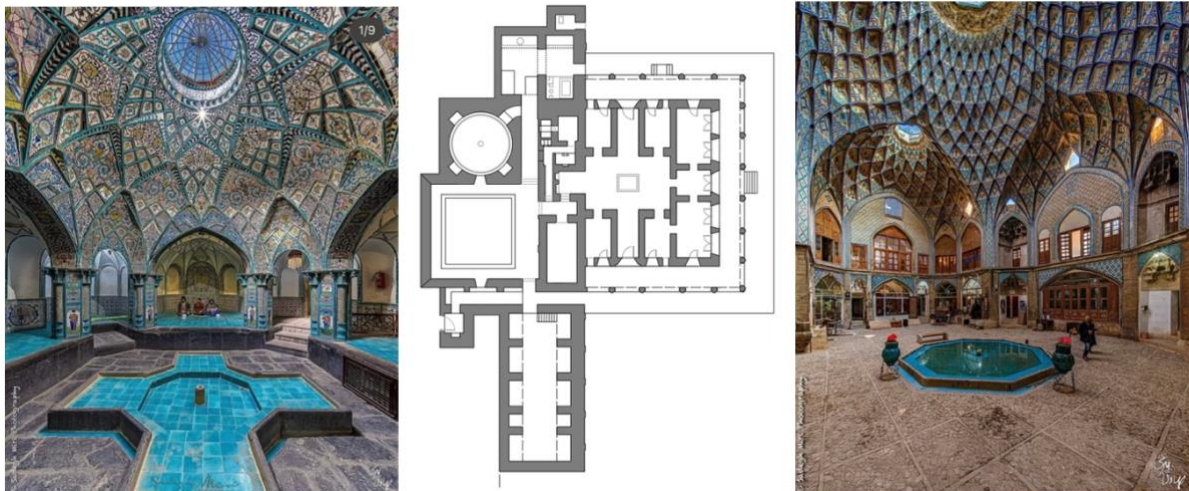
*Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan, Built 1598–1629*



The application of this archetype in interior spaces is equally significant. In structures such as public baths (hammams), the central placement of water not only had symbolic resonance but also practical functionality, serving the bathing rituals in an enclosed, often domed, environment. The integration of light through oculi in the ceiling and the reflection of water on tiled surfaces further enhanced the sensory experience, reinforcing the connection between purification and architectural space.

This architectural logic is strikingly evident in commercial architecture as well. The Timcheh Amin al-Dowleh in the Kashan Bazaar exemplifies the synthesis of functional space and archetypal form. Despite being a covered commercial hub with elaborate muqarnas vaulting, the central water basin anchors the spatial composition. Here, the presence of water is not functionally necessary, yet it persists, highlighting the enduring symbolic weight of water and the courtyard archetype in Persian architectural thought.

**Figure 18**  
*The Greater Persian World*



This phenomenon extends even into private, residential interiors. In the Sadrzadeh House in Sirjan, for instance, a water basin occupies the center of the reception hall, a space traditionally reserved for social gatherings. As Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar assert, such configurations express an “inner spiritual order” (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1973).

### Pattern Repetition in the Arts

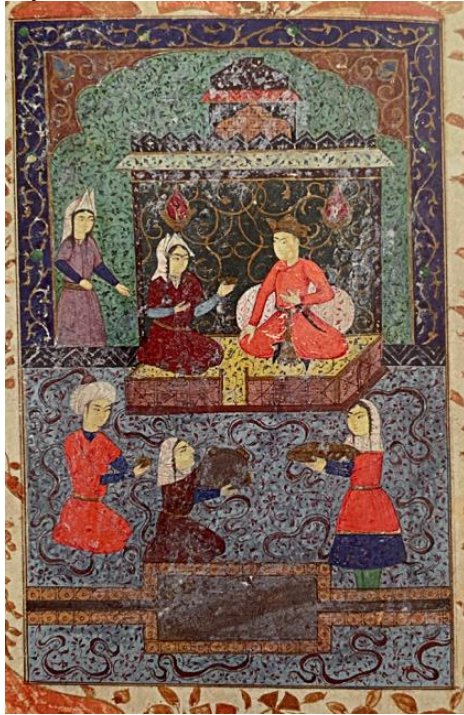
The continuation of this archetype, with the centrally placed water element, can be observed in Persian art, particularly in the tradition of miniature painting. Persian miniatures, which share stylistic affinities with Chinese and other Eastern painting traditions, are deeply connected to the philosophical and cultural concepts of Persian civilization.

A salient example of this archetype appears in the illustrated manuscripts of Nezami Ganjavi's *Khamsa*, such as the image provided here. In this scene, the architectural interior of a palace frames a courtly moment: the enthroned king, surrounded by attendants and female figures, is positioned in a symmetrical setting. At the core of this arrangement lies a rectangular water basin—rendered with delicate brushwork and stylized patterns of flowing water—which anchors the composition both visually and symbolically. The presence of water at the center of the royal hall evokes traditional Persian paradigms of the archetype, which are mentioned.

In the famous Haft Paykar miniature, Bahram Gur is shown seated beside a pool in a domed pavilion, with the central basin reflecting the dome above. Likewise, the miniatures illustrating Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* often feature palace scenes where courtyards, gardens, or pavilions are organized around a central fountain or pool.

### Figure 19

*Safavid Persian Miniature, Nezami Ganjavi's Khamsa, 16th Century*

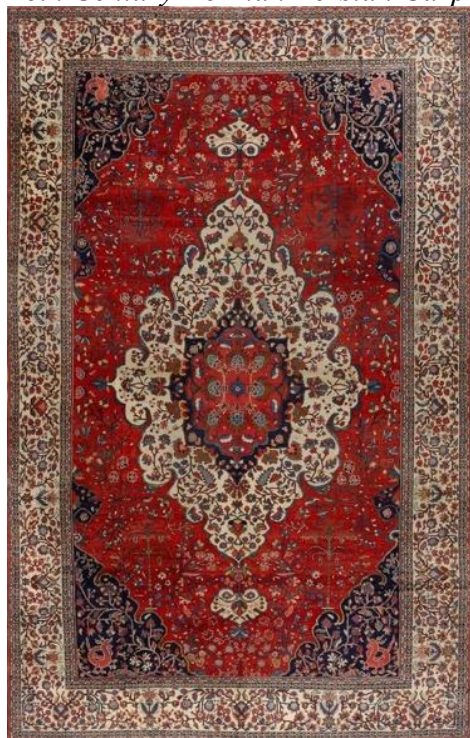


Moreover, this spatial archetype is also echoed in the architectural representations within the miniatures themselves. For instance, in Timurid and Safavid illustrated manuscripts, buildings are frequently depicted with open courtyards, symmetrical layouts, and an axial basin that reflects real architectural practices, such as those seen in the Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan or the Timurid gardens of Herat (Grabar, 1987).

Persian miniatures act as condensed cultural texts that reflect broader archetypal principles present in Persian architecture and aesthetics.

In the tradition of Persian carpet weaving—much like in Persian miniature painting—we find the reflection of shared architectural and artistic archetypes. One of the most prominent of these is the archetype of centrality, particularly symbolized through the theme of water. This motif manifests not only in gardens and architecture but also in the intricate internal designs of Persian carpets, such as the one depicted here, a finely woven Kerman carpet.



**Figure 20***16th Century Kerman Persian Carpet*

This carpet's composition is emblematic of the *chahar bagh* (four-part garden) and the *chartaq* (four-arched structure), where a central axis or space, often featuring water, forms the heart of the design. In the carpet, this is echoed through the large, ornate central medallion, which mirrors the placement of a water basin at the intersection of architectural axes in traditional Persian garden pavilions and courtyard houses (Blair & Bloom, 1994).

The layered borders of the carpet, each filled with its rhythmic patterns and enclosed scripts of flora, serve a purpose beyond decoration. These concentric borders draw the viewer's eye inward, creating a visual pilgrimage toward the symbolic center. Much like how traditional Persian buildings are organized to lead inhabitants toward a central, serene courtyard.

In this way, the carpet becomes more than a decorative object—it is a portable piece of architecture, a woven microcosm of paradise that transforms interior space and carries metaphysical symbolism into the domestic realm.

Examples of references to the courtyard and the life going on in it are also clearly evident in cinematic works. This centrality of the courtyard in everyday life is powerfully portrayed in Ali Hatami's film *Mother*, where the courtyard becomes the emotional and ceremonial heart of the home. It is not merely a space for circulation or climate control; it is the axis of memory, ritual, and gathering. Family interactions unfold around this space, underscoring the enduring cultural and symbolic significance of the courtyard as more than architectural—it is a space of domestic sanctity and communal identity. In Dariush Mehrjui's film *Mom's Guest*, the courtyard and its central pond serve as the unifying element for all the residents of the house. In the final scene, a joyful feast is held in the courtyard beside the pond, symbolizing connection, community, and shared life.

**Figure 21**

*Two Scenes of the Mother Movie (1989) Directed by Ali Hatami*



### Conclusion

The archetypal patterns observed in Iranian architecture illustrate just one path within this rich tradition. Yet, they reveal a persistent thread of *continuity and change* across millennia. Despite historical disruptions, the culture maintained its trajectory of growth and transformation, offering lessons for future architectural innovation. Recognizing these ancient models allows contemporary architects to connect meaningfully with a deeply rooted and historically evolved architectural heritage.

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## Seriousness, Banter, and Vulgarization: The Shift in the Meaning of Sex and Violence in Audio-Visual Works of the Northeastern Renaissance

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### Abstract

The term “Northeastern Renaissance” carries a dual meaning: on the one hand, it represents an artistic movement that emerged in the late 2010s in the three Northeastern provinces of the People’s Republic of China (as well as the eastern regions of Inner Mongolia), bearing a manifesto-like quality; on the other hand, it is also ironic, as the Northeastern provinces have long been perceived as a region that was historically beyond the reach of China’s traditional elite culture, thus having little to revive or restore. This duality is reflected in the audio-visual works of Northeastern post-industrial culture, particularly in their depiction of sex and violence. These works exhibit an ambiguous attitude toward sex and violence—both critical and humorous. Building upon the absurdist foundation of Northeastern post-industrial culture, as discussed in the author’s 2024 academic presentation, this paper further explores the dual nature of sex and violence. The structure of the paper is as follows: The first section reviews my 2024 discussion on the absurdity in Northeastern post-industrial audio-visual works. The subsequent chapters focus on *Drifting Away*, a crime drama that aired in 2025, whose narrative elicited polarized reactions from the audience—some fervently idolized the four butcher-like serial killers, while others found the moral implications deeply unsettling. Finally, the author will analyze this contrast through the lens of the duality in Northeastern post-industrial culture, demonstrating how the intersection of Northeastern migrant culture and post-industrial conditions has given rise to a satirical art form that challenges traditional Chinese moral values.

**Keywords:** Northeastern Renaissance, post-industrial culture, sex and violence, satirical irony, censorship avoidance

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## Introduction

In a 2024 academic conference paper titled “Analyzing the narrative context of post-industrial audio-visual works in Northeast China from the absurdity in the documentary *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks* (2002),” I discussed how films, TV series, and popular songs set in Northeast China embody Albert Camus’s concept of absurdity.<sup>1</sup> Camus’s absurdity primarily refers to the “confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (1979, p. 32). In the paper, I pointed out that artistic works with Northeast cultural backgrounds often involve reflections on the era, which are typically expressed through black humor, specifically manifesting as self-mockery, joking about death, and the stark contrast between ideals and the present. These characteristics metaphorically represent the massive changes of that era, as around the turn of the millennium, Northeast China—namely Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and eastern Inner Mongolia—faced the same fate as the former Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries: the sudden shift from socialism to a free-market economy led to the collapse of numerous state-owned enterprises and massive worker unemployment. In this laid-off wave, workers began to doubt the superior social status of the working class promoted during the Mao era. It can be said that the absurdity in the Northeast is rooted in the irreconcilable gap between the real world and utopia in people’s hearts. This gap is mainly reflected in the loss of working-class identity and honor, leading people to question the rationality of socialist beliefs.

This article builds upon that discussion on Northeast audio-visual art, further exploring the satirical characteristics in films and TV series set in the Northeast, contemplating why they choose elements of poverty, violence, and sex trade, yet simultaneously avoid deep reflection on these social issues. The article will be divided into two parts: the first part will use some audio-visual works with Northeast elements, especially comedic ones, as case studies to discuss the satirical effects in the Northeast cultural context; the second part will focus on China’s new noir films and TV series, particularly *Drifting Away* (P. Chen producer, 2025), to discuss the exaggerated portrayal of violence and the reticence about sex in these works, as well as the situational irony techniques employed.

## Satire in the Cultural Context of Northeast China

For the convenience of discussion, I use the term “Northeastern Renaissance” works to collectively refer to literary and artistic works set in contemporary Northeast China. The term “Northeastern Renaissance” originated from a stand-up comedy performance by rapper Baoshi Gem (Yang et al., 2024). In my 2024 article, I compared elements from Baoshi Gem’s breakthrough work with some films and TV series set in the Northeast around the turn of the millennium, arriving at a general understanding of the Northeastern Renaissance, namely an alternative reflection on the collective trauma brought about by the post-Deng Xiaoping era’s shift toward political liberalism and economic marketization reforms. According to scholar Dai Jinhua, Northeastern Renaissance works represent a form of self-expression by an old logic facing aphasia as it is rapidly replaced by a new logic (Dai & Teng, 2022, Question: Why Northeast Writing Matters, para. 3).

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<sup>1</sup>The article “Analyzing the narrative context...” has three authors, and I am the primary author. The other two contributed only to translation and proofreading. Therefore, I will describe the content using the first-person perspective.

The attitude embodied in the “Northeastern Renaissance” artistic movement highlights the absurdity of reality’s gap without engaging in deep criticism, ultimately returning to the consolation of the subject. This characteristic, according to Tao Dongfeng (2007), stems from the canon-mocking literature that emerged in the late 1990s, namely “parodies, rewritings, and reshapings of canonic works” (p. 204). This literature is manifested explicitly in a batch of online literature that imitates the style of Hong Kong comedian Stephen Chow’s film *A Chinese Odyssey* (1995), structuring classical literature with reality. Tao believes that texts are mediated by social forces and are constantly reconstructed according to the social conditions at the time (p. 205), and canon-mocking literature is precisely the result of the nihilism caused by the “economic construction as the center” liberal policy and the temporarily shelved controversy over the Cultural Revolution. Timothy Bewes points out that this cynical creative attitude reflects distrust of “the account of the world offered by the world” (p. 1). Bewes notes that, besides questioning, it “traditionally favours symbolic, gestural rhetoric over conventional discussion, which avoids morbidity and introspection, furthermore, on the basis that the world is not worthy of such solemn regard” (p. 1).

However, unlike canon-mocking literature, the specific satirical methods of the Northeastern Renaissance are not through reconstructing literary classics, but through (moderately) mocking the current situation and self-mockery. For example, in the black comedy film *Free and Easy* (Geng, 2017), a soap salesman scammer (played by Zhang Zhiyong) uses anesthetics to knock out a young man (played by Chen Xi) and rob him of his money. When the young man catches up to the scammer, the scammer pulls out a gun and says to him, “[...] you should know that our society needs peace and harmony.” The young man leaves in anger and encounters a scammer dressed as a monk (played by Xu Gang). Perhaps out of spite, he robs the fake monk of all his amulets. When the fake monk chases after him to demand them back, the young man knocks him down. At this point, the religious scammer utters a line that seems to admonish the other: “Harmonious thoughts will save us from calamity.”

The word “harmony” (pronounced “hé xié”) appears twice here, both mocking the political program of “harmonious society” proposed by then-Chinese President Hu Jintao. In the internet context during Hu’s administration, “harmony” and its homophone “river crab” (pronounced “hé xiè,” similarly to harmony “hé xié”) became satirical terms (Flower & Leonard, 2016, p. 45; Osburg, 2016, p. 49), even changing their part of speech from noun and adjective to verb. For instance, in the later years of Hu Jintao’s administration, increased internet regulation made many words sensitive, so when netizens found a post deleted, they would say it was “harmonized,” implying it triggered the sensitive word list and was deleted by the Communist Party’s network administrators (Latham, 2016, p. 168). Therefore, in *Free and Easy*, the two instances of “harmony” represent two ironies: irony toward reality, i.e., I scammed you, but do not fight back because I have a gun; and self-mockery, i.e., you beat me, but do not continue because the current political slogan requires us to live in harmony.

Similar to canon-mocking literature, the true popularity of the Northeastern Renaissance was driven by the development of media and the internet. Initially, Northeastern comedian Zhao Benshan, from the late 1990s, created catchphrases for the following year in his performances at every Lunar New Year Gala, such as “plucking the wool of socialism,” “take a few steps if you’re not sick,” “what bicycle do you want (sometimes replaced with watch)?” In Zhao’s stage comedies, there is no shortage of ironic effects from exaggerated representations of social reality. For example, in *Zuó Tiān, Jīn Tiān, Míng Tiān* ([Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow] 1999), he played an elderly farmer from rural Northeast China who, facing the host’s request, had to give a report. The comedic contrast lies in his misunderstanding of a TV interview report

and a political meeting report in a rural committee. So, he loudly recites a prepared rhyme praising the Communist Party's governance in the countryside, describing the extraordinary life of the Chinese people and the "chaos" of Western democratic politics. After Zhao reads these "achievements" in an exaggerated tone, the audience bursts into laughter knowingly (CCTVGala, 2013a). In addition, Zhao accurately simulates the fraudulent behaviors popular in the Northeast during the layoff wave. For example, in *Mài Guǎi* ([Selling crutches] 2001), he plays a street scammer whose wife's kindness inadvertently cooperates with his scam, successfully selling a pair of crutches to a healthy chef (CCTVGala, 2013b).

It is worth noting that some scholars believed Zhao's performance insulted the image of farmers after watching (Xiao, 2012, pp. 36–38). However, Zhao's offense was not an isolated case; for instance, his peer comedian Pan Changjiang often joked about short people in stage plays (Pan himself is only 160 cm tall), and another well-known comedian Huang Hong faced audience complaints for insulting unemployed Northeast workers and community security guards in different works. It can be said that Northeastern performances inherently carry a playful nature, thus often offending certain groups.

From another perspective, this offense appears entirely different. For example, Zhao's farmer image actually punctures the kind and benevolent farmer seen in urban political propaganda posters, revealing the cunning, greedy, and politically insensitive (often showing a lag compared to current policies) aspects of Northeast rural areas. This satire represents an attempt to break through the boundaries of canon-mocking literature that avoids touching politics.

Zhao's humor masks political satire, but in the works of younger creators after the millennium, they attempt to push this satire further. According to Tao (2007), the younger generation (Tao refers to millennials) no longer cares about sanctity and views everything as an object of mockery (p. 212). One case is the flash animation series *Kuāng Kuāng Rì Jì* ([Kuangkuang's Diary] Si producer) broadcast online in 2009. This series reflects the childhood of people born in the 1970s and 1980s in mainland China, covering topics like school, games, love, and family. The story is told from a boy's perspective, where he is portrayed as somewhat slow and often unable to understand adults' deceptions. Initially, the animation satirizes deceptions from parents and educators encountered in childhood, but in the 19th episode, a special edition celebrating the Lunar Year of the Tiger 2010, the creators blatantly review the social injustices of the previous year in the form of Kuangkuang's dream, and at the end, show extreme revenge against the government's vested interests. In this version, one scene simulates the 1994 fire in Karamay, Xinjiang, where, according to China Youth Daily, someone shouted "let the leaders go first" amid the panicked students, causing them to miss the best chance to escape the fire (B. Liu & G. Liu, 1995, p. 39). The purpose of recreating this event in Kuangkuang's Diary is obviously to satirize social injustice.

With the development of the internet, official network regulation has become increasingly strict. Stage performances, TV series, films, and animations with political parody can hardly pass review. In this situation, the method of alluding to reality has shifted, as Dai puts it, exaggerating its "locality" to "provide a consumable feeling" (Dai & Teng, 2022, Question: Re-discussing "Northeastern Renaissance," para. 3, sentence 2). Next, I will select *Drifting Away*, a web series that exploded in popularity in early 2025, to analyze several manifestations of overconsuming locality, namely vulgarization and entertainmentization.

## Vulgarization, Entertainment, Violence Overflow, and Sexual Taboos in *Drifting Away*

Starting from *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (Diao, 2014), new noir films set in the Northeast have become prevalent in police/crime genre films, including *Burning Ice* (Du & Lu, 2017), *Day and Night* (Wu, 2017), *Why Try to Change Me Now* (Diao, 2023), *The Long Season* (Lu, 2023), *Frozen Surface* (Chen, B., 2024), and the latest 2025 broadcast *Drifting Away*. *Drifting Away* depicts criminals as protagonists, portraying the leader of the four-person dismemberment group as a character with Hannibal-like charm, which made the show's popularity surpass its contemporaries. However, this drama also sparked huge controversy because the character settings and plot highly overlap with the real 2002 dismemberment case in Jilin City, Northeast China, potentially causing secondary psychological trauma to the surviving victims' families. It can be seen that the object of mockery in this drama is not authority, officials, or the system, but has shifted to violence and murder. Next, I will analyze the creators' attempts to entertain violence and sex in this drama and the reasons behind them.

*Drifting Away* is set in 2002 in the Northeast. A dismemberment case occurs in a place called Snow City, and the suspects—Deng Ligang (played by Wang Qianyuan), Shi Bi (played by Ren Zhong), Song Hongyu (played by Wang Jiajia), and Ji Dashun (played by Zong Juntao)—escape the police blockade. The criminal police captain Peng Zhaolin (played by Guo Jingfei) embarks on a difficult pursuit. The four criminals commit another crime the following year, but one of the victims, a young girl Zhen Zhen (played by Zhao Jinmai), successfully escapes and later attends the police academy to become a police officer, teaming up with Peng to solve the case, finally capturing the four criminals in 2011.

The drama portrays the four murderers with considerable personality charm. Their cruel behaviors even become promotional strategies, such as an actress Li Fei'er reposting fans' screenshots of Song's using a spatula to kill in the drama to interact with fans (Eastern Business News, 2025a); and the show's promoters even compare the four's murder and dismemberment to meat-cutting standards in a meat processing plant (Eastern Business News, 2025b).

For this seemingly entertaining violence, we need first to review two important events in the modern history of the Northeast: the pre-industrial immigration wave and the post-industrial layoff wave.

The immigration wave, also known as “Chuǎng guān dōng (Crashing into Guandong<sup>2</sup>),” refers to the massive influx of population from northern provinces into the sparsely populated Northeast region for survival, from the end of the Qing Dynasty continuing to the famine years of the Mao era (Gottschang & Lary, 2000, pp. 4–10, pp. 135–144). The laid-off wave (pronounced “xià gǎng” in Chinese) refers to the 1990s, when China's economic reforms led to the market-oriented transformation of state-owned companies, resulting in the layoff of large numbers of workers or forcing them to leave their actual positions under the name of “agreement to retain labor relations,” stopping salary payments (Zhao, 2021).

The immigration culture lasting nearly half a century makes the Northeast different from the inland, with relatively thin Confucian social and moral views. Men and women working together in factories for long periods make the social atmosphere relatively open. Of course, the absence of traditional rural gentry systems and the atomized distribution of population also

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<sup>2</sup>Gguān Dōng is one of the old names for Northeast China. It refers to the region located east of Shanhaiguan, which is the easternmost pass of the Great Wall.

bred various violent organizations. The population dividend promoted during the Mao era led to a large number of births in the Northeast starting in the 1960s. However, when these children reached middle age, they encountered the nationwide layoff wave. This laid-off wave affected not only middle-aged people but also young people who, after graduating high school, were supposed to enter the enterprises and factories where their parents worked. These people were forced to flow from factory organizations into society, becoming unstable factors, one obvious phenomenon being the increase in violent crimes.

In recent popular series, *Burning Ice* and *The Long Season* feature two standout villains: Li Fengtian (played by Ning Li) and Fu Weijun (played by Jiang Qiming). Their common characteristic is the abuse of violence, i.e., resorting to violence for problems that do not require it: Li directly beats a provocative peer with a glass ashtray into the hospital; Fu twists the arm of a couple's son (a child) to force them to leave the city and return home.

The disorder caused by the abuse of violence angers the audience before conflicts escalate, so creators tentatively add realistic elements to explain this abuse, such as in *Burning Ice*, where Li initially kills untrustworthy gang leaders, making his violence seem justified; or in *Frozen Surface*, where the killer Jin Zhuhua (played by Lin Xiao) kills an adult male outside the mission target, motivated by his domestic violence against children. In some film-noir-style series, criminals are often portrayed as socially marginalized people. Li Fengtian, the debt collector in *Burning Ice*, is such a character; in middle age, he relies on violent debt collection for the underworld to survive. Fu Weijun, the deaf-mute youth in *The Long Season*, relies on organizing other social youths into gangs to establish himself in society. Of course, these series do not discuss the social reasons behind these villains' dire lives to avoid triggering official film censorship.

In addition to avoiding political discussions, what can attract the attention of censorship institutions is the portrayal of public officials. For example, in the noir film *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (2014), the Berlin version includes a scene where the female protagonist Wu Zhizhen (played by Gwei Lun-mei), a suspect, sexually bribes the male protagonist, suspended police officer Zhang Zili (played by Liao Fan), on a Ferris wheel, while the Chinese release version cuts this scene (Yi Ge Shuoxi, 2025). A similar case is in the 2023 hit web series *The Long Season*, with inconsistent portrayals of police: a police officer, Li Qun (played by Tang Zeng), greedy for higher positions, is often despised by his hot-tempered but just superior Ma Desheng (played by Chen Minghao) and thus often satirized. However, when the plot reaches the point where Li has become the bureau chief, the important clue arranged initially to be solved by former officer Ma turns out to be information Li had long known, but he did not expose it for the sake of the old officer's face. This huge contrast in the character's portrayal is a failure in shaping, but given the high-quality narrative of the entire drama, we can understand this flaw as the director's compromise with the censorship system.

Thus, we find that when creators of Chinese police/crime genre films attempt to graft mature genre narrative frameworks from around the world, they encounter a problem: to avoid stereotypical police images while considering the many restrictions on police roles in the censorship system, they can only describe police protagonists as suspended, such as Zhang in *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, Yan Liang (played by Qin Hao) in *Burning Ice*, or retired, such as Ma Desheng in *The Long Season*, to allow them to have normal human sides, i.e., they have personal desires and selfish motives. When this mode is used frequently, it becomes tedious. At this point, a new creative breakthrough is to abandon shaping police and instead add personality charm to criminals. In *Drifting Away*, the creators deeply portray the butcher quartet:

Deng has leadership qualities, cunning and daring to take risks; Shi has the wisdom of a second-in-command, using his calm side to coordinate between the leader and others; Song has a fiercer temperament than male killers and knows how to use her female identity for convenience in life; Ji is a careless professional meat cutter from a slaughterhouse, the lowest in the team, sometimes responsible for creating laughs in the drama. In contrast, the police in this drama are flattened, idealized, and stereotyped. Peng combines many virtues, such as loving his family, persisting in justice, sympathizing with the weak; beyond that, he has no human side, i.e., whether he would abandon justice for overconcern about his wife and children? The drama does not show it, merely portraying this officer as an energetic person. This approach sacrifices the quality of the work to avoid economic losses from censorship.

Similarly affecting the work's quality is the drama's evasiveness about the sex trade. The creators describe phenomena in the Northeast during the layoff wave, such as some women having to rely on sex services, including accompanying guests to sing and dance in nightclubs, suffering sexual harassment from male colleagues, especially male leaders in offices, and prostitution in fixed venues to sustain life. However, the creators do not want to say sex trade so directly, sometimes simply avoiding the topic. Therefore, the drama has a strange narrative: at the beginning, before Song joins the butcher quartet, as a kidnapping victim, she hopes the others will not continue harming her on account of having had sexual relations with them. This straightforward line is striking because it reflects the plight of Northeast women in society during the lay-off wave. This is reproduced in some noir-style films and series, but very subtly, for example, in *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, the laundry shop owner long-term sexually harasses and molests Wu, but she endures it for survival. In *The Long Season*, college student Shen Mo (played by Li Gengxi) and unemployed worker Li Qiaoyun (played by Liu Lin) choose to work in nightclubs to survive. In *Frozen Surface*, a poor night school female student, Chen Xiaoming (played by Yang Yutong), chooses to be kept by capitalist Yan Hongqiao (played by Xing Jiadong) to escape poverty and bullying.

However, when Song joins the quartet and finds the next kidnapping target, Qiu Feng (played by Fang Yuanyuan) in a nightclub, the description of sex trade stops. The relationship between Qiu and the bandits disguised as businessmen is akin to that of friends who become familiar at a party, which obviously does not fit the professional setting. Unlike the abuse of violence, the portrayal of sexual behavior in the drama is even more conservative.

In fact, this conservatism should not be seen as the creators' avoidance of the censorship system; it should also consider the Northeast's immigration culture and post-industrial culture. According to a report from the Institute for Sexuality and Gender at Renmin University of China, local public attitudes toward sex work in the Northeast changed during the laid-off wave, manifesting as reduced condemnation of sex workers and understanding it as a survival method (Huang & Pan, 2009, p. 6); moreover, the area was initially composed of immigrants, with relatively open attitudes toward sex. This also creates a special phenomenon in films and TV, where audiences know what the director did not shoot, the director knows the audience understands what he wants to say, and due to review policies, he must abandon some scenes; thus, audiences outside this context are often puzzled by the plot, but those familiar with the context clearly understand the implications behind what the director did not mention. This is a form of situational irony, i.e., cleverly mentioning or deliberately avoiding in a special context to connect the audience with real prototypes, similar to the 2008 internet catchphrase “nǐ dòng

(you know),” as a mockery of political insider dealings behind social injustices (Guo, 2018, p. 139).<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is another irony, manifested as deliberately mentioning a political slogan in everyday life scenes, like the political report in Zhao Benshan’s stage comedy mentioned earlier. The satirical logic behind this lies in the various injustices encountered in the post-Reform and Opening-up era,<sup>4</sup> reminding people of the collectivism and class narratives of the Mao era; when someone encounters injustice but fears the punishment of revealing the truth, they choose to use politically correct slogans for irony. According to researcher Ching Kwan Lee (2000), these slogans have duality: on one hand, they belong to the collective memory of the Northeast with heavy industry as the pillar; on the other hand, they are ideological weapons actively chosen by laborers protesting injustices in the laid-off wave. Lee believes that the Maoist narrative context helps contemporary Northeasterners overcome the severe consequences of “demoralization and atomization” under massive unemployment (p. 235).

In Judith Audin’s words, political propaganda phrases have become puns, meaning in life, they are a “situational irony” (2016, p. 108), i.e., out-of-touch slogans spoken by people in reality as a mockery of the present. In *Drifting Away*, there is such mockery: the four criminals summarize their experience in kidnapping, murder, and dismemberment as “gan zhong xue (干中学 [learning by doing]),” a phrase from a famous Mao Tse-tung (1936) quote, “A revolutionary war is a mass undertaking, it is often not a matter of first learning and then doing, but of doing and then learning, for doing is itself learning” (*Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, ch. 1, sec. 4, para. 13, Sentence 3).

Moreover, in 2021, Xi Jinping mentioned this phrase at the opening ceremony of the Central Party School’s training class for young and middle-aged cadres (Qstheory, 2021). Due to the butcher quartet’s constant mention in *Drifting Away*, “learning by doing” became an annual hot meme, and many audiences unfamiliar with the Mao era context thought it was a phrase created by Northeasterners (Sa Jia Wang Erxiao, 2025). “Learning by doing” turns robbery, murder, and dismemberment into an experience report meeting for advanced workers in the collectivist era. This appropriation of political figures’ speeches is not accidental; it reflects the duality of China’s political vocabulary since the post-Mao era—on one hand, they are unshakable political views; on the other hand, their gap with reality gives them ironic effects.

The laughter created by Zhao Benshan’s report mentioned earlier illustrates this. Zhao’s character publicly recites a doggerel: “The spring breeze of reform blows across the land, the Chinese people are truly striving; united to cross the century, a big flood did not affect much” (CCTVGala, 2013),<sup>5</sup> causing the audience to roar with laughter. Here, there is a contrast: rural political reports were creations of the Mao era, while “spring breeze of reform” is a common metaphor for Deng’s economic opening policies. Zhao forcibly merges these two vastly

<sup>3</sup>The phrase “you know” was even employed by official spokespersons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2014. During a press conference for the Second Session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, spokesperson Lü Xinhua addressed reporters regarding the corruption of a senior official who was rumored to be involved in a coup. He initially used formal rhetoric and later included the phrase “you know” to allude to the official’s likely fate. (Netease News, 2014)

<sup>4</sup>According to a World Bank report, China is experiencing increasing inequality and social disparity following the economic reform. The report attributes this issue to a combination of reforms, the household registration system, land financing, and tax policies. (Dollar, 2007)

<sup>5</sup>The original Chinese text is: “gǎi gé chūn fēng chuī mǎn dì, zhōng guó rén mín zhēn zhēng qì; qí xīn hé lì kuà shì jì, yī chǎng dà shuǐ méi zǎ dì”. (CCTVGala, 2013a)

contrasting things into one segment, creating laughter through emphasized recitation, which, in Audin's words, "illustrate[s] the gap between words and their absence of meaning in real life" (Audin, 2016, p. 108).

Whether in the portrayal of violence, sex, or political slogans, it reflects the audio-visual works' need to resist official values to some extent in the creation process. Of course, they are not social activists; doing so makes it easier to get a story background more suitable for commercial films.

### Conclusion

This article explores the characteristics shown in contemporary films and TV series set in the Northeast, namely the abuse of violence and conservatism toward sex. This situation is the result of creators testing the elasticity of the censorship system for commercial success. The cost of doing so is that films and TV series lack reflectivity, falling into a superficial trap where violence and sex trade are deliberately emphasized, while the cause of all this—the laid-off wave—is hidden. When values cannot be discussed and criticized, any noble slogan has an ironic nature, as if mocking the vast gap between utopia and the real world.

The problems brought by *Drifting Away*, including the entertainmentization and dumbing down of dismemberment and prostitution, are not simply attributed to the creators' quirks, but are the inevitable result of the harsh censorship system under current political pressure. Through analysis, we see that in the past decade's noir films and TV series, there is almost always a trend of avoiding reflection and moving toward nihilism. The creators' avoidance of censorship develops subtle ironic methods. However, in the long run, it will inevitably leave the audio-visual works of this era in a distorted state of development.



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## **Engineered Not to Learn: Four Digitally Induced Cognitive Impairments Hindering Learning in Social-Media Natives**

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### **Abstract**

The business model of social media maximizes screen time by exploiting dopamine-driven mechanisms, engaging attention and short-term memory to process constant interruptions. Over time, users develop an addiction to distraction, fostering dependency on shallow engagement and undermining deep focus. Due to neural plasticity, the brain rewires itself to prioritize fleeting stimuli, especially harmful when exposure begins early, as developing brains are more malleable. Digital natives, immersed in digitally pervasive, distraction-filled environments, struggle with traditional learning models requiring resilience and delayed gratification. The constant use of digital devices shapes cognitive strategies, modifying the brain through plasticity. This passive engagement contrasts with the “generation effect,” where active problem-solving enhances memory retention. The blurring of entertainment and education exacerbates challenges, as digital natives apply shallow, dopamine-driven patterns to learning, undermining deep education. This shift has led to a rise in psychological and cognitive issues, including Specific Learning Disorders (SLD), social anxiety, and low self-esteem. More specifically, it has resulted in four key cognitive impairments: Addiction to Distraction, Long-Term Memory Disruption, Setback Handling Dysfunction, and Inferential Reasoning Deficit. These impairments arise from digital technologies prioritizing instant gratification, fragmented attention, and passive information consumption. By identifying these four impairments, the paper provides a framework for updating learning methods to align with the cognitive needs of digital natives, emphasizing cognitive resilience, sustained attention, and active inferential thinking for meaningful learning in a digital world.

*Keywords:* cognitive realignment, cognitive ecology, learning wellbeing, educational design, social-media natives

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## **Introduction: An Induced Dysfunctional Approach to Learning**

The educational difficulties of social-media natives emerge not from a lack of motivation, but from a deep reconfiguration of cognitive behavior driven by the digital environment. Their mind, continuously exposed to fast-paced flows of stimuli, has been trained to privilege immediacy, novelty, and discontinuity—features intrinsic to the entertainment paradigm of contemporary media. Learning, however, operates according to the opposite logic: it demands temporal extension, conceptual layering, and deferred gratification.

The early and continuous immersion in the smartphone–social media complex produces a misalignment between the cognitive strategies developed through everyday digital life and those required by formal education. Minds shaped by the perpetual feedback of digital systems learn to process through short-term engagement and emotional stimulation, whereas schooling requires long-term focus and conceptual integration. What results is not a simple behavioral conflict but a neurological one: the mental architecture of learners has been structurally attuned to rapid transitions rather than sustained depth.

### **The Digitally Extended Mind**

Cognition has always been distributed beyond the boundaries of the brain—into language, writing, tools, and artifacts (Clark & Chalmers, 1998). Yet each extension transforms what it supports. The printed page, for instance, cultivated attention and deep processing through its linear, stable structure. Digital media, by contrast, foster an ecology of scanning, switching, and hyperlinked association.

The digitally extended mind operates within an environment of continuous micro-decisions: every scroll or tap demands a micro-problem-solving action. This perpetual low-level engagement trains the mind to stay alert but unfocused, active but not reflective. The neural circuits of attention adapt to this rhythm of fragmentation, reinforcing patterns of stimulus-response that hinder the mental stillness required for deep understanding. The result is a cognitive modality characterized not by ignorance, but by *saturation without consolidation*.

### **From Educational to Entertainment Paradigm**

Education and entertainment represent two incompatible paradigms of cognition. The first is slow, effortful, and cumulative; the second, fast, effortless, and transient. The educational paradigm rewards patience and the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, while the entertainment paradigm gratifies immediacy and rewards low-threshold novelty.

Digital culture, by merging these two paradigms, has generated an epistemological confusion. Students approach learning through the same mental filters they apply to streaming content or social media feeds. Reading becomes scanning; reasoning becomes clicking. Within this confusion, attention shifts from understanding to navigation. The act of learning itself begins to feel alien—too slow for a brain that has been trained to expect constant updates.

### **Methodological Context and Limitations of the Presented Work**

The reflections developed in this paper are based on a qualitative investigation conducted at the School of Design, Istituto Marangoni (Milan), during the academic year 2024/25. The study involved 118 instructors reflecting on their experience with approximately 630 students across

Foundation, Bachelor, and Master programs. Discussions were organized by department and disciplinary area, and responses were thematically coded and synthesized through comparative analysis.

When the findings were later shared with other Istituto Marangoni campuses (London, Paris, Dubai, Mumbai, Shenzhen, Florence, and Milan Fashion), a strong convergence emerged. Despite cultural and curricular differences, faculty members consistently reported the same learning difficulties: fragmented attention, reduced inferential reasoning, and limited cognitive resilience. This recurrence suggests that the impairments identified are not local anomalies but structural effects of the digital environment on cognition.

At the same time, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The research was carried out within a design-education context—an ecosystem characterized by project-based learning and iterative feedback—where the interaction between cognition and creativity plays a central role. These conditions may not directly reflect those of other educational domains, such as STEM or humanities, and therefore limit the generalizability of the conclusions.

Nevertheless, the interpretive strength of this study lies in its anticipatory character. The four impairments identified—Addiction to Distraction, Inferential Reasoning Deficit, Long-Term Memory Disruption, and Setback Handling Dysfunction—have since found confirmation in cognitive and neuroscientific research on digital media and learning (e.g., Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Karpicke & Roediger, 2008; Ward et al., 2017). This convergence validates the findings as early evidence of a broader cognitive transformation produced by the attention economy and underscores the need for pedagogical redesign to address it.

### **Four Digitally Induced Cognitive Impairments**

The cognitive transformation described above manifests in four recurring forms of dysfunction that together define a new mental ecology. These are not disorders in the clinical sense but adaptive responses to a technological environment that rewards reactivity over reflection.

#### **Addiction to Distraction**

Digital platforms are deliberately engineered to capture attention by exploiting dopaminergic reward loops that reinforce compulsive checking and perpetual engagement (Berridge & Robinson, 1998; Schultz, 1997). Infinite scroll, push notifications, and algorithmic novelty sustain a state of continuous micro-stimulation in which attention is constantly fragmented. Over time, the user's cognitive architecture adapts to this modality: what begins as distraction becomes a default mode of processing, a structural "addiction to distraction."

In this condition, the mind is trained to be rewarded immediately rather than to attend. Each stimulus triggers a brief cycle of orientation, reward, and abandonment, cultivating a preference for immediacy over depth. The resulting attentional style favors dispersion over depth—able to notice everything yet focus on nothing for long. This addiction to distraction is so compulsive that the mere presence of a smartphone can drain cognitive resources by diverting part of working memory toward potential digital engagement (Ward et al., 2017).

Attention thus becomes physiologically tuned to high-frequency, short-horizon events (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006), effectively training the mind to be perpetually distractible.

Through neural plasticity, the brain gradually adapts to the environment it inhabits. The result is a cognitive architecture optimized for reactivity but hostile to contemplation—an attentional ecology designed for movement, not for meaning.

Educational design must therefore act as a form of attentional re-engineering. Restoring deep focus requires not prohibition but rhythm: structured alternations between stimulus and silence, input and integration. Short lecture segments followed by active retrieval exercises (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Roediger & Butler, 2011) help re-establish attention as a deliberate act rather than a reflex. In this sense, teaching becomes a practice of cognitive recalibration—a form of gentle rehabilitation of attention, guiding the mind back from dispersion toward intentional presence.

### **Inferential Reasoning Deficit**

Inference—the mental process of connecting information into coherent meaning—constitutes the core mechanism of understanding. In traditional learning environments, this capacity is trained through the active synthesis of clues, contexts, and prior knowledge. Digital culture, however, has transformed inference into an automated process. The hyperlink, by pre-connecting signifier and signified (to put it in semiotic terms), eliminates the need for interpretive effort (Pirulli & Card, 1999). The user no longer constructs the link but merely activates it.

This condition fosters what may be termed *pseudo-inference*: a mode of shallow comprehension in which meaning is accessed rather than generated. Over time, the cognitive system becomes habituated to externally provided connections, reducing the necessity of internal synthesis. Students display a preference for answer-fetching over reasoning, and their argumentative structures often replicate the linearity of sources rather than constructing independent conceptual frameworks.

At the neural level, this dependency weakens the generative acts—abduction, induction, and deduction—that constitute the architecture of inferential reasoning (Cowan, 2005). Without such internally produced linkages, information remains unintegrated, preventing the formation of stable “schemas” (organized neural networks) necessary for understanding.

Pedagogically, this impairment demands a shift from content delivery to cognitive activation. Tasks should invite learners to reconstruct paths of reasoning rather than merely retrieve results. “Explain-your-path” exercises, delayed access to resources, and concept mapping from memory before exposure to exemplars can reactivate the *generation effect* (Slamecka & Graf, 1978), compelling students to connect rather than collect information.

### **Long-Term Memory Disruption**

Within the ecology of the digitally extended mind, information is no longer primarily stored internally but continuously accessed through external supports—search engines, cloud storage, shared drives. This outsourcing of memory appears, at first glance, to be an ideal form of cognitive economy. By delegating the storage of information to external systems, the mind conserves energy and resources for the rapid, problem-solving activity required by the interactive logic of digital navigation. From an energetic standpoint, this strategy is efficient: it minimizes the cognitive cost of retention and maximizes reactivity within a stimulus-rich environment.

However, what seems an economy from the perspective of the extended mind becomes a profound impoverishment within its “core:” the brain itself. Learning depends on the *generation effect*—the principle that information processed through internal elaboration is remembered more deeply because it generates new and organized synaptic connections, the neural structures known as schemas (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008; Slamecka & Graf, 1978). These schemas constitute the architecture of comprehension, integrating new knowledge with existing mental frameworks.

When memory is externalized, the cognitive work that produces these neural organizations is bypassed. The mind retrieves information but does not transform it into solid knowledge; retrievability replaces understanding, and what is gained in accessibility is lost in consolidation. In this sense, the outsourcing of memory represents not a cognitive aid but a subtle form of disempowerment: the individual becomes dependent on external systems for what once defined the autonomy of thought itself—the capacity to generate, retain, and connect meaning within the architecture of the brain.

### **Setback Handling Dysfunction**

Digital immediacy has profoundly altered the learner’s relationship with effort and delay. In online environments, information is delivered through systems optimized for accessibility and instant response. Such constant immediacy progressively erodes frustration tolerance—the ability to persist through difficulty, uncertainty, or deferred gratification. When the environment systematically removes friction, the mind loses the habit of searching, waiting, and strategizing.

This untrained capacity to “find after effort” represents a critical cognitive loss. The act of searching is itself a formative process: it develops planning, hypothesis testing, and adaptive reasoning. Within the digital milieu, where results are pre-linked and instantly retrievable, the learner’s cognitive system no longer experiences the slow rhythm of discovery. As a consequence, difficulty is perceived not as a challenge to engage with, but as a signal of inadequacy or system failure.

In educational contexts, this manifests as premature disengagement from complex tasks, defensive reactions to critique, and an overall reduction in exploratory curiosity. The ability to cope with setbacks—the psychological stamina that transforms error into insight—atrophies through disuse.

To rebuild *cognitive endurance*, educational design must reframe failure as an integral phase of the learning cycle, introducing controlled difficulty as a structural element of education and making it the explicit object of metacognitive reflection. As Duckworth et al. (2007) and Mischel et al. (1989) demonstrate, resilience is not innate but cultivated through the experience of delayed reward. Pedagogies that normalize struggle, value revision, and reward process over immediacy are essential to retraining the learner’s capacity for strategic search and the patient reconstruction of meaning.

### **A Cognitive Ecology Engineered for Dispersion**

These impairments are not isolated defects but the predictable outcome of an attention economy that commodifies cognition. The digital environment has transformed attention from a faculty



of consciousness into a unit of transaction. The result is an ecology of constant semi-engagement: perpetual stimulation without assimilation.

In earlier centuries, learning unfolded within rhythms of scarcity—of time, information, and feedback. Concentration and memory developed naturally within that slowness. The digital ecology inverts this logic. It replaces continuity with acceleration, reflection with reaction, and patience with immediacy. The adolescent brain, highly plastic and still forming its executive networks (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006), is especially vulnerable to such reconditioning. The consequence is a generation cognitively trained for flow, not for form—for connection without comprehension.

Education thus finds itself confronting a paradox: it must cultivate the very faculties that the surrounding environment systematically dissolves. To teach today is to restore rhythm where speed dominates, silence where noise prevails, and depth where cognition has been flattened by perpetual access.

### **Implications: A Dual-Strategy Framework**

Although the primary aim of this paper has been to identify four digitally induced cognitive impairments, it is equally necessary to outline directions for pedagogical action. The following section proposes a conceptual framework—a dual-strategy approach—through which education can respond to the cognitive conditions generated by digital life.

If the digital environment engineers dispersion, education must, in turn, engineer coherence. This can only occur through two complementary dimensions: one *structural*, concerning the spatial and temporal organization of learning, and one *instructional*, focused on the cognitive and relational skills that the digital milieu has weakened. Together, these two strategies redefine education as a design discipline—a practice devoted not only to the transmission of knowledge, but to the *design of cognitive environments* capable of sustaining meaning and attention.

#### **Structural Reorientation**

Attention is not merely a psychological faculty; it is a “mental environment” that can be shaped by design. Learning environments should be conceived as *attentional architectures*—contexts that promote concentration by reducing cognitive noise and scaffolding the rhythms of engagement.

The temporal structure of teaching should align with the physiology of memory: alternating exposure and retrieval, interspersing focus with rest, and allowing intervals for consolidation (Cepeda et al., 2006; Roediger & Butler, 2011). These pauses are not absences of learning but its invisible infrastructure, where understanding sedimentates into long-term memory.

Assessment, too, can support this temporal coherence by valuing trajectories of improvement rather than static outcomes. Grading systems that reward progress over immediacy encourage perseverance and resilience—qualities essential to countering the acceleration imposed by digital culture. The classroom should be a cognitive environment itself that restores rhythm, continuity, and the proper act of learning.

## Instructional Reorientation

While structure shapes the external conditions of learning, instruction must act upon its internal mechanisms. In a world where the environment no longer teaches sustained effort, reasoning, or frustration tolerance, these must become *explicit subjects of education*.

Pedagogy should prioritize to rebuild the “learning mind:” the ensemble of cognitive habits that enable deep understanding. This involves metacognitive training, iterative feedback, and practices of active retrieval that strengthen inferential reasoning and long-term retention (Duckworth et al., 2007; Slamecka & Graf, 1978). When students learn to recognize distraction, to reconstruct reasoning, and to experience error as formative rather than punitive, they begin to inhabit technology consciously rather than be governed by it.

## Learning as Cognitive Realignment

Beyond structural and instructional adaptation lies a broader cultural responsibility: education must become a site of cognitive realignment, where the human mind regains its temporal, emotional, and reflective balance.

Within the broader framework of *learning wellbeing*, pedagogy should cultivate the ability to sustain attention, inhabit silence, and find satisfaction in slowness. These are not nostalgic ideals but essential conditions for higher-order cognition. The school, seen in this light, becomes a place where technology is not rejected but rehumanized through conscious inhabitation, with education acting as a *gentle rehabilitation of attention*, allowing students to rediscover the cognitive rhythms that underlie genuine understanding.

## Conclusion and Future Work

To teach & learn in the digital age is to teach & learn *against* the current of the medium. The four impairments identified in this study—Addiction to Distraction, Inferential Reasoning Deficit, Long-Term Memory Disruption, and Setback Handling Dysfunction—are not pathologies of individuals but systemic effects of an economy that profits from distraction.

Schools must act as counter-environments: spaces where thought can slow down, consolidate, and reflect. Teaching becomes a form of *cognitive design*, shaping not only what is known but how knowing happens. Each act of focused attention, each deliberate effort of reasoning, each moment of silence becomes an affirmation of human intentionality amid the noise of automation.

The findings presented here derive from a design-education context and therefore carry the limits inherent to qualitative inquiry. Nevertheless, the patterns identified have since been corroborated by studies in cognitive science, psychology, and neuroscience, confirming the validity of the observed phenomena (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2017).

Future research should extend these insights through ecological momentary assessment of distraction patterns and targeted interventions addressing each impairment, ideally conducted as pre-registered, multi-site replications (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Integrating neuroscientific, phenomenological, and semiotic approaches would further clarify how digital ecologies shape cognition and how education can restore balance within them.

Ultimately, the goal of such inquiry is not diagnostic but transformative: to design pedagogies capable of restoring the conditions under which thought can once again unfold in its natural rhythm. Education, reimagined as a form of *cognitive wellbeing*, becomes both an act of resistance and an art of care—a deliberate rebalancing of the human mind within its technological habitat.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author acknowledges the use of AI-assisted technologies (OpenAI ChatGPT, GPT-5) solely to improve the language, clarity, and readability of the manuscript. The conceptual content, structure, analysis, and interpretations are entirely the author's own.

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## Beyond the Product-Centered Design Culture

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### Abstract

Artificial Intelligence is ushering in a new era of design culture, redefining the traditional pursuit of harmonizing form and function. Historically, design has been constrained by structural necessities and usability requirements, negotiating aesthetics with functionality. However, as AI promises to liberate function from its physical embodiment, aesthetics itself becomes a new kind of function. Design evolves into “functional art,” drifting away from the historical concept of “applied art” that originally paved the way for the later rise of design as a discipline. This evolution is so profound that the very disciplinary status of design may need to be radically rethought. This paper explores the shift from functional design to functional art, where the aesthetic definition of the designed object, freed from traditional functional constraints, acquires a new cultural mission—one that, following Arthur C. Clarke’s principle that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” also reclaims to retrieve the ancestral, mystical relationship between humans and their environment. AI may mark the end of the first history of design and inaugurate its second history, where function and aesthetics merge into an immaterial yet “dense” (simultaneously aesthetic and functional) experience. This transition calls for moving beyond a product-centered design culture toward an era of “living” objects, endowed with AI-driven, magic-like capabilities, thus reminiscent of ancient magical metaphors that once helped humans navigate a seemingly supernatural world. Whereas design once managed objects’ bodies, it must now manage their souls.

*Keywords:* artificial intelligence, design culture, product aesthetic, affordance, design art

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## Introduction: Beyond the Product-Centered Design Culture

The progressive diffusion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across everyday technologies suggests that its integration into product and furniture design is not a remote hypothesis but an emerging inevitability (Langley et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2023). While AI currently operates mainly through digital assistants such as Alexa, Siri, or Google Assistant, its gradual incorporation into tangible design domains signals a paradigm shift.

For over a century, design has been defined by the negotiation between form and function—a balance that secured its disciplinary identity within modernity. Yet, as AI assumes operational tasks once mediated by physical affordances, this relationship changes. Actions traditionally performed manually—switching a light, opening a drawer, adjusting temperature—are now delegated to systems capable of interpreting intentions and anticipating needs (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988).

This shift entails a cognitive transformation: the user–object relationship evolves from *proximal* (based on direct touch and manipulation) to *distal* (based on interaction at a distance). The object becomes an interlocutor rather than an instrument, responding not to action but to inference. As Verbeek (2011) observes, technologies no longer merely extend the body—they mediate perception and intention. Consequently, the aesthetic dimension of the object emerges as the new operational field of interaction, embodying trust and intelligibility.

Affordance, once understood as the material reference for usability on the product's body, now operates primarily on the cognitive level. Users no longer recognize functionality through form but infer artificial intelligence from expressive cues that signal agency. Aesthetics thus supplants ergonomics as the perceptual interface of interaction, transforming sensory appeal into a vehicle of interpretive intelligibility—a new kind of aesthetic form grounded in meaning rather than function.

### From Manipulation to Delegation: The Cognitive Shift in Human—Object Interaction

#### From Proximal Manipulation to Distal Mediation

Traditional product interaction was defined by manual gestures—grasping, pressing, or adjusting. These actions embodied the logic of affordance (Norman, 1988), in which physical form conveyed function. Design mediated between user and mechanism, making use self-evident.

AI displaces this paradigm. Interaction becomes distal—mediated by voice or gesture, often performed at a distance and detected through motion and proximity sensors, as exemplified by the Volee lamp designed by Odoardo Fioravanti for Fontana Arte. The user no longer manipulates but communicates; the object interprets rather than reacts.

This relocation of agency transforms the object into a perceptual and cognitive partner. The site of interaction shifts from the tactile to the semantic level, where meaning rather than mechanics governs the exchange. As Flusser (1999) anticipated, design moves from shaping things to shaping relations of meaning—an evolution that redefines the role of aesthetics.

## Affordance as Aesthetic Mediation

As interaction becomes interpretive, the expressive qualities of the object acquire operational relevance. Form no longer communicates usability through physical cues but through perceptual and cognitive signals that express intelligence, intention, and responsiveness. In this context, aesthetics emerges as an *aesthetic affordance*—an invitation to understanding and trust rather than physical action.

The aesthetic experience thus becomes an act of cognition: users interpret visual and material cues as manifestations of underlying intelligence. The object, in turn, is perceived not as a static artifact but as an intentional agent engaged in a dialogue of sense-making. Through its aesthetic language, the object communicates its own logic of operation, enabling a form of understanding that precedes and structures functional engagement.

This evolution redefines the very notion of the object as “actant” (Latour, 1991). Since performance is no longer activated through direct use but through mediated relation, the form of affordance becomes less determined by the action it invites and increasingly shaped by perceptual and cognitive motivations. At the extreme of this tendency, what semiotically corresponds to the indexical sign of usability—the “invitation to act,” in Peirce’s (1931–1958) typology—recedes, giving way to the purely formal valorization of perception at a distance. The design object thus transforms into a design art object: no longer an index of use, but an autonomous symbol of meaning. In semiotic terms, it ceases to point to action and begins to engage users in an *interpretative cooperation* (Eco, 1979), where meaning is co-constructed through perception and inference.

## The Cognitive Transition: From Doing to Believing

If aesthetics becomes a new kind of affordance, it also redefines functionality. What was once an attribute of mechanical efficiency now extends to the perceptual and cognitive performance of the object. Functionality is no longer limited to what the product *does*, but to how it *makes itself understood*. The expressive coherence of the object—its capacity to signal intelligence, reliability, and emotional tone—thus becomes part of its operational behavior.

In semiotic terms, this shift marks a passage from indexicality to symbolicity (Peirce, 1931–1958). Traditional design relied on indexical forms—signs that pointed directly to possible actions. In AI-augmented design, by contrast, the object communicates through symbolic cues that invite interpretation rather than execution. Functionality, once grounded in mechanics, becomes grounded in meaning. The user’s engagement turns from manipulation to inference, and interaction succeeds through interpretive cooperation (Eco, 1979) rather than ergonomic immediacy.

Aesthetic functionality thus mediates between algorithmic processes and human cognition. It translates invisible operations into perceptible form, allowing users to read intention and reliability in behavior and appearance. The aesthetic surface becomes a semantic interface—a layer of intelligibility where technology becomes humanly accessible.

At this stage, aesthetics no longer decorates function but constitutes it. Beauty lies in epistemic clarity—the ability to render complexity understandable and intelligence perceptible. Through aesthetic functionality, design reconciles the experiential and the cognitive, transforming perception into understanding and interaction into dialogue.



## A New Era of Functional Art

Traditionally, “functional art” referred to applied art: utilitarian objects embellished with decoration, where aesthetics played an ornamental role secondary to function. Today, AI-mediated interaction redefines this relationship. As function becomes distal—activated through mediated signals rather than direct manipulation—it unfolds as a cognitive process rather than a physical one.

In this mediated ecology, functionality is no longer a separate layer but an aesthetic one. Once the pragmatic dimension of use shifts into intelligent responsiveness, operation and expression converge. The functional act becomes an aesthetic act: perception becomes performance, appearance becomes affordance.

A new era of functional art emerges, where “function” denotes relational intelligence—systems of response and adaptation fully integrated within the aesthetic field. Freed from mechanical constraint, aesthetics becomes the medium through which function is perceived and enacted. The object reveals its expressive autonomy not by negating function but by absorbing it into a unified aesthetic experience.

Functional art thus marks the culmination of a long cultural trajectory: the point where technology allows aesthetics to act autonomously while granting functionality the subtlety of interpretation. Form and function, after a century of negotiation, no longer coexist in tension but fuse into a single cognitive and perceptual unity.

## Theory of Mind and the Plausibility of Artificial Cognition

### Plausible Cognition and the Intentional Stance

Human cognition is interpretive by nature. When faced with behavior that appears purposeful, the mind constructs an internal model of intention—a Theory of Mind (Dennett, 1987). Artificial intelligence exploits this mechanism through *plausible cognition*: the generation of coherent continuations that simulate understanding without possessing it (Bender et al., 2021).

Large language models operate by predicting probabilistic token sequences within vast multidimensional spaces (Mitchell, 2023). Though devoid of self-awareness, their linguistic coherence activates the user’s interpretive apparatus, eliciting empathy and trust. The user’s mind treats syntactic plausibility as a proxy for intentionality. This interaction is neither purely rational nor illusory—it is *aesthetic*, sustained by rhythm, tone, and expectation, much like the reading of a literary text.

Wittgenstein (1953, 1969) provides a relevant analogy: meaning arises from “language games” and “forms of life”—shared conventions that make communication intelligible. AI operates within a similar ecology: its output gains credibility not through understanding but by adhering to communal norms of linguistic plausibility. As in human dialogue, intelligibility is a social construct, not an ontological proof.

### Cold and Hot Cognition

Contemporary cognitive science distinguishes between *cold* and *hot* forms of Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Langley et al., 2022). The former involves logical inference about others’

beliefs; the latter includes affective attunement and empathy. Current AI excels in cold cognition—statistical reasoning without emotional grounding.

Design compensates for this absence. By shaping expressive form, it provides affective plausibility—bridging computational coldness and human warmth. Aesthetic coherence acts as emotional scaffolding, enabling social cognition to operate where genuine empathy cannot. The object inspires trust not by feeling, but by appearing capable of feeling.

Thus, cognition and aesthetics converge: the former becomes perceivable only through the latter. Just as empathy is triggered by expressive form in human interaction, AI relies on aesthetic mediation to render its intelligence socially legible.

### **Aesthetic Affordance as Cognitive Ground**

Aesthetic affordance becomes the cognitive foundation of plausibility. Through perceptual and formal coherence, users attribute mind to the object. Visual balance, rhythm, and material sensitivity form the semiotic cues through which intelligence becomes believable.

This mechanism mirrors Wittgenstein's (1969) view of "certainty" as a communal criterion of meaning. In both human and AI communication, understanding is not verified internally but accepted intersubjectively within shared practices. What counts as "intelligence" is defined by fit within the game of plausible interaction—a collective calibration of expectation.

Design, therefore, becomes the syntax of plausibility: it orchestrates perceptual and symbolic parameters that make artificial cognition intelligible. Aesthetic affordance is not a supplement to intelligence but its enabling condition—the stage upon which cognition, real or simulated, becomes meaningful.

## **From Magical Thinking to Artistic Metaphor**

### **The Persistence of Magical Cognition**

The human tendency to attribute mind to non-human entities predates technology. As Cassirer (1944) and Descola (2013) note, early cultures interpreted the world through magical participation, perceiving continuity between symbol and reality. To name or depict something was to act upon it.

The scientific revolution replaced this worldview with causal rationality (Galilei, 1967), yet the symbolic impulse persisted—migrating into art, where metaphor re-enacted the cognitive structures of animism (Bateson, 1972; Gombrich, 1960). Artistic creation preserved the ancient belief that form could embody presence, maintaining the continuity between imagination and ontology that modern rationality had severed.

### **The Return of Animism Through AI**

Artificial intelligence reactivates this cognitive pattern in a technological form. Intelligent systems behave *as if* animated, simulating agency and intention. The user's interaction reawakens symbolic participation—a renewed "digital animism" where algorithms acquire affective presence.

In this context, aesthetics regains its “magical” role: mediating between knowledge and belief, between the intelligible and the plausible. The designer shapes not only surfaces but the *metaphoric conditions* through which artificial systems become culturally and emotionally legible (Nannicelli, 2025; Oksanen, 2023).

The designed object thus becomes a ritual interface—a contemporary totem translating computation into experience. As early artifacts embodied the invisible forces of nature, AI-equipped objects embody the invisible logic of code, transforming data into aura. Through aesthetic mediation, design reinstates its ancient role as a cultural operator of meaning.

### **Beyond the Product-Centered Design Culture**

The mediation of function through AI demands a redefinition of what design manages. Modern design shaped the bodies of objects, encoding use through visible form. In the AI age, function is performed by distributed systems—predictive models, adaptive environments, autonomous agents. The object no longer manifests mechanism but *behavior* (Borgmann, 1984).

Borgmann’s “device paradigm” described how technology concealed complexity behind simplicity. With AI, this concealment becomes *ontological*: the user perceives responsiveness rather than process. Design therefore curates the *appearance of intelligence*, crafting mutual legibility between human and system (Flusser, 1999). The designer’s agency shifts from shaping artifacts to composing relations of existence—between visible form and invisible computation, trust and intelligibility.

As objects acquire autonomy, designers orchestrate their expressive coherence, guiding the convergence of form and function into *phenomenological unity*. Beyond the product-centered paradigm, design resumes its ancestral role as mediator between matter and meaning—just as magical thinking once did in the ancient world, and art in the modern. Ultimately, design culture approaches its singularity, where form and function no longer stand in tension but reveal themselves as two dimensions of the same perceptual and cognitive phenomenon—a “densified” aesthetic body.

### **Conclusion: The Second History of Design**

Artificial intelligence inaugurates not merely a technological phase but a new *epistemology* of design. The first history of design—from industrial modernity to the digital age—translated human intention into functional form. The second begins when function becomes invisible, executed by immaterial systems, and form reclaims expressive autonomy.

In this condition, design’s task is no longer to reconcile aesthetics and utility but to synthesize cognition and perception. The aesthetic becomes functional because it enables understanding; the functional becomes aesthetic because it manifests intelligence.

As the designed object ceases to be a tool and becomes an operational metaphor, design enters its second history—a culture of *AI-functional art*, where beauty is not decorative but operational and meaning is not attributed but enacted. The modern designer shaped matter to embody use; the designer of this new era will shape experience to embody *perceived agency*.

Here, design reaches its singularity: the point at which form and function, long conceived as separate and opposing principles, converge and ultimately dissolve into one another. Their

mutual annihilation marks not an end but a transformation—an *ontological shift* in which aesthetics and utility become inseparable dimensions of the same design phenomenon. Far from disappearing, design thus fulfills its original vocation: to make sense—not metaphorically alone, but functionally and metaphorically at once—in the very act of making non-human intelligence visible and relatable to human understanding.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author used AI-assisted tools (OpenAI ChatGPT, GPT-5) exclusively to enhance language clarity and readability. All conceptual content, structure, and interpretations are entirely the author's own.

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## **Effect of Dance Pedagogy on Social Aesthetic Perception in Adult Learners: A Pilot Study on the Validation of the Social Aesthetic Perception Scale**

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### **Abstract**

This pilot study investigates the impact of dance pedagogy on adults' social aesthetic perception. A pilot Social Aesthetic Perception Scale (SAPS) was developed to assess emotional resonance, social connectedness, bodily awareness, and cognitive flexibility in adult learners (ALs). Using purposive sampling ( $N = 30$ ), participants engaged in structured dance sessions over 60 days. Quantitative results from the 15-item SAPS showed moderate increases, particularly in emotional attunement and social connectedness (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.766$ ), demonstrating acceptable reliability for this pilot study. Qualitative data were collected from a subsample of three participants through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and thematic analysis. Participants reported greater empathy, trust, and appreciation of collective movement, alongside enhanced cognitive flexibility, including improved tolerance for ambiguity, openness to novelty, and adaptive decision-making. These findings support the SAPS as a valid tool and suggest that dance pedagogy fosters social-aesthetic perception, interpersonal adaptation, and overall social-emotional development in ALs. Importantly, dance classrooms function as dialogical spaces, where aesthetic and relational meaning is co-created through verbal reflection and embodied interaction.

*Keywords:* adult learners, cognitive flexibility, dance pedagogy, social aesthetic, scale

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## Introduction

Dance pedagogy, as a learner-centered approach, offers unique opportunities for adults to engage with social aesthetics—how individuals perceive and interpret aesthetic experiences within social contexts (Berleant, 2023). Within the dance classroom, social aesthetics can manifest in the mutual awareness of movement, coordinated rhythm, and emotional resonance with partners or groups. These experiences are not limited to visual or artistic appreciation but encompass how people relate to others emotionally, empathetically, and physically in communal settings. By engaging in these processes, ALs not only develop artistic and relational skills but also participate in experiences that support broader goals of adult education, including lifelong learning, social integration, and enhanced wellbeing.

Building on frameworks of dance pedagogy (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Sheets-Johnstone, 2024), social aesthetics (Berleant, 2023; Cross, 2024; Martin & Merriman, 2015; McMahon, 2018; Nielsen, 2001), and adult education (Boateng et al., 2022; Knowles et al., 2015), this pilot study investigates the impact of dance pedagogy on adults' social aesthetic perception. It explores dance as an art form that deepens participants' aesthetic awareness as they adapt to new challenges and social environments, both within dance settings and in everyday life. Thus, this study views the dance classroom as a dialogical space where aesthetic and relational meaning are co-created through verbal and embodied interaction. Against this background, the pilot study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does participation in dance pedagogy influence self-perceived cognitive flexibility among ALs with no prior dance training?
2. How does engagement in structured dance pedagogy ALs' broader social-aesthetic perception?
3. To what extent is SAPS a valid and reliable instrument for measuring changes in social aesthetic perception among ALs?

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Aesthetics and Dance Pedagogy

Social aesthetics refers to the perception and experience of art as shaped by social interactions and the dynamics of group participation (Born et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Dewey (1934) emphasized that art is intrinsic to human development, with aesthetic experience emerging from continuous interaction with the environment. In dance classes, this is evident in group dynamics, where participants' synchronized movements and shared experiences cultivate both art appreciation and social engagement. The harmony of a well-synchronized routine or the fluidity of partner work encourages learners to perceive beauty in everyday human interactions, such as teamwork or natural rhythms. Heidegger (1962) similarly suggests that beauty is relational rather than standardized, grounded in authenticity and vulnerability. This understanding promotes cultural humility and respect for diversity. It also encourages an optimistic worldview in which challenges are approached as opportunities for growth.

Building on these philosophical perspectives, empirical findings demonstrate how social aesthetics operates in practice. Thus, within dance pedagogy, social aesthetics is enacted through communication, partnership, and shared aesthetic experiences that strengthen social bonds. Research shows that successful group collaboration and learning depend on cohesion. For example, Giguere (2021) and Sorokowski et al. (2024) found that joint dancing fosters pro-

sociality. Their studies suggest that cognitive activity is influenced by both embodiment and the social environment, while group cohesion supports cooperation. In this context, social and cognitive abilities are enhanced, and dialogue—both verbal and embodied—emerges as a key component of learning and co-creation. One way these dynamics are reinforced in practice is through ritualized activities that build trust and cohesion.

### **Rituals and Group Cohesion**

Rituals in dance pedagogy are structured activities, such as warm-up routines, closing exercises, symbolic gestures, partner-switching protocols, and shared celebrations, that help establish trust, cohesion, and cultural norms (Turner, 1969). Additional practices, including punctuality, greetings, expressions of appreciation, and eye contact, further structure the learning environment and promote adaptability. Turner (1969) emphasized *communitas*—social equality and solidarity fostered through rituals—while Vygotsky (1978) highlighted that learning is socially contextualized through interaction with peers and instructors. Dewey (1934) and Jackson (1998) similarly proposed that communal practices merge practical, social, and educational domains to produce aesthetic outcomes. Together, these rituals not only shape the structure of dance classes but also enhance the embodied experience, reinforcing the social and aesthetic bonds central to dance pedagogy.

### **Embodied Learning and Dialogue**

Embodied learning and dialogue are central to dance pedagogy, integrating perception, emotion, cognition, and social interaction. Learners use bodily experiences and movement to construct social meaning, while verbal and non-verbal dialogue fosters empathy, trust, and shared aesthetic understanding (Freiler, 2008; Freire, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Dance thus functions as a medium for co-creating knowledge and cultural expression, supporting cognitive, emotional, and relational growth beyond technical mastery. SAPS is designed to capture these unique, embodied, and socially co-created experiences, differentiating it from previous instruments that primarily measure individual or cognitive aspects of aesthetic perception.

These philosophical and pedagogical perspectives justify the development of a new scale to measure social aesthetic perception, as existing instruments do not fully capture the relational and embodied dimensions emphasized in dance pedagogy.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Participants ( $N = 30$ ) were adult beginners (18+ years) with no prior formal dance education. SAPS items, detailed in Table 1, measured emotional engagement, social connection, metacognitive awareness, aesthetic sensitivity, and transformative experience on a 1–5 Likert scale, with reliability assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . SAPS items, adapted from the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory, measured participants' cognitive flexibility, not only as a trait but as a responsive quality shaped through embodied, cooperative experiences in which learners adapt to nonverbal cues and shifting group dynamics. Participants were 18 men and 12 women, with a mean age of 36.5 years (SD 7.8).

**Table 1**  
*SAPS Component*

Item N	Statement	Dimension
1	I feel deeply connected to others when I participate in dance.	Emotional Engagement
2	Dancing helps me feel like I belong to a caring community.	Social Connection
3	I am aware of how my emotions change when interacting through dance.	Metacognitive Awareness
4	I notice and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of partner movements.	Aesthetic Sensitivity
5	I often reflect on how my dance affects others emotionally.	Transformative experience

Qualitative data from three participants were collected via semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, then coded thematically to identify patterns of social-aesthetic growth (Table 2). Due to the small sample, these data are exploratory. Interview questions explored participants' perceptions of interpersonal connection, aesthetic meaning, and emotional resonance during dance activities. Transcripts were then coded thematically, focusing on recurring patterns and individual reflections that pointed to dimensions of social-aesthetic growth (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Thematic Analysis Coding Scheme. Semi-structured Interviews*

Theme	Description	Sample Codes	Example Excerpt
Emotional engagement	How learners feel emotionally engaged in dance	Feeling moved, emotional flow, empathy	"When I dance, I feel connected to everyone, like we're sharing the same emotion."
Social Connection	Development of trust within community through dance	Trusting partners, group belonging, support	"I trust my dance partner completely — it makes me more confident."
Metacognitive Awareness	Awareness and reflection on own learning process	Self-monitoring, strategy use, reflective practice	"I think about how I learn steps best and try to apply that every time."
Aesthetic sensitivity	Heightened awareness and appreciation of beauty in movement, rhythm, and shared expression	Perceiving beauty, flow awareness, attunement to movement	"I notice small details in how the group moves together — it feels beautiful and makes me appreciate the art more."
Transformative Experience	Changes in personal or social identity through dance	Self-confidence boost, changed perspective, social growth	"Dancing has made me more outgoing and comfortable in social settings."

Table 3 illustrates a sample of the observation instrument used to assess participant behavior during dance classes. Indicators included emotional engagement, verbal interaction, synchronization, self-correction, and overall engagement. Each indicator was operationalized through observable examples (e.g., smiling, giving feedback, moving in sync) and rated on a 5-point scale to capture the intensity or frequency of occurrence.

**Table 3**  
*Observation Instrument*

Indicator	Example	Score (1–5)
Emotional Engagement	Smiling, expressive gestures	1 = rarely observed, 5 = consistently observed
Verbal Interaction	Giving/asking feedback, showing interest	1 = rarely observed, 5 = consistently observed
Synchronization	Moving with group/partner, maintaining rhythm	1 = rarely observed, 5 = consistently observed
Self-Correction	Adjusting based on cues	1 = rarely observed, 5 = consistently observed
Aesthetic sensitivity	Noticing and appreciating beauty in movement or flow	1 = rarely observed, 5 = consistently observed

Over six months, participants engaged in structured dance courses, including improvisation, rhythm exercises, partner work, and choreography designed to foster interpersonal coordination. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and reliability testing, while qualitative data were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and individual reflections, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' social-aesthetic and cognitive development in dance pedagogy.

## Results

**Quantitative Findings.** Preliminary results indicated a moderate increase in SAPS scores across participants, particularly in emotional attunement and social connectedness. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values showed 0.76 (Table 4), suggesting acceptable internal consistency for a pilot instrument:

**Table 4**  
*Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Values*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.766	15

Qualitative data from interviews further supported these trends. Using a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), SAPS-related items addressing the five themes—engagement, connection, awareness, aesthetic sensitivity, and transformation—generally fell within the 3–5 range (Table 5), suggesting:

- High levels of social aesthetic awareness and engagement
- Meaningful social and emotional experience

**Table 5***SAPS-Related Items*

Interview Statements	Likert Scale (1–5)
<i>I feel emotionally engaged and connected while dancing</i>	3–5
<i>I appreciate social interactions more through dance</i>	4–5
<i>Participating in dance helps me reflect on my learning process</i>	4–5
<i>Positive shared aesthetic experiences build trust</i>	5
<i>Dance helped me grow personally and socially</i>	4–5

Although based on a small number of interviews, these qualitative data align with SAPS scores, supporting the scale’s validity in capturing the social-aesthetic and emotional effects of dance participation. Participants reported growing recognition of the relationship between social interactions and aesthetic judgments during dance learning. Many noted their increasing ability to read others’ body language, empathize with partners, and appreciate moments of collective movement as “beautiful” or “emotionally meaningful.” Several participants described an unexpected sense of comfort and bonding in the group, emphasizing how non-verbal interactions during dance led to trust and mutual respect. Moreover, learners articulated how their dance experiences influenced their well-being in daily lives. For instance, some expressed greater confidence in social situations, more patience in listening to others, and a stronger appreciation for diversity in expressive forms. Participants linked their learning in dance to increased cognitive flexibility, citing improved tolerance of ambiguity, openness to novel situations, and adaptive decision-making in interpersonal encounters outside of class.

Observation data indicated moderate to high levels of participation, with scores generally ranging from 3 to 5 across indicators. Emotional engagement and synchronization were frequently rated at the higher end, reflecting strong affective involvement and coordinated group movement. Verbal interaction and self-correction showed more variability, typically falling in the mid-range, suggesting that learners were beginning to develop reflective and dialogical practices but had not yet reached full consistency. Overall, participants demonstrated robust engagement with dance activities, confirming that this observation instrument effectively captures social-aesthetic behaviors.

## Discussion

Findings from this pilot study suggest that dance pedagogy enhances social-aesthetic perception and cognitive-emotional development in ALs. Quantitative SAPS results indicate that learners generally rated their experiences in the mid-to-high range (3–5) across five key themes: emotional engagement, social connection, metacognitive awareness, aesthetic sensitivity, and transformative experience. Participants reported feeling emotionally engaged, socially connected, reflective about their learning, and attuned to trust and shared aesthetic experiences, highlighting both personal and social growth.

Complementing these self-reported data, observational indicators provided direct measures of participant behaviors within dance classes. Scores ranging from 3 to 5 suggest that participants were moderately to consistently engaged in smiling and expressive gestures, actively giving and responding to verbal feedback, synchronizing with partners or the group, self-correcting based on cues, and noticing aesthetic qualities in movement and collective flow. These observed behaviors map directly onto the SAPS items. For example, emotional engagement and verbal interaction align with the SAPS items capturing connectedness and social

appreciation, while synchronization and aesthetic sensitivity correspond to participants' recognition of shared beauty and trust-building through group movement. Self-correction reflects metacognitive awareness, highlighting learners' reflective engagement with their own learning process.

Qualitative interview data further support the trends captured in both tables. Participants described growing recognition of the relationship between social interactions and aesthetic judgments during dance learning, often noting increased ability to read others' body language, empathize with partners, and appreciate collective movement as beautiful or emotionally meaningful. Reports of comfort and bonding in the group, as well as the influence of dance on daily social interactions, align with high SAPS scores for social connection and transformative experience, and with observed behaviors such as synchronization, aesthetic sensitivity, and verbal interaction. Moreover, participants' descriptions of adaptive decision-making, tolerance of ambiguity, and cognitive flexibility are consistent with self-correction and reflective practices observed in class.

Together, the SAPS responses, observational indicators, and interview excerpts provide a triangulated picture: dance pedagogy promotes social-aesthetic awareness, embodied and dialogical engagement, and cognitive-emotional growth. These findings align with international studies showing that joint dance fosters pro-sociality, cognitive flexibility, and emotional engagement (Giguere, 2021; Sorokowski et al., 2024), suggesting that social-aesthetic benefits of dance are observed across cultural contexts.

This pilot study is part of a larger doctoral project, which will incorporate additional instruments and larger samples to further investigate the effects of dance pedagogy on ALs' social-aesthetic perception. Small sample size and pilot design limit generalizability. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias, as participants' perceptions could be influenced by social desirability or personal expectations. Larger-scale validation of SAPS, cross-cultural studies, and longitudinal designs are recommended.

## **Conclusion**

This pilot study validates the SAPS as a promising tool for measuring social-aesthetic perception in ALs. Findings indicate that dance pedagogy fosters empathy, trust, collective meaning-making, and cognitive flexibility. Functioning as dialogical and embodied spaces, dance classrooms provide not only artistic learning but also pathways for interpersonal and social transformation. Beyond the aesthetic experience, rituals play a key role in structuring the learning process, strengthening social bonds, and supporting embodied learning that integrates cognitive and emotional growth. Future work could explore how the SAPS performs across different adult learning environments, extending its application beyond dance to other creative and communal settings.

## **Declaration of AI-Generation or AI-Assistive Technology in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this manuscript, ChatGPT was used only to assist with language editing. All ideas, interpretations, and analyses presented in this work are solely those of the author. The use of AI did not influence the study design, data collection, analysis, or conclusion.

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## Understanding and Performing Silence in Dance

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Official Conference Proceedings

### Abstract

Silence in performance has often been explored in theatre, yet its role in dance remains an under-examined study area. While theatre can exist as a standalone medium, dance and music often rely on additional elements to create meaning. This paper investigates silence as an active choreographic element in dance, examining how movement, stillness, and the absence of sound contribute to performance dynamics. By questioning how silence is embodied in movement, this study explores whether silence in dance functions merely as an absence of sound or if it extends beyond that, shaping the performer's expression and the audience's perception. In this paper, we examine a few productions, such as Peter Brook's concept of "The Empty Space" and the works of choreographers such as Chandralekha, Akram Khan, and Astad Deboo; their modern approaches and use of the element of silence in the way they have perceived, observed, and analysed in the performance space. Additionally, this paper will also explore the influence of culture and regional context on the use of elements in productions, the style of dance (whether classical or folk), and, of course, the treatment of space and techniques. Methodologically, this study employs performance analysis, choreographic case studies, and audience reception studies to understand how silence is choreographed and received. Through this lens, the paper aims to reveal how dance can convey meaning through silence, creating an immersive experience that transcends verbal or musical articulation.

*Keywords:* stillness, silence in dance, choreography

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## **Introduction**

The relevance of studying silence in performance and dance is both significant and multifaceted, providing valuable insights into the nature of expression, communication, and embodied presence within the performing arts. While silence is conventionally perceived as a mere absence of sound or activity, this interpretation overlooks its profound dramaturgical, choreographic, and metaphorical importance. In contemporary performance scholarship, silence is increasingly recognized as an active force that structures time, accentuates meaning, and enables nuanced forms of engagement between performers and audiences. This section outlines the relevance of investigating silence in dance and performance through an academically rigorous lens, demonstrating how silence functions as a vital element within artistic practices and theoretical frameworks.

Traditionally, the primary vehicles of meaning in performance have been regarded as sound, speech, and music. The assumption persists that expressivity is fundamentally rooted in the audible or the articulate, and that the absence of these elements connotes emptiness or void. However, a growing body of research in performance studies, theatre, and choreography has challenged this presumption, proposing instead that silence is a generative site of presence and potentiality. By attending rigorously to silence, scholars and practitioners alike are invited to reconsider how meaning is produced, communicated, and received in the performing arts.

## **Studying Silence as Different Tools**

### **Silence as a Dramaturgical Structure**

From a dramaturgical perspective, silence is not an empty interval but a meaningful structuring device. It organizes time and narrative in ways that heighten dramatic tension, guide audience reflection, and delineate moments of transition. Silence can be wielded to punctuate action, sustain suspense, or invite introspection. The work of theatre director Peter Brook, for example, exemplifies how an “Empty space” enlivened by silence can be densely charged with theatrical potential. Such intervals of quietude are dramatic not simply by contrast but because they permit the proliferation of alternate meanings and interpretations, which would otherwise be occluded by the constant presence of sound or dialogue. Consequently, the dramaturgical employment of silence facilitates a deeper, more contemplative mode of spectatorship, in which audiences are encouraged to fill the seeming void with their own interpretations and emotions.

### **Silence as a Choreographic Resource**

In choreographic terms, silence profoundly alters the perception and execution of movement. When auditory cues are absent, the body itself assumes the role of rhythmic and expressive agent. The works of choreographers such as Akram Khan, Chandralekha, and Astad Deboo, who have strategically integrated silence into their choreography, are worth noting. In addition to these, the approach to removing musical accompaniment in a body-based performance is explored. Each gesture, pause, and transition becomes focused with heightened significance to invite both dancer and audience to attune themselves to nuances that might otherwise be overshadowed.

Silence in choreography challenges performers to cultivate increased bodily awareness and intentionality. Freed from the structural constraints of sound, dancers engage with time, space, and movement in novel ways, often developing idiosyncratic vocabularies that emerge solely from their embodied presence. In this context, silence serves to democratize the elements of performance, granting equal or greater importance to the sometimes-overlooked aspects of breath, gravity, and stillness.

### **Silence as Performance, Metaphor, and Movement**

Silence in performance can also be understood as both an act and a metaphor. As a performative strategy, it introduces new dynamics into the interaction between performers and audience members. Silence interrupts established patterns of expectation, producing moments of surprise, anticipation, or even discomfort. Such ruptures foster conditions in which both spectators and artists are compelled to listen, observe, and participate more actively, cultivating a heightened atmosphere of presence.

Metaphorically, silence is deeply polysemic, capable of signifying presence, absence, resistance, or spirituality depending on its cultural and socio-political context. In some instances, silence is evocative of meditation, withdrawal, or sacredness; in others, it constitutes a political act denoting refusal, protest, or critique. On an embodied level, silence in movement is realized through stillness, pause, or the invisible labor of preparation. These moments lend themselves to the communication of complex emotion and intention, demonstrating the body's capacity to "speak" powerfully in the absence of words or music.

### **Relevance to Contemporary Theory and Practice**

The academic relevance of studying silence in dance and performance extends to both practice and theory. For practitioners, understanding silence as an active and meaningful force enriches creative possibilities and invites innovative approaches to composition and interpretation. It challenges artists to reconsider the centrality of sound, encouraging exploration of how movement, stillness, and absence might forge new aesthetic and communicative pathways. For scholars, silence opens productive avenues for critical inquiry into the politics of visibility, the dynamics of attention, and the limits of representation.

Furthermore, the deliberate study and application of silence are particularly pertinent in an era characterized by sensory overload and powerful noise. The intentional use of silence becomes a means of resistance—a space for reflection, recalibration, and counter-narrative. It invites audiences and artists alike to listen more deeply, to tune into the unspoken, and to appreciate the richness found in restraint and contemplation.

Choreographic techniques that create silence in dance work by emphasizing stillness, controlled breath, and the reduction or absence of movement, transforming silence from a mere lack of sound into an expressive bodily state. Some key techniques include:

1. **Stillness or Arrested Movement:** Complete cessation of motion, which requires significant physical control to maintain balance and presence.
2. **Slow, Minimal Movement:** Utilizing movement that is so gradual or reduced that it creates a sensation of quiet stillness.
3. **Breath Control and Breath as Movement:** Choreographers often focus on the dancer's breathing patterns as a part of silent expression, using deliberate inhalations,

exhalations, or breath holds that are felt more than heard, emphasizing the body's internal rhythms.

4. **Spatial Awareness and Use of Negative Space:** Techniques where dancers emphasize spatial relations and create “empty” zones onstage, which amplify the sensation of silence by drawing attention to absence as much as presence.
5. **Improvisation within a Silent Framework:** Some choreographers provide dancers with open-ended structures or scores that invite improvisation without sound, compelling performers to generate movement organically, often resulting in unpredictable silent interludes or pauses.
6. **“Silent Choreography” Exercises:** Using non-verbal embodiment of emotions or narratives often learned through rehearsed or improvised silent acting techniques, highlighting gesture and posture to communicate without sound.

Overall, these techniques reveal that silence in dance is not a void but a highly skilled, intentional, and expressive state that foregrounds the subtleties of the human body as a communicative instrument, achieving depth and presence through absence of external sound.

One major approach conceptualizes silence as a form of non-verbal communication that conveys meaning through intentional absence or withholding of speech or sound. This perspective sees silence as an active, strategic choice rather than a passive void, emphasizing silence's role in creating tension, signaling power dynamics, or evoking emotional and psychological states. For example, feminist and critical race theorists have explored silence as a marker of marginalized voices—both enforced and resistive—highlighting how silence can function politically in contexts of exclusion and oppression.

Another theoretical lens looks at silence through the framework of performative theory. This treats silence as “doing” rather than simply “being”—silence as an embodied act that shapes the interaction between performer and audience. In this view, silence contributes to the temporal, spatial, and affective rhythms of performance; it intervenes in meaning-making processes by inviting audience interpretation, contemplation, or empathy rather than dictating meaning through language or sound. Such a framework attends closely to the experiential qualities of silence—how it shapes presence, attention, and relational dynamics within the live event.

Semiotic and cultural studies frameworks analyze silence in terms of signs and meanings within specific cultural contexts. Silence can be coded with diverse meanings depending on social norms, rituals, and symbolic systems. It is not neutral but imbued with cultural significance that must be decoded, sometimes requiring insider cultural knowledge. This approach often intersects with ethnographic methods, examining how silence functions in ritual, ceremony, or conflict across groups and societies.

From a psychological and cognitive perspective, silence is associated with internal processes such as reflection, memory, and ideation. It is linked to modes of mental activity that underpin speech or action but remain pre-verbal or non-verbal. Such frameworks explore silence's mnemonic, evaluative, and intrapersonal dimensions—how silence structures thought and self-awareness in performance contexts as well as everyday interaction.

Finally, dramaturgical and choreographic theories focus on how silence structures the temporal and spatial architecture of performance. In dramaturgy, silence governs the pacing, tension, and narrative flow by interrupting speech and allowing unspoken subtext to emerge.

In choreography, silence is embodied through stillness, breath, and spatial dynamics, actively reshaping the language of movement. These frameworks investigate silence as a compositional and expressive element that challenges assumptions about sound's primacy in dance and theatre.

In sum, these diverse theoretical frameworks reveal silence as a rich, multidimensional phenomenon in performance—one that functions at once linguistically, politically, culturally, psychologically, and artistically. Understanding and analyzing silence requires interdisciplinary tools that account for its complexity as both an absence and a presence, a disruption and a creation of meaning within performative acts.

## Case Studies

### ***XENOS* by Akram Khan (2018)**

Akram Khan's *XENOS* is a profound meditation on the fractured identities and dualities of the colonial Indian soldier during the First World War, skillfully merging elements of kathak and contemporary dance to illuminate the beauty and horror of the human condition. Drawing from twentieth-century archives, Khan (2018) gives poetic voice to the "shell-shocked dream" of a colonial soldier, creating a physical and emotional landscape shaped by trauma, conflict, and memory. The production negotiates the liminal borderlands between East and West, past and present, and the intricate intersections of mythology, technology, and history.

### ***Expansion and Context***

*XENOS* is set against a backdrop that initially resembles a traditional Indian durbar—a gathering rich with rugs and intricate musical interplay. However, as the narrative advances, this scene is abruptly stripped away: the trappings of the durbar are winched into darkness, replaced with minimalist and brutal imagery evocative of the trenches of World War I. Khan's transformation from a revered dancer into a conscripted soldier—his body rendered an "instrument of war"—establishes the central arc of the performance. Through precise and articulate physical language, Khan (2018) embodies the collective psychic wound of countless unnamed soldiers.

The score, oscillating between lush vocals, frenetic percussion, and jarring silences, amplifies the sense of fragmentation. Musicians, sometimes present on stage and sometimes retreating into shadow, become part of the work's shifting world. The movement language alternates between fluid kathak and jagged, jarring contemporary sequences, the choreography reflecting both cultural synthesis and psychic rupture.

### ***Analysis: Elements of Silence***

Silence proves fundamental to *XENOS*, operating as a dramaturgical force that disrupts, punctuates, and underscores the performance's thematic concerns. Silence is not an absence but a heightened presence—an embodied void that invites the audience to confront the unspeakable trauma of war and displacement.

**Dramaturgical Use.** Silent moments arrive abruptly, suspending narrative flow and performance energy. For example, the music and movement may suddenly halt, leaving the stage in darkness or with a single shaft of light illuminating Khan's still, vulnerable form.

**Choreographic Silence.** Khan's (2018) use of stillness and minimal gesture creates embodied silence—the dancer's body tense, attentive, yet unmoving, vibrating with withheld energy. Structural and Emotional Resonance: Silences highlight transitions between cultural worlds—between Kathak's lyricism and the fragmented, convulsive contemporary dance vocabulary. Silent spaces mark the dissolution of cultural boundaries and signal the inexpressibility of the soldier's trauma. When music or sound returns, its emotional impact feels amplified because of the preceding void, intensifying the performance's pathos.

In Akram Khan's (2018) *XENOS*, the interplay between Kathak rhythmic pauses and contemporary dance stillness produces a rich contrast that serves both aesthetic and thematic purposes. These forms of silence—distinctly rooted in their respective traditions—become essential tools for meaning-making and emotional resonance within the piece.

### ***Kathak Rhythmic Pauses***

Kathak, a classical Indian dance form, is renowned for its intricate rhythms, percussive footwork, and expressive storytelling. Pauses within Kathak are tightly interwoven with its music and rhythmic cycles (taal).

### ***Contemporary Stillness***

By contrast, the stillness characterizing contemporary dance in *XENOS* is less about rhythmic punctuation and more about existential presence and embodied reflection. Contemporary dance often uses stillness to disrupt movement, create emotional depth, or interrogate meaning apart from structured music or story. In Khan's (2018) choreography, contemporary stillness is marked by a suspension of time—a profound quiet that may last several seconds or longer, where the body appears at rest but is internally charged with emotion, memory, or unresolved tension.

### ***SHARIRA by Chandralekha (2001)***

Chandralekha's (2001) *Sharira* is a landmark work that interrogates the complexity of the female body, divine femininity, sexuality, and spirituality, while employing silence as a fundamental performative language. Through slow movement, carefully held postures, and extended pauses, *Sharira* crafts a meditative space that transcends spectacle, making silence both subject and substance of the dance.

### ***Expansion and Context***

At its core, *Sharira* is not about narrative in the conventional sense but about evoking an experience of the body as a site of creation, desire, and transcendence. The choreography diverges from traditional storytelling and instead emphasizes abstraction, slowness, and repetition. Two dancers—the female performing body often central—navigate through a tapestry of levels, postures, and spatial patterns that represent various energies associated with the feminine principle: creation, sensuality, nurture, and resistance.

The work's movement vocabulary draws heavily from yoga, kalaripayattu, and Indian classical dance, but is stripped of decorative gesture and dramatic excess. Instead, Chandralekha's focus is on the internal—the materiality of the body, the act of breathing, and the weight of presence. The performers' postures often channel archetypal forms, such as the

yoni (the triangle as a sign of female generative power), continually invoked not as an object for the male gaze but as an affirmation of autonomous, embodied sexuality and spiritual potency.

### *Analysis: Silence in Sharira*

Silence in *Sharira* (2001) operates on multiple layers—aural, kinesthetic, and emotional:

- **Kinesthetic Silence:** Perhaps *Sharira*'s (2001) most radical element is its choreography of stillness and slowness. The dancers' extremely gradual, deliberate movements create a space thick with anticipation and contemplation. These pauses and held postures magnify even the slightest shift in tension or breath, inviting the audience to focus on the internal energies flowing through the bodies.
- **Aural Silence:** Often performed with minimal sound or music, much of *Sharira* unfolds against a sonic backdrop of near silence. This aural restraint compels viewers to attune to the dancers' breathing, the rustle of fabric, or the soft contact between body and floor—subtle reminders of organic life and the inner rhythms of existence. The absence of musical cueing places emphasis squarely on the material body and its energies, subverting the expectations of spectacle and providing an acoustic space for reflection and intimacy.
- **Symbolic and Dramaturgical Silence:** Chandralekha (2001) employs pauses and *talam* (internal rhythm) as dramaturgical tools, allowing every stillness to function as a site of transformation. Rather than denoting a mere stoppage, these silences are potent with suggestion: creation, waiting, refusal, and regeneration. In holding these postures, the dancers sculpt silence into a visible force, making the audience an active participant—leaning forward, engaged, resonating with the palpable tension and release that unfold across time and space.
- **Feminist and Political Silence:** Within the broader cultural context, the silence in *Sharira* can also be read as resistance to objectification and to conventional representations of femininity. By internalizing both protest and sexuality, Chandralekha's (2001) choreography directs expressive energy inward, situating silence as a marker of autonomy, subversion, and sacred power.

Postural stillness in performance serves as a powerful conduit for communicating divine femininity, drawing from deep spiritual, mythological, and somatic traditions. The concept of divine femininity encompasses qualities such as creation, receptivity, intuition, nurturing, and inner strength—attributes often represented through archetypal goddesses and symbols across cultures. Stillness becomes a means by which these aspects are embodied and made present on stage, resonating far beyond the absence of movement.

In sum, still postures serve as living icons of the divine feminine by:

- Evoking spiritual archetypes through shape, space, and minimalism
- Calling forth inner wisdom, serenity, and intuitive presence
- Affirming creative power and sensual wholeness without outward display
- Creating spaces of collective contemplation, healing, and renewal.

Through postural stillness, the feminine sacred is not simply represented but embodied, inviting the audience to witness, resonate, and perhaps access these energies within themselves.



## ***Breaking Boundaries by Astad Deboo (2009)***

Astad Deboo's (2009) initiative, *Breaking Boundaries*, stands as a pioneering and deeply inspiring project in contemporary Indian dance, particularly remarkable for its inclusive approach of training and performing with auditorily challenged and underprivileged performers from the Salaam Baalak Trust. This production and its rigorous training process offer a fascinating lens through which to study the element of silence in dance and the ways dance can exist and flourish without reliance on traditional musical accompaniment.

### ***Training Process and Its Challenges***

Deboo's work with these performers began without auditions, welcoming street children who came primarily with Bollywood or informal dance backgrounds and little to no formal training. The process was intensive and transformative, focusing on cultivating body awareness, control, and spatial sensitivity rather than traditional notions of rhythm tied to sound. Deboo (2009) emphasized minimalistic yet physically challenging choreography, where dancers learned to trust their bodies and each other while maneuvering highly controlled movements often performed in contained or unconventional spaces like benches.

The training encouraged exploring internal rhythms and bodily impulses, allowing performers to generate movement from their own physiological cues rather than external music. Deboo often worked with the dancers on breath control, kinesthetic listening, and physical connectivity to create a collective sense of timing and flow. The psychological support and camaraderie built through rehearsal were equally important, helping performers overcome personal and social barriers to unlock expressive potential and embodied confidence.

### ***The Role of Silence in the Performance***

Silence in *Breaking Boundarie* is not emptiness or absence; rather, it is a dynamic and essential presence. The minimal or delayed use of music—drums appear only near the end of the performance—means that silence becomes the default “soundscape” during much of the dance. This silence foregrounds the dancers' movements, breaths, and physical energy, transforming the body into the primary instrument of rhythm and expression.

Without external musical cues, performers learn to listen deeply—to one another, to the spatial environment, and to their own internal rhythms. This heightened awareness turns silence into an aural and spatial texture that shapes the dance's tension and release. The silence also intensifies the audience's focus on visual and kinesthetic elements, heightening the experience of collective breathing, balance, and trust that Deboo's choreography demands.

### ***Dance Without Music: Expanding Perceptions***

*Breaking Boundaries* demonstrates that dance can transcend the traditional interdependence on music or sound by centering movement as autonomous and self-sufficient. It challenges the assumption that music is always necessary to create rhythm and emotive power in dance, showing instead that silence can be a fertile ground for innovation and expression. The dancers' bodies generate their own rhythmic pulses through footwork, breath, and spatial interaction, underscoring the somatic dimension of performance.

### ***Training Process: Embracing Silence***

The training process for *Breaking Boundaries* began with performers from the Salaam Baalak Trust, many of whom came with limited dance experience and primarily Bollywood or informal movement backgrounds. Astad Deboo (2009) introduced them to a controlled, minimalistic aesthetic that contrasted sharply with their earlier training. Central to this method was the cultivation of heightened body awareness and trust, teaching dancers to embody rhythm and timing through internal cues—breath, muscle tension, and physical impulses—rather than relying on auditory signals.

Breath control exercises formed a cornerstone of training, enabling dancers to anchor themselves and find an internal pulse. Visual cues, such as hand signals and eye contact, replaced verbal counting, fostering ensemble coordination and spatial awareness. This approach not only adapted to the needs of hearing-impaired dancers but redefined how rhythm and musicality could be understood and embodied, emphasizing the body as a self-sufficient rhythmic instrument.

The performer's intention in using silence is central. It is a conscious act—an act of communication that transcends words or music. By deciding when to hold a pose, pause movement, or remove external auditory cues, the performer crafts a space where internal energies—such as breath, stillness, or subtle gestures—become the primary mode of expression. These moments are often deliberately held, with complete awareness of their impact, reinforcing the spiritual or emotional message that the performer aims to project.

Equally vital is the audience's role—the receiver's interpretive framework. The audience's perception of silence depends greatly on their emotional and cultural state, their capacity for empathy, and their openness to non-verbal cues. When the “wavelengths” between the performer and the audience match—meaning the audience is receptive and attuned—the silence becomes a shared, almost sacred space of understanding. In this state, silence can evoke a profound sense of presence, creating an embodied experience where meaning is felt rather than spoken. It fosters a heightened connection, inviting viewers to experience the subtle energies of the body, breath, and environment without external distraction.

This phenomenon—where performer intention and audience reception synchronize—is often considered the pinnacle of effective silent performance. It's as if both parties are tuned into a similar frequency, where the unspoken dialogue between body and mind, between performer and observer, becomes a form of silent poetry. When this wavelength alignment occurs, the impact of silence intensifies; the performance becomes a vessel of spiritual and emotional resonance, often leaving a lasting impression that words cannot capture.

The challenge—and the extraordinary potential—of silence in performance lies in this matching of wavelengths. As difficult as it is to cultivate such an attunement, it is also the element that renders silence most effective. It requires a high degree of self-awareness and emotional intelligence from the performer, who must embody the intention of the silence, and a deep receptivity from the audience. The result is an immersive experience where silence is not an absence but a presence—an active state of being that communicates beyond the limits of language or sound.

## Conclusion

Silence, as intentionally employed in performance, is a profound act of shared presence. It highlights the performer's conscious choice to communicate without words, while relying on the audience's openness to receive and interpret this non-verbal dialogue. When their wavelengths match—when intention and reception align—silence becomes a potent channel for authentic, transformative exchange that resonates beyond the physical space, touching the spiritual core of human experience.

The paper discusses different projects by contemporary choreographers and analyzes the element of silence as observed by the author. While the observations are grounded in subjective interpretation, they are guided by identifiable factors that frame and support the overall inquiry. In exploring how silence functions within dance, the study highlights that the absence of sound does not denote the absence of meaning or presence. Instead, silence becomes a powerful medium that allows the body to communicate, evoke emotion, and reshape perception.

By engaging with silence, choreographers and performers are invited to rediscover the body's intrinsic rhythm, texture, and expressive capacity. This approach celebrates stillness and quiet as active forces that can deepen the audience's experience, offering new ways to perceive time, space, and movement. The paper, therefore, serves as an invitation to artists, scholars, and audiences alike to reconsider the sensory boundaries of performance. It encourages an exploration of how silence can create resonance within and beyond the stage, transforming both the creative process and the act of witnessing.

Ultimately, this paper opens a reflective and imaginative space for dance to evolve beyond conventional dependencies on music or sound. It calls for continued experimentation, where silence is not merely the background or pause in performance but a vital performative element—capable of revealing the subtle, profound dialogues between the body, emotion, and perception.

## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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## **A Study on the Early Historic Society of Kerala, Its Society, Trade and Burial Practices Through the Megaliths (1000 BCE–500 CE)**

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### **Abstract**

Megaliths are undressed burial stones belonging to pre-historic Kerala, in India during 1000 BCE to 500 CE. Originally excavated by J. Babington, in Kerala, the term megaliths derives its origin from the Greek words “Mega” (big) and “Lithos” (stone). In this period, Kerala was inhabited by agro-pastoral communities skilled in iron metallurgy. The objective of the paper is to study the cultural and sepulchral practices of the society with the help of the material vestiges left by them. It also intends to explore the nature of the exchange/trade economy boosted by their skill in iron metallurgy. Further, it analyses burial practices adopted by these communities to understand how they commemorated their ancestors. This qualitative study adopts a critical and descriptive approach in analysing both primary and secondary data along with the author's personal observations and inferences. The primary data are the Archaeological Survey of India's excavation reports and the secondary data include the classical literature belonging to the period. The key research questions of this study are “Whether these structures evidences settlements in these areas?” and “Were these sepulchral practices evidences of social stratification?” The study found that are nine types of megaliths-Urn burials, Cap Stones, Hat Stones, Dolmens, Menhirs, Stone Circles, Cists, Rock Cut Chambers and Sarcophagus. They were made of locally available granite, laterite and terracotta. Grave goods found in assemblages inside or beneath these structures consisted of pottery, metal implements, beads and bones. These findings evidences agro-pastoral communities attempting to settle with their diverse skills and proficiency in myriad occupations.

*Keywords:* megaliths, rock cut caves, menhirs, sarcophagi, hat-stones, umbrella-stones

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## Introduction

Megaliths are huge monolithic sepulchers in peninsular India constructed by the people to pay respect for the dead ancestors. The stone henges the famous pre-historic monuments on Salisbury Plains in Wiltshire, England was a true marvel which enthralled archaeologists, historians and public alike. Megaliths of this type, meant to commemorate the ancestors are found in various parts of Kerala, in India, distributed in Highland, Midland and Low land geographical zones. The age of megaliths (circa 1000 BCE to 500 CE) is considered to be the primordial phase in the history of Kerala. Though no habitation cum burial sites were discovered in the region their presence points to the spread of human settlements close to burial grounds. The people who inhabited these areas were skilled in metallurgy, masonry, pottery, bead manufacturing, weaving and were engaged in an exchange economy that was largely urban (Loga, 1887). The assemblages found in the megaliths stand proof to an organized society which was largely agro-pastoral and stratified in nature, that existed during the period.

## Objectives

1. To study the cultural and sepulchral practices of the society of Kerala with the help of material vestiges left by man
2. To explore the nature of the exchange/trade economy by their skill in iron metallurgy
3. To analyze the burial practices adopted by these communities to understand how they commemorated their ancestors

## Previous Works and Literature Review

A series of excavations were conducted by the archaeologists to unearth the unique heritage of Kerala, mainly the megaliths in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Earlier excavations were made in various parts of South India with different types of sepulchral practices and it included Adichanallur, Koraki, Kayal, Pallavaram, Dadampatti, Parvai, Brahmagiri etc. The discovery of pottery from these sites are different in nature, but the use of iron and the skill in metallurgy is attested to all the sites. Primary burials with the human skeletons have not been found in Kerala. On the other hand the megaliths of region has secondary burials which have bone fragments along with pottery, ornaments and metal objects.

Credit goes to the British Archaeologist J Babington (1823), who had excavated a capstone at Chettapparmba in Kozhikode. In his work, the Description of *Pandoo Coolies*, J Babington has written that this place was literally the field (compound) of death, *Chatthum paramba*. He has also written elaborately of the tripods, swords, knives, axes made of iron along with other burial goods (Babington, 1823).

William Logan (1879), Alexander Rea (1911), A.H. Longhurst (1912), L.A. Cammaide (1930), A. Ayyapan (1933) H.H. Khan (1937) were some of the archaeologists who conducted excavations during the colonial period in Kerala. Vasudeva Poduval, Department of Archaeology and Anujan Achan of the Department of Archaeology, Cochin state were the other pioneers of excavations before Indian independence. The Archaeological Survey of India undertook systematic excavations of the region on the basis of stratigraphy to determine the chronological sequence of the megaliths. V.D Krishnaswamy, B.K. Thapar, K.J. John, worked to locate the chronology and significance of the megaliths. The family likeness of the ceramic types and fabric noticed here and Brahmagiri and other megalithic sites no doubt indicates a alienness of the different groups comprising the southern megalithic complex, though the

different shapes of the monuments and the variations in the burial customs represented therein seem to preclude an absolute homogeneity (Thapar, 1948). The excavations at Porkalam, Mangad that yielded a lot of artefacts belonging to the period, archaeologists have arrived to the consensus that the megaliths of Kerala roughly belonged to the times between 1000 BCE and 500 CE. Carbon-14 dating method on organic materials like charcoal or bones found in association with the burials helped to fix the timeline of the megaliths.

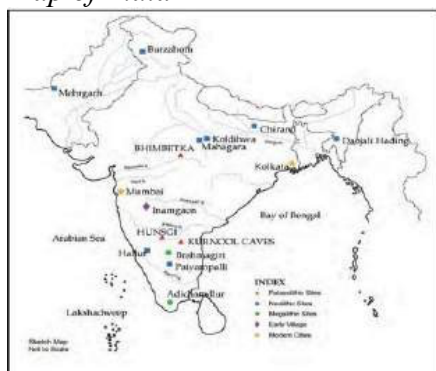
### Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that uses a critical and descriptive approach in analysing both primary and secondary data along with author's personal observations and inferences. The literature belonging to the period of study, the Sangam Literature- *Ettuthaokai*, *Pattupattu*, *Patinenkillanakku* and post Sangam works like *Cilappathikaram*, *Manimekhalai*, *Kilkanakku* etc., throw a lot of light on the society, traditions and practices of the period. Early epigraphs in *Tamil Brahmi*, *Vattteluthu*, *Granthavari* and coins with references also are important sources. Reports of the studies of the Archaeological Survey of India, provide authentic and first hand information about the monuments ever since their existence was found to be a marvel to the academia involved in archaeological excavations in India.

### Significance of Megaliths

Kerala, the region located in the southern part of India, has distinct topographical zones. It has a long coastal belt (lowland) near the Arabian sea on the western part, fertile plains in the middle (midland) and hilly ranges on the eastern part alongside the Western ghats (highland). The region was part of ancient *Thamizhakam* and widely referred in the ancient corpus of Literature- the Sangam Literature. Till the middle of twentieth century it was believed by the archaeologists that the ecology and mineral availability in this region did not make it conducive for palaeolithic and neolithic man of make a living in this zone. Microliths were discovered from Chevayur in Kozhikode, Malampuzha and Thenmala which were used by the tribal groups for hunting and food gathering. Microliths were proof of people trying to make a living in this geographical zone when man hadn't begun to practice sedentary life by settling down with agriculture and domestication of animals. The Edakkal caves, an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) protected site has petroglyphs of animal and human figures and *muniyaras* (burial chambers) suggesting the presence of human settlement in this region.

**Figure 1**  
*Map of India*





**Figure 2**  
*Map of Kerala*



However it was the Iron age of the region that attracted the attention of the archaeologists and historical enthusiasts due to the large presence of burial monuments very distinct for each region. Megaliths derive its name from Latin, Mega which means “big” and lithos “stone” are undressed burial stones found in various parts of Kerala made according to the availability of the material found in a particular locality in abundance. Thus dolmens multiple and single are to be found in the eastern mountainous regions composed of granite gneiss and charnockite: the rock cut caves, menhirs and umbrella stones on the laterite plains; and Urn burials with some menhirs on the alluvial seaboard. The type of megaliths include rock cut tombs, *Pathikalls* or hood stones, *topikalls* or Hat Stones, *Kudaikalls* or umbrella stones, Dolmenoid Cists, Urn Burials, Stone Circles and Menhirs and Sarcophagi. Such monuments were mostly discovered accidentally during the construction of road and buildings. Local people rarely realised the significance of them being evidences of heritage, history and culture. Many of the early attempts on the megaliths were largely antiquarian in nature (Mohanty & Selvakumar, 2002). Mortimer Wheeler, A British Archaeologist who played a pivotal role in excavating megaliths of South India, aptly summarised the situation “Megalithic monuments had been ransacked rather than excavated, sometimes with the help of a dynamite” (Wheeler, 1947). Urn fields had been gathered up like rice crops. However the “summary digging” and the antiquarian interest gave way to studies on the burial chambers as monuments that spoke volumes about the societies of iron age and early historic period of the region. The popular name associated with the megaliths was *Pandoo Coolies*, probable the corruption of *Mandavarkuli*, the burial pit of the dead which are often associated with human skeletal remains and burial furniture (Babington, 1823).

### **The Influence of Geography**

Sangam Literature throws ample light about the practice of commemorating the dead by constructing burial chambers. The *Thinai* concept that is seen in ancient Tamil literature classifies landscapes based on their ecology at the same time mentions about the occupations of the tribes there. In the *Kurinji* (Mountainous regions) people were hunter-gatherers, In *Mullai* (Pastoral forests) they were cattle herders, In *Neythal* (Coastal Regions) they were fishermen or salt makers, In *Marutham* (wetlands), farmers and in *Palai* (Dry regions) they were nomads who were plunderers. The geographical differentiation which was reflected in the occupations, could be seen in the type of megaliths, materials used for construction and also the material vestiges left by them inside these burial chambers.

## Megalith Typology

### *Rock Cut Chambers*

Predominantly made of laterite, these caves were made by scooping out square stepped pits in the rock approached by rock cut steps. These caves sometimes have single or multiple chambers and some of them have port holes too. Openings are mostly covered by stone slabs. Kakkad, Eyyal, Porkalam, and Citrari are a few places where rock cut caves are found (Satyamurthy, 1972).

**Figure 3**

*Rock Cut Cave – Anakkara, Kerala*



### *Kudaikals or Umbrella Stones*

Porkalam and Cheramangad have a lot of stones that are shaped in the form of umbrella placed above another stone. These monuments are mushroom shaped and were constructed taking into account the incessant rains the region have for a good number of months in a year, allowing rain water to flow to the ground thus safe guarding the burial goods beneath, paving way to its longevity.

**Figure 4**

*Umbrella Stones, Cheramangad, Kerala*



### *Topikals or Hat Stones*

A circular laterite stone is seen on the ground beneath which mostly urn burials were found. Such specimens are seen in Cheramangad in Kerala.

**Figure 5***Hat Stone, Cheramangad, Kerala****Dolmens and Dolemenoid Cists***

Dolmens are made of granite slabs and are seen on the ground covered with a cap stone. Dolmenoid cist a variant of the Dolmens are burial chambers constructed with four slabs forming orthostats and the fifth used as capstone. The terms Dolmens and Dolemenoid cists are mostly used interchangeably. The Dolemenoid Cist in Alappuzha had yielded gold coins. Dolmens discovered in the Kerala region are so unique in nature with no parallels of the type found anywhere else in the world.

**Figure 6***Dolmen at Marayaur, Kerala***Figure 7***Dolemenoid Cist at Porkalam, Kerala*

### ***Urn Burials***

Urns made of clay were excavated in various parts of Kerala with grave assemblages meant to commemorate the dead ancestors. Though primary and secondary burials have been excavated from various parts of South India, only secondary burials with bone fragments have been excavated from Kerala, hitherto. Agricultural implements which were made of iron included wedges, blades and cutting knives. The presence of iron slag in the pits from where the urn burials were discovered shows that iron was locally manufactured in the region (Satyamurthy, 1972).

#### **Figure 8**

*Urn Burial, in Situ – Porkalam, Kerala*



### ***Menhirs***

Generally constructed as memorial stones they are monoliths erected to honour heroes of war. They are either made of granite or laterite whichever was locally found in abundance in the regions.

#### **Figure 9**

*Menhir, Idukki, Kerala*



### ***Pathikals or Hood Stones***

They are unique to the region and are found abundantly in Cheramangad. It resembles the hood of a snake and covers an underground burial.



**Figure 10***Hood Stones, Cheramangad, Kerala****Stone Circles***

Made of laterite or granite these circles are meant to mark the boundary of a burial area and stones are arranged in circular pattern. They are found alongside dolmens or umbrellas stones.

**Figure 11***Stone Circle \_Anakkara, Kerala****Sarcophagi***

Sarcophagi or stone coffins were part of the larger megalithic burials which included urns and cists. A rare sarcophagus was discovered from a rock-cut cave at Viyur, Kerala. Bone fragments were found inside the sarcophagus. Archaeologists have confirmed that it belonged to the iron age of Kerala.

**Figure 12***Sarcophagus, Viyur, Kerala*

## Occupation

The Assemblages found in the megaliths of Kerala include, pottery, metal implements and tools, stone beads and bone fragments. These assemblages are a proof of the different occupations followed by people in different areas and point to the nature, rituals, practices and stratification in the society. The discovery of iron weapons in the megaliths show that they practiced hunting and food gathering. The archaeo-zoological evidences point to domestication of animals. Artificial ponds with slopping steps close are found close to megaliths in certain cases. Milch cow was treated as wealth by the tribal groups. Sickles, Ploughshares among assemblages prove that agriculture was a major source of livelihood. Location of megaliths near arable land and paddy husk excavated proved that they were agriculturists trying to settle down. Evidences also suggest mixed crop patterns in agriculture. A few tribes like *Kadars*, *Uralis*, *Malapandarams* still exist who are dependent on hunting, fishing etc as their ancestors did in the neolithic times.

There are ample evidences to believe that trade with other regions occurred. The presence of Russet coated painted ware which was not locally made and the presence of semi – precious stone beads (camelian, amethyst, quarts, beryl, chalcedony, topaz) among the assemblages in megaliths are proof (Thapar, 1948).

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that the people who built megaliths in honour of their dead ancestors belonged to agro-pastoral societies attempting to settle with their diverse skills and proficiency in myriad occupations. Internal and external trade flourished which added to the prosperity of the tribal groups. The accumulation of political power gradually turned the society to a stratified one. These burial monuments which are undoubtedly the finest proof that throw ample light on the region's iron age, its society, economy and polity don't get enough maintenance and are largely neglected. It is very important that these burial monuments are to be preserved well for the sake of the future generation.

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## **Geospatial Direct-Address Videos As Alternative Participatory Governance Device for Community Problem Identification and Decision-Making at a Subdivision in a City Located in Laguna**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines geospatial direct-address videos as an alternative participatory governance device for community problem identification and decision-making in a subdivision in Laguna, Philippines. Through a thematic analysis, the research assessed residents' and barangay decision-makers' perspectives using VeneKlasen and Miller's (2002) distinctions about power and Tufte and Mefalopulos' (2009) participatory outcomes. Short direct-address videos of residents were mapped geospatially in a digital platform and later shown to barangay officials to elicit responses. The findings revealed mixed dynamics of Power Over, Power With, and Power Within, demonstrating how digital video mapping enables proactive citizenship while also exposing structural hierarchies in community decision-making. The most observed participatory outcome was the improvement of competencies and capacities, indicating that barangay decision-makers recognized the potential of geospatial videos for enhancing transparency, collaboration, and participatory problem-solving. The study underscores the promise of audiovisual and locative media as alternative participatory tools for inclusive governance.

*Keywords:* participatory governance, geospatial video, thematic analysis, community participation, digital mapping

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## Introduction

This study investigates how video, when situated geospatially, may serve as a participatory medium for community-level problem identification and decision-making. With the proliferation of mobile technologies and the increasing accessibility of audiovisual recording, communities today have the means to represent their own realities and articulate grievances in a direct and embodied form.

In the Philippines, particularly within the barangay context, participatory governance often suffers from hierarchical communication patterns that marginalize ordinary citizens' voices. The researcher sought to explore how geospatial direct-address videos, which are short video segments of residents speaking directly to the camera from their neighborhoods, can act as a tool for participatory communication and grassroots governance.

This work contributes to the growing discourse on participatory communication by situating visual storytelling within a locative and digital framework. It recognizes that visibility, spatiality, and voice can mutually reinforce empowerment in community settings.

## Literature Review

Participatory video (PV) has evolved as a form of community-based media production aimed at empowerment and inclusion (Colom, 2010; Kyung-Hwa, 2016). It allows participants to represent their experiences, share concerns, and propose actions through collaborative video-making. The process fosters dialogue and reflection, reminiscent of Freire's (1989) notion of conscientization.

Related approaches, such as ethnovideography (Flor, 2005), emphasize researcher-facilitated video documentation of community life. Meanwhile, "cellphilms" (Dockney & Tomaselli, 2009; MacEntee et al., 2016) capitalize on mobile devices as accessible means of participatory visual research. These traditions highlight the capacity of video to democratize knowledge and stimulate civic participation.

The study also draws on concepts of discourse communities (Swales, 1990) and community conversations (Public Agenda, n.d.), which frame communication as an enabling condition for collective problem-solving. In the local governance context, digital and ICT-based mechanisms such as e-governance initiatives (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Shah, 2005) illustrate how technology may bridge citizen-state communication gaps.

Methodologically, the study was inspired by Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and the transect walk (Chambers, 1992), both emphasizing local participation, contextual learning, and visual mapping. Integrating these frameworks, the research positions geospatial direct-address videos as both communicative artifacts and analytical tools for examining participatory power.

## Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative design rooted in participatory communication and thematic analysis. Fieldwork took place in a subdivision within a barangay in a city located in Laguna, Philippines.

## Transect Walk and Data Collection

A transect walk, a participatory mapping activity, was conducted with a local guide to identify residents willing to record short direct-address videos. Each resident spoke about perceived community issues (such as drainage, safety, waste management, or infrastructure) while being filmed in front of the concerned site. The videos were captured using mobile devices, afterwards geo-tagged, and then embedded in an interactive digital map of the subdivision (developed with the help of a multimedia artist).

The resulting digital map served as a visual repository of residents' concerns, making visible the geography of local problems through spatially-linked testimonies.

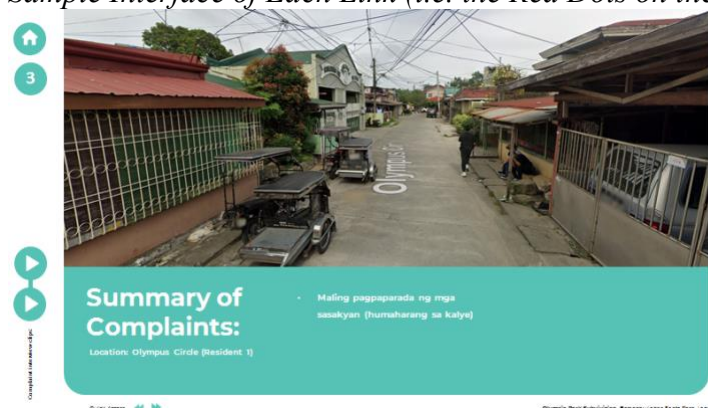
**Figure 1**

*The Interactive Map That Contains the Geospatial Direct-Address Videos*



**Figure 2**

*Sample Interface of Each Link (i.e. the Red Dots on the Map) When Clicked*



## Focus Group Discussion

The second phase involved a focus group discussion (FGD) with barangay decision-makers. During the session, the interactive map and videos were presented to elicit reactions, reflections, and assessments of the tool's potential in governance. Participants included

members responsible for administration, barangay justice (including a separate one that focuses on violence against women and children), peace and security, health, and the environment.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The transcripts were analyzed using two analytical lenses:

1. VeneKlasen and Miller's (2002) distinctions about power: Power Over, Power To, Power With, and Power Within, to describe power dynamics reflected in participants' responses.
2. Tufte and Mefalopulos' (2009) participatory outcomes, including Improvement of Competencies and Capacities, Increased Feelings of Ownership, and Actual Influence on Institutions, to identify the extent of perceived participatory change.

This dual framework allowed the study to map how both residents and officials articulated agency, empowerment, and collaboration

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Residents' Perspectives**

Residents identified a range of recurring issues, ranging from waste management, clogged drainage, road deterioration, and neighborhood security. Their video testimonies often expressed frustration toward slow responses from authorities but also optimism about community cooperation.

The direct-address style amplified the immediacy and sincerity of each message, establishing visual intimacy between speaker and viewer. The act of speaking to the camera, rather than to the researcher, symbolically reclaimed communicative agency.

Three major power dimensions were observed:

- *Power Within*: Residents displayed confidence and pride in articulating their experiences, reflecting self-recognition and personal ownership.
- *Power With*: Several invoked collective action, citing neighborhood cleanups and watch programs as examples of cooperation.
- *Power To*: A few expressed a capacity to act to resolve a specific community issue.
- *Power Over*: Some expressed powerlessness due to bureaucratic inertia, indicating persistent asymmetry between citizens and authorities.

These findings suggest that participatory visual media, even in limited form, can foster critical self-awareness and symbolic empowerment.

#### **Barangay Decision-Makers' Perspectives**

Barangay officials expressed interest in adopting the method as a supplementary feedback mechanism. The videos' clarity and location-specificity made them valuable for administrative monitoring.

However, the most recurrent power dimension among officials was Power Over, reflecting their institutional control and top-down approach. Yet, traces of Power To emerged as they

discussed how the videos could improve competencies in assessing and addressing community concerns.

In terms of participatory outcomes, Improvement of Competencies and Capacities appeared most frequently, followed by Increased Feelings of Ownership. The former points to a professional learning process among decision-makers; the latter indicates a modest attitudinal shift toward shared responsibility.

### **Bridging Perspectives Through Geospatial Media**

The interactive map served as a dialogic interface, connecting experiential data (residents' narratives) with bureaucratic insight (barangay evaluation). The interspersing of the videos and the digital map re-imagined traditional communication flows, making citizen voices visible in a format that is legible to governance structures.

The results affirm that visual and spatialized storytelling can act as a boundary object that mediates between ordinary and official discourses. Yet at the same time, it also reveals that empowerment through media remains partial unless accompanied by structural reforms in local decision-making culture.

### **Conclusion**

Geospatial direct-address videos combine audiovisual immediacy with spatial precision, presenting a novel medium for participatory governance. They transform citizens from passive complainants into active documentarians of local realities.

The study's findings emphasize that such participatory media can expand the communicative interface between citizens and local authorities, making governance more transparent and inclusive. However, their transformative potential depends on institutional willingness to engage and act upon the information produced.

While the approach empowered residents symbolically and dialogically, the persistence of Power Over among officials underscores the need for deeper structural participation. Scaling up this method could involve partnerships between universities, NGOs, and local governments to institutionalize geospatial audiovisual mapping as part of barangay development planning.

Future research may refine the model by integrating quantitative mapping analytics, crowdsourced data, or longitudinal monitoring of community issues. Overall, geospatial direct-address videos represent a convergence of media, geography, and civic engagement—an approach that reimagines communication as a participatory pathway toward better governance.

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### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies**

During the preparation of this paper, the author used ChatGPT to assist in refining clarity, structure, and formatting in accordance with the IAFOR Conference Proceedings style guidelines. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed, and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.

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## **History as a Nightmare: From Modernist to Metamodernist Irish Drama (James Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Frank McGuinness and Owen McCafferty)**

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### **Abstract**

James Joyce in Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* declared that "As an artist, naturally I attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history". Nevertheless, political discourse in fiction has always been a complex and intricate issue. Perspectives regarding the boundaries to which political discourse should be apparent in literature vary widely among various writers. While some writers try to distance themselves from the political turmoil, others use literature as a means to convey the political problems that matter to them deeply. The present paper explores the interface between literature and politics over a span of a century, in modernist, post-modernist and metamodernist Irish drama, in particular the plays of James Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Frank McGuinness and Owen McCafferty (*Exiles* (1918), *Faustus Kelly* (1943), *Observing the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1986) and *Quietly* (2012)). These four English-language writers of Irish descent are all united by the concern of Irish History and Politics. A comparative study of these four authors allows to explore the variance in political discourse. Despite the similarities, the difference in the authors' position is apparent in the manner in which these issues are rendered: While Joyce and O'Brien tend to be ironic and sarcastic, McGuinness and McCafferty give a more personal outlook, which awakens some empathy towards their characters. Moreover, McGuinness and McCafferty are more deeply and openly involved in the history of Ireland.

*Keywords:* modernist, metamodernist, Irish, drama

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## Introduction

Humanity has long been fascinated by the questions of whether political events have an impact on art and whether it is possible to avoid “the nightmare of History” (Joyce, 1986, p. 34) and live a solitary life of ideas in the Ivory Tower in the creative and intellectual pursuit of pure beauty. The question becomes more thought-provoking and intricate during times of significant political upheaval, when society becomes extremely politicized. Whether a writer should be impartial and an objective spectator or clearly state their opinions or political concerns in their works has been a subject for research over years, and the attitude of scholars and the authors towards the extent to which political discourse is permissible in the literature is heterogeneous.

The present paper explores the interface between history, politics and literature over a span of a century, in modernist, post-modernist and metamodernist Irish drama, in particular the plays of James Joyce, Flann O’Brien, Frank McGuinness and Owen McCafferty: *Exiles* (1918), *Faustus Kelly* (1943), *Observing the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1986) and *Quietly* (2012). These four English-language writers of Irish descent are all united by the concern of Irish History and Politics. Thus, a comparative study of these four authors allows to explore the variance in political discourse.

The importance of political issues and its role in shaping modern and post-modern Irish Literature have been studied in a number of works (Gibson, 1991; Gula, 2002; Kiberd, 2005; Watson, 1987). Mostly, these studies are concerned with the treatment of Irish nationalism, the Irish Revival, WWI in the works of various writer. Moreover, they mostly are centered on James Joyce, thus fail to show what changes the attitude to political issues undergoes from a modernist writer to a post-modernist one. Besides, these studies deal with the accuracy of various political issues within the text, ignoring the importance of the literary text itself. What makes the present paper interesting is that it shows how political discourse has been shaping Irish Drama from Modernism to Meta-Post-Modernism. The paper at the same time stressed how the writer’s personal experiences and background define their attitudes, which undoubtedly are being reflected and incorporated in their literary creations. The paper is divided into two parts: the first one is dealing with James Joyce and Flann O’Brien and the transition from modernism to post-modernism, whilst the second part show how meta post-modernist writers, such as McGuinness and McCafferty make use of political issues in their famous plays. The results of the study are outlined in the conclusion. The methodology used during the research is close reading of the literary text itself. The paper does not go at great strength to give the definitions of those terms used within the paper, such as: modernism, post-modernism, meta post-modernism, political discourse, as there are no additions to the term and they do not need to be explained. Thus, the paper is based on the textual analysis and the existing critical literature in the field.

### From Joyce to O’Brien: Fleeing or Remaining in Ireland?

In Tom Stoppard’s play *Travesties* James Joyce appearing as a fictional character declares that “As an artist, naturally I attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history” (Stoppard, 1975, p. 5). James Joyce, believed that literature should be distant from politics, or as Gabriel Conroy, one of the characters in his short stories (*The Dead*) puts it, “Literature is above politics” (Joyce, 1968). However, Joyce contradicts this statement within the story by showing how literature is the medium of politics, for it has the power to incite change among its audience. Gabriel himself later uses the power of words in his toast to persuade those gathered together at his aunt’s dinner party to mourn the loss of the elder generation’s focus on

“qualities of humanity, hospitality, of kindly humor” to the rising generation’s devotion to “new ideas and new principles”. Through such juxtaposition of ideas, Joyce shows us that literature is not above politics, but rather is the medium through which political ideas are best conveyed. Joyce used his skills in writing to express his disdain for English imperialism, which he saw as the main reason for the paralysis of Ireland. Joyce’s belief in the importance of an individual over the society is stressed with his other character—Stephen Dedalus—who in *The Portrait* declares that:

I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use - silence, exile, and cunning. (Joyce, 1964, p. 247)

Thus, Stephen embodies Joyce’s own struggles with his identity and background and roots, which is why Stephen goes into exile like Joyce himself. In his 1907 lecture “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” Joyce argues that:

When the Irishman is found outside of Ireland in another environment, he very often becomes a respected man. The economic and intellectual conditions that prevail in his own country do not permit the development of individuality. No one who has any self-respect stays in Ireland, but flees afar as though from a country that has undergone the visitation of an angered Jove. (Joyce, 1964, p. 163)

Although for Joyce, physical escape from Ireland equaled to spiritual one, his works suggests the opposite. In Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes in Chapter 2 says to Robert Cohn, when Cohn is talking about moving to South America to escape his unhappiness, which Jake dismisses as futile, “Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There's nothing to that” (Hemingway, 2006, p. 11). Joyce’s characters who suffer from unhappiness, and see escape as a way out soon realize, that there is no running away from one’s history and roots.

The play *Exiles* deals with four players and two couples, Richard Rowan, a writer and his “common-law wife” Bertha, and Robert Hand with his cousin and previous lover Beatrice, both old friends of the previous couple:

The plot is deceptively simple: Richard, a writer, returns to Ireland from Rome with Bertha, the mother of his illegitimate son, Archie. While there, he meets his former lover and correspondent Beatrice Justice and former drinking partner and now successful journalist Robert Hand. Robert was also Beatrice's lover, and here the complications begin. Robert has started to woo Bertha again, and Richard wants to orchestrate an affair between them. The result remains uncertain, as does his motive. Robert publishes an article inspired by the experience, and Richard reads it with scorn and pain. Richard too has been writing, seemingly about Beatrice, which inspires jealousy from Bertha. Richard has arranged the entire scenario, perhaps, in order to give himself something to write about. Failing that, he seems to wish to experiment with testing the limits of Dublin bourgeois morality to emphasize his status as a cultural exile. I will now consider what is at stake in treating him as a failed speculator rather than a simple manipulator. (Goodwin, 2014, p. 297)

James Joyce in his only play *Exiles*, which as Hugh Kerner outlies should not be seen as “an apologia for Richard Rowan” explores the themes of escape through the main character Richard Rowan, who himself is a writer and an alter ego of Joyce. Richard's self-imposed exile is a reflection of Joyce's desire to flee from his past and the influences of his upbringing, particularly the teachings of his mother and the Jesuits. However, this escape is ultimately portrayed as a facade, as Richard grapples with deep-seated doubts and confusions that mirror Joyce's own turmoil. Richard Rowan, just like Joyce seeks freedom from traditional values, as well as societal expectations, as well as his own language—Gaelic, which Ireland had long lost and which bothered Joyce as a writer the most. Once a majority language, which declined in the 19th century. Therefore, Joyce runs away from his roots also from a linguistic point of view. It can be well observed in the following episode:

All life is a conquest, the victory of human passion over the commandments of cowardice. Will you, Richard? Have you the courage? Even if it shatters to atoms the friendship between us, even it breaks up forever the last illusion in your own life? There was an eternity before we were born: another will come after we are dead. The blinding instant of passion alone—passion, free, unashamed, irresistible— that is the only gate by which we can escape from the misery of what slaves call life. Is not this the language of your own youth that I hear you in this very place where we are sitting now? Have you changed?

RICHARD: (Passes his hand across his brow.) Yes. It is the language of my youth.

(Joyce, 2016, p. 125)

Thus, both Joyce and his characters becomes stuck in the paradox of seeking freedom while being bound by one's heritage, highlighting the futility of his quest for total liberation. As the famous American novelist Michael Crichton in his novel *Timeline* “If you don't know history, you don't know anything. You are a leaf that has not yet realized that it is part of a tree,” and therefore, no matter how hard one tries to detach himself/herself from the country's history and politics it still seems to be an impossible mission. Moreover, the play is not about finding one's self or place, balancing relationships or finding inner peace, it is a strong statement of how the country, background and history haunts one as a nightmare, from which there seems to be no way out.

Andrew Gibson in his book *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses* states that *Exiles* should be read as a political allegory in which the radical Catholic Richard Rowan and the conservative Protestant Robert Hand compete for the heart of Bertha as Ireland. Richard's ideas are more progressive than Robert's, and feature a wonderful generosity. But Bertha finally overturns the plans of both men, much as Gretta Conroy and Molly Ivors upset the plans of Gabriel Conroy in “*The Dead*.” Gibson sees Bertha as outside the control of history and pointing to the future (Gibson, 2002, p. 234).

Andrew Gibson also suggests that “The Irish and British-Irish contexts are the principal points of reference in Joyce's works...” (Gibson, 2002, p. 2), which seem undeniable. Even in *Dubliners* the short story *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* cannot be read without all the historical and political background behind it, where various political candidates are discussing Irish Politics, Irish Nationalism and Home Rule on Ivy Day, which on its own is a commemoration of Charles Stewart Parnell, the Irish Nationalist figure.

Unlike Joyce's *Exiles*, Flann O'Brien (Published It Under The Name Myles Na Gcopaleen, and used Brian O'Nolan as his other penname) makes a comic parodying of the Faust legend in his play *Faustus Kelly*, where the chairman of an Urban Council makes a pact with the devil in order to secure advancement, and thus creates the modern Faust, who has nothing to do with the one we had known previously. These newly created Faust bears resemblance with *Kvarkvare Tutaberi* by Polikarpe Kakabadze (a Georgian modernist playwright). The Irish Faust is only obsessed with career advancement, and like *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* by James Joyce the characters of the play somewhat get together while discussing world politics and rivals, but even this "unity" is a farce and shows the detachment and loss of communication between the characters. Thus, Flann O'Brien's attitude towards Irish politicians can be traced rather well in the play, and the close analysis shows how O'Brien blamed those in power for the situation in which Ireland had fallen.

### **History as a Nightmare – From McGuinness to McCafferty**

Unlike Joyce and O'Brien Frank McGuinness in *Observing the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards Somme* tells us the story of WW1 and the Battle of Somme, one of the deadliest battles in all of human history. The main character Kenneth Pyper gives his nostalgic flashback from the viewpoint of the only surviving soldier of the eight. The start of the terrible Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 1916 – is at the same time the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690s. Both of these battles have a significant place in shaping Northern Ireland's unionist consciousness. Born and raised in Donegal Frank McGuinness, these events have played an important role in shaping him a playwright. Born in Buncrana, Co Donegal in 1953, Frank McGuinness had neither experienced the great war or the direct effects of Irish Nationalism, but McGuinness calls his birthplace "a place of contradiction, a place of ambiguities" (Roche & McGuinness, 2010, p. 18) and which he regards has "contributed to making me into a writer" (Roche & McGuinness, 2010, p. 18).

In an interview, while asked about Donegal, the place where he was born and raised, McGuinness replied the following:

As you say, it's a place of contradiction, a place of ambiguities. It's an isolated place, as well. I think all of those factors contributed to making me into a writer. I am a man who doesn't really know where he stands a lot of the time. These various plays are an attempt to decipher the location of where my head's at. I never found a sense of place an easy thing to grasp and I certainly never found it an easy thing to celebrate. I'm not at ease anywhere. But I have no doubt where I absolutely belong and where I come from, and that is Donegal. And I've no doubt where I will go to, and that is Donegal. It has continued to have a very powerful hold on my imagination and it will always be so, I'm certain of that. I find that there's no escaping it, but then I don't think there's any desire to escape from it. That said, I don't think I could live in it, certainly not at this stage in my life. (Roche & McGuinness, 2010, p. 18)

Frank McGuinness' play shows how the fear that Irish identity would disappear in the trenches of the Great War, resulted into something totally different, and how in the muddy fields of the Somme, a young generation achieved a form of self-definition.

The Battle of the Somme represents a significant milestone in the history of Ulster loyalism. Over six thousand members of the Ulster Division were killed in a single day of combat. Entire streets in Belfast and small villages in Antrim were left without young men, as authorities had

intentionally grouped new recruits together, resulting in units led by officers no higher than the rank of captain. In *Ulysses*, while Deasy converses with Stephen and pupils play hockey outside, Stephen perceives the playground as a battlefield, suggesting that the pupils are abandoned and consequently doomed. Kenneth Pyper, the main character and sole surviving soldier of the division, reflects at the beginning of the play: “In the end, we were not led, we led ourselves.” The anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, a date celebrated by the Irish due to William of Orange's decisive victory that secured Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, is a central issue. Notably, the date of the Battle of Boyne, July 1st, coincides with the Battle of the Somme, which resulted in devastating casualties and offers little for the Irish to commemorate. The play examines the significance of these two battles and their impact on unionist consciousness. Additionally, McGuinness addresses the topic of homosexuality, a subject considered controversial at the time. In an interview regarding *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, McGuinness refers to his “personal obsession”, namely, “the warring relationship between England and Ireland”. He elaborates, “It's like a desperately unhappy marriage which is either going to go on being desperately unhappy or something is going to happen and heal it” (Sato, 1996, p. 82). Craig, a Protestant and comrade of Pyper, asserts:

You're trying too hard, Pyper. It's too late to tell us what we're fighting for. We know where we are. We know what we've to do. And we know where we're doing it for. We knew before we enlisted. We joined up willingly for that reason. Every one of us, except you. You've learned it at long last. But you can't teach us what we already know. You won't save us, you won't save yourself, imagining things. There's nothing imaginary about this, Kenneth. This is the last battle. We're going out to die. (McGuinness, 1986, p. 74)

The tension between Protestants and Catholics, Unionist and Nationalists, ethno-nationalist-religious struggle in Northern Ireland known as The Troubles becomes the main theme for Owen McCafferty's play *Quietly* (2012). Called as “a play that lives up to its title in the best possible way. It is spare, unshowy and it feels utterly truthful” by The Guardian, it tells us the story of Jimmy and Ian, two Belfast men in their 50s, meeting for the first time to talk about the events of one day in 1974, when they were both 16. Owen McCafferty's play *Quietly* explores the personal impact of the Troubles' legacy and examines the significance of truth and reconciliation for individuals trying to move forward while still being affected by the past. In those days, in 1974, one was the perpetrator, and the other the victim. They both tell their story from their own perspective. It's like history is repeating itself, as if nothing changes and it's cyclical? For them “History is a nightmare”, as put by Joyce in *Ulysses*, from which they are trying to awake.

McCafferty's main aim was to tell a story about two ordinary people, who struggle due to the past, but whose voices are not heard. As he said in an interview, “All I've ever wanted to do is tell stories about people who go unnoticed through life”. *Quietly* is a play that shows that catharsis or epiphany as Joyce used to call it, can only be achieved not only from emotional self-evaluation, but from listening to one another, and most importantly, from hearing each other out. As Jimmy says near the end of the play “You know nothing do you – some good did come from it – we met – we understand each other – that's enough” (McCafferty, 2012, p. 86).

While Joyce was trying hard to run away from Irish Consciousness and History, and O'Brien parodied the situation Ireland had fallen into, both McGuinness and McCafferty try to explain the human condition and the inner struggles of being an Irishmen through history and experiences, which cannot and mustn't be forgotten.

## Conclusion

The emphasis on these four English-language writers of Irish descent is due to several factors: First of all, Ireland lost the vital tool necessary for any writer under British dominion: its language, so along with the political controversy the linguistic conflict itself became an important factor. Secondly, the plays *Exiles* (1918) *Faustus Kelly* (1943), *Observing the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1986) and *Quietly* (2012) all written in different time periods is a great chance to observe the changes that political discourse underwent from modernist through post-modernist and meta-postmodernist eras. Unlike James Joyce and Flann O'Brien, both McGuinness and McCafferty write about true historical events, and while they were not present at that time, the impact that these events had on the country, and hence on their consciousness, is obvious. While both Joyce and O'Brien are more concerned by creating the character's psychological portrait and expressing their own concerns, Frank McGuinness and Owen McCafferty, offer a retrospective of the First World War and past events taking place in Belfast, which has a larger scale influence on the characters' development. Whilst, Joyce and O'Brien are more ironic and use parody as a main tool, McGuinness and McCafferty are more sympathetic and understanding of their characters.

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## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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## **Mindfulness and Ecological Intelligence in Design, Technology and Entrepreneurship Education**

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The Barcelona Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2025  
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### **Abstract**

The focus of the scientific paper is a concept for applying mindfulness practices in the process of forming ecological intelligence through training in construction, technology and entrepreneurship in children of preschool and primary school age. The possibility of integrating conscious presence in the present moment into the approach to improving children's ecological intelligence is investigated. The main emphasis is on forming a positive educational environment through useful practices that combine intellectual and emotional development through integration and interdisciplinary connections. The aim is to build transferable skills using informal methods. The possibility of forming ecological thinking in the earliest childhood is investigated using practices that combine emotional self-regulation, academic achievements and a conscious attitude towards the environment. The article explores the possible combination of mindfulness practices with active learning methods in ecological education through training in construction, technology and entrepreneurship. The aim is to provoke children's creative and non-standard thinking when solving environmental challenges in the technological process. The aim is to combine logical and technological thinking with emotional self-regulation, empathy and social skills. Examples of pedagogical practices aimed at forming ecological thinking through awareness and positive practical orientation of training in constructive-technological competencies are presented. The aim is to apply a value-oriented and holistic approach with interdisciplinary connections in the pedagogical process of teaching knowledge and skills for sustainable development.

*Keywords:* mindfulness, ecological intelligence, construction, technology and entrepreneurship education, children of preschool and primary school age

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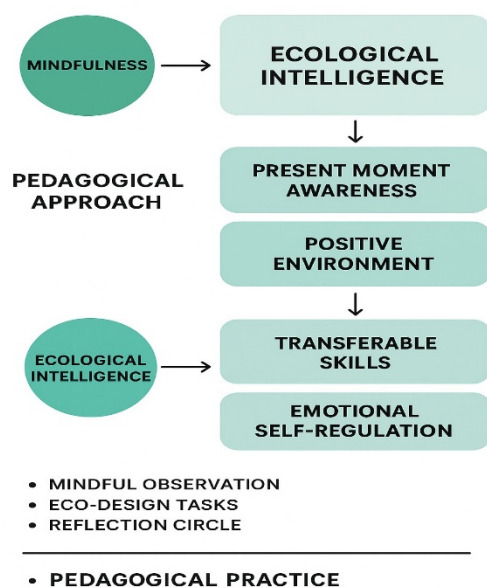
## Introduction

In recent years, the growing global focus on sustainable development and environmental awareness has influenced early childhood education. The concept of *ecological intelligence* (Goleman, 2009) highlights the interconnection between human behavior, cognitive understanding, and emotional empathy toward nature. Integrating mindfulness practices into educational processes can strengthen this awareness by connecting thinking, feeling, and doing. Ecological intelligence encompasses the understanding and responsible interaction with the environment, combining knowledge, emotional involvement, and ethical behavior. It implies recognizing the interdependence between human actions and nature, as well as developing sustainable habits. When connected to mindfulness, ecological intelligence becomes not only a cognitive but also an affective process—cultivating respect, curiosity, and care for the living world.

Mindfulness, defined as the ability to maintain attention on the present moment with openness and non-judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2011), provides a foundation for developing self-regulation and empathy, essential components of ecological consciousness in children. Ecological intelligence combines cognitive understanding of environmental systems with emotional and ethical dimensions of sustainability (Goleman, 2009; Orr, 2004). Mindfulness enhances this by cultivating awareness, compassion, and a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's actions (Siegel, 2012).

Mindfulness represents a conscious presence in the current moment, encouraging children to observe their sensations, thoughts, and surroundings without judgment. In the educational process, mindfulness promotes emotional balance, concentration, and empathy. Through short guided activities—such as mindful breathing, sensory observation, or nature reflection—children develop awareness that strengthens both their emotional self-regulation and environmental sensitivity.

In pedagogical practice, mindfulness transforms the educational process into an experience where knowledge is not only acquired but *embodied*—children become active participants in learning, reflecting on how their actions affect the world around them. In early education, mindfulness can be introduced through sensory exploration, reflective dialogue, and cooperative creation. Studies show that mindfulness-based activities improve attention, emotional balance, and pro-social behavior (Flook et al., 2015). When applied to environmental topics, such practices promote ecological awareness as a lived experience rather than a theoretical construct. This conceptual model explores the integration of **construction, technology, and entrepreneurship education** with **mindfulness practices** in order to form ecological intelligence. The approach is experiential and interdisciplinary, aligning with the goals of *Education for Sustainable Development* (UNESCO, 2017).

**Figure 1***Conceptual Model for Integrating Mindfulness Into Ecological Intelligence Formation*

This model emphasizes that through mindful engagement, children can connect emotional self-awareness with constructive action, leading to value-based ecological understanding.

Pedagogical practices for cultivating ecological intelligence through mindfulness are based on experiential and project-based learning. Activities such as creating small eco-gardens, recycling projects, or mindfulness walks encourage reflection, creativity, and cooperation. These practices link logical and technological thinking with emotional self-regulation and empathy, forming transferable skills that integrate intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions of learning.

**Table 1***Integrating Mindfulness and Ecological Intelligence Through Pedagogical Practice*

Activity / Practice	Mindfulness Dimension	Ecological Intelligence Aspect	Expected Educational Effect
<b>Mindful Nature Walk</b>	Focused observation of sounds, textures, and colors in nature	Awareness of biodiversity and respect for living systems	Strengthens sensory perception, empathy, and emotional balance
<b>Eco-Design Workshop</b>	Conscious attention to materials and sustainable choices during creation	Understanding of sustainable production and recycling principles	Promotes creative and critical thinking; encourages responsibility
<b>Recycled Art Project</b>	Reflection on transformation and reuse	Awareness of waste impact and circular use of resources	Develops imagination, innovation, and ecological awareness
<b>Mindful Gardening</b>	Presence during planting and care for plants	Understanding of growth processes and natural interdependence	Nurtures patience, care, and a sense of connection with nature
<b>Reflection after Activity</b>	Guided reflection on emotions, challenges, and learning experiences	Ethical evaluation of actions and their environmental impact	Builds emotional self-regulation, cooperation, and value-based reasoning

**Table 2***Pedagogical Model for Developing Ecological Intelligence Through Mindfulness Practices*

<b>Pedagogical Stage</b>	<b>Main Goals</b>	<b>Core Activities / Methods</b>	<b>Developed Skills and Competencies</b>	<b>Expected Outcomes</b>
<b>Awareness and Observation</b>	To develop focused attention and emotional presence	Mindful observation of natural elements, sensory games, guided breathing	Concentration, self-regulation, awareness of natural surroundings	Improved emotional stability and initial ecological curiosity
<b>Emotional Connection with Nature</b>	To build empathy and care for the environment	Storytelling with ecological themes, drawing emotions in nature, group reflection	Emotional literacy, empathy, social communication	Strengthened motivation to protect the environment
<b>Exploration and Creative Expression</b>	To encourage active engagement and creative problem solving	Eco-design workshops, recycled art projects, mindful experiments	Creativity, innovation, ecological responsibility	Development of ecological thinking through experiential learning
<b>Integration and Reflection</b>	To connect emotional and cognitive learning	Reflection circles, eco-journals, self-assessment activities	Metacognitive skills, emotional insight, moral reasoning	Formation of ecological intelligence as a system of values and actions
<b>Application in Everyday Contexts</b>	To transfer learning into practical behavior	Mini-projects in the community, eco-initiatives, classroom sustainability rules	Transferable life skills, teamwork, decision-making	Sustainable habits and mindful ecological behavior

Mindfulness practices transform ecological education into a holistic developmental process. When children learn to pause, observe, and act consciously, they begin to connect inner calmness with outer care. This balance supports *self-regulation*, *empathy*, and *pro-social ecological behavior* (Hyland, 2015).

Moreover, integrating mindfulness with construction and entrepreneurship education encourages problem-solving and creative ecological innovation—teaching children that sustainability can emerge from imagination and awareness working together.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The integration of mindfulness practices into ecological education provides teachers with a holistic pedagogical tool that simultaneously supports emotional self-regulation, social sensitivity, and sustainable thinking. When applied in construction, technology, and entrepreneurship training, mindfulness fosters awareness of both the process and its environmental impact. This reflective attitude helps children connect creativity with responsibility and develop adaptive behaviors based on empathy, cooperation, and respect for natural systems. Through experiential learning, mindful observation, and collaborative projects, educators can cultivate not only ecological intelligence but also a deeper sense of well-being and belonging in children. Thus, the pedagogical process becomes a space where values, cognition, and emotion merge to form sustainable and humane attitudes toward the world.

## Conclusion

Mindfulness-based ecological education offers a pathway for integrating intellectual, emotional, and moral growth in early learning. Through mindful observation and creative engagement, children can transform abstract environmental ideas into lived, value-driven experiences. The cultivation of ecological intelligence is therefore both a pedagogical and ethical goal—shaping future citizens who think critically, feel deeply, and act responsibly for a sustainable world.

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## Contemporary Emphasis on Civic Education in the Process of Academic Preparation of Pedagogy Students

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### Abstract

This article explores students' perceptions on key issues focused on the topics, content and importance of global citizenship and education for peace within their academic training. The study is based on the survey method. The sample consists of 73 bachelor's degree students at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov” from majors in which the discipline “Civic education” is studied – Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, Special Pedagogy. The focus of the study is on tracking students' perceptions in the context and the opportunities for optimizing and improving their academic preparation in the specific discipline in accordance with state requirements in the scientific field of Pedagogical Sciences. The analysis of the results clearly shows that students perceive global citizenship as a symbiosis between awareness and action. On the one hand, that we are all part of the huge global family, and on the other – we all have the only power and the huge and active role in solving world problems. Among the most common values noted by respondents are tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability. The concept of education for peace is most often associated by students with the words dialogue, empathy, non-violent communication.

*Keywords:* higher pedagogical education, civic education, global citizenship, education for peace

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## Introduction

Civic education is gaining increasing importance in the preparation of future teachers, especially in the context of the challenges of globalization, intercultural interaction and the need for sustainable peace. In addition to professional knowledge, students in pedagogical specialties should develop values and skills that will allow them to form responsible, tolerant and active citizens. In Bulgaria, civic education is integrated into higher pedagogical education in accordance with national standards and European recommendations. However, questions remain about how students perceive its role and content, especially with regard to global citizenship and peace education. Their perspective is essential, as it influences their readiness to integrate civic competences into future teaching practice.

## Literature Review

In the context of global climate change, social inequality, poverty, limited access to water in different corners of the Earth and ongoing military conflicts, the uncertainty of the future is increasingly tangible. Ensuring a sustainable and secure future for future generations should be set as a goal in all education systems. This makes the role of preschool institutions one of the most important in laying the foundations for lifelong learning, according to the European and National Reference Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (Dimova, 2025).

Children are the future of the planet, they are the bearers of change and hope for a better world, therefore concepts such as global citizenship and education for peace must be present in curricula from an early age.

This section presents an overview of contemporary theoretical views and research related to the key concepts of civic education, global citizenship and education for peace.

Within the framework of contemporary studies on civic education, including those of Alscher, Ludewig and McElvany political and civic participation are seen as an integral part of a well-functioning democratic system and as a desired outcome of the educational process. Civic education aims to develop political literacy, interest in democratic processes and readiness for active participation in public life in young people. The use of appropriate teaching methods is crucial for achieving motivation and forming civic competences in adolescents (Alscher et al., 2022).

According to Balkanski and Zahariev (1998), civic education is an interdisciplinary and integrative educational process that combines social knowledge, skills, competencies, values, attitudes and democratic culture. It is a form of social and value training aimed at integrating the individual into society and at active participation in public processes, based on respect for human rights, legality and the moral principles of democratic governance (Balkanski & Zahariev, 1998).

Castles and Davidson (2000) make a clear distinction between globalization and global citizenship. While globalization is associated with transnational economic, cultural, and demographic processes that challenge traditional models of national belonging, global citizenship is defined by them as a necessary new framework for participation, identity, and rights in the context of cultural diversity and global mobility. It is not an extension of globalization, but a critical response to the challenges it poses to national citizenship (Castles & Davidson, 2000).

The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development, adopted in Paris in 2023, defines the concept of “peace” as inextricably linked to “international understanding” and “cooperation”. This conceptual framework emphasizes friendly relations, understanding and cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders, and respect and observance of human rights and freedoms (UNESCO, 2023).

According to Harris and Morrison, peace education is understood as a philosophical and process-oriented approach aimed at building the personality and culture of peace through education. It creates a learning environment that promotes values, attitudes and behaviors that reject violence and prevent conflicts by addressing their roots. It is based on the principles of non-violence, respect for human rights, tolerance and social justice (Harris & Morrison, 2012).

In the Republic of Bulgaria, the formation of civic competences is guaranteed through the implementation of the European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, in accordance with national regulatory documents, including:

- The Law on pre-school and school education
- Regulation No. 13 on civic, health, environmental and intercultural education
- Regulation No. 5 on pre-school education

Civic education is implemented in an integrated manner already in preschool age, being taught in various educational areas. In school education, it continues to be integrated into the curriculum of various subjects, and in grades XI and XII it is established as an independent academic discipline.

In the context of higher education, in the training of pedagogical specialists, the discipline “Civic Education” is mandatory only in certain specialties. Topics related to global citizenship and education for are considered as separate elements within the lecture course on the discipline.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to present the perceptions of future students on key issues related to the importance of global citizenship and peace education within their academic preparation.

The tasks to be solved in it are:

- to reveal the theoretical aspects of civic education, global citizenship and peace education
- to study the perceptions of students in the context of the researched issues
- to analyze the results obtained.

The study is based on the survey method. The sample consists of 73 bachelor's degree students at the Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov”, Republic of Bulgaria. The respondents are studying in specialties in which the discipline “Civic Education” is included in the curriculum as a mandatory or elective subject. These are the specialties: Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language, Special Pedagogy.



The focus of the study is on tracking students' perceptions in the context and opportunities for optimizing and improving their academic preparation in the specific discipline in accordance with state requirements in the scientific field of Pedagogical Sciences.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study was conducted among 73 students of pedagogical specialties at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov”, Republic of Bulgaria. All respondents are female and are studying in the specialties of Social Pedagogy, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language and Special Pedagogy. After completing the lecture course on the discipline “Civic Education”, an anonymous author's survey was conducted, including eight questions. This paper analyzes one of them.

The strongest emphasis in the survey was evident in the responses to the open-ended questions, in which the students clearly associated the concepts of “global citizenship” and “education for peace” with specific values, actions, and global challenges.

The freedom to formulate their own answers, without pre-set frameworks, led to authentic, meaningful, and diverse statements. The only instruction that the participants received was to share what they associated these two key concepts with.

This demonstrates not only the level of academic preparation of the students in the researched issues, but also their ability to apply what they have learned in real life and professional situations. Thus, an active civic position is formed, which is essential for their future role as educators and pedagogues.

The data obtained were thematically grouped, highlighting the main directions presented in Table 1.

The classification of responses by topic allows for a better understanding of the dominant attitudes and value orientations among future teachers. It also serves as a basis for developing possible teaching strategies aimed at developing a global mindset and a culture of peace.

**Table 1***Words and Concepts Associated With Global Citizenship and Education for Peace*

	Topic	Keywords and expressions	Key ideas/values
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP	Essence and awareness	Awareness that we are part of a global society; Concern; Social responsibility	Awareness, belonging, responsibility
	Values and principles	Acceptance of cultural diversity and differences; Social justice; Socio-economic equality; Human rights; Tolerance; Empathy; Respect; Integration; Sustainability; Environmental preservation; Market economy	Equality, respect, empathy, sustainability, justice
	Actions and participation	Active role in solving global problems such as poverty, climate change, military conflicts; Participation in volunteer activities; Support for human rights causes; Protection of peace and nature; Learning foreign languages and getting to know new cultures; Being part of the change; Accepting differences as something valuable; Not judging without knowing	Activity, commitment, empathy, humanity
	Results and effects	A tolerant society is fairer, happier, stronger; In it, everyone feels accepted and valued; Each of us has a responsibility not only to our own, but also to the global community	Harmony, reciprocity, global responsibility
EDUCATION FOR PEACE	Characteristics	Friendship, dialogue, respect, understanding; Opens the mind and heart; Promotes tolerance and respect; Teaches non-violent communication; Develops critical thinking and empathy; Prevents conflicts through education; Young people are the engine of change	Dialogue, peace, respect, empathy, education
	Influence and significance	Key to building a more just, sustainable and tolerant society	Tolerance, sustainability, human values, understanding

*Source:* Author

The analysis of the results clearly shows that students perceive global citizenship as a symbiosis between awareness and action. On the one hand, that we are all part of the huge global family, and on the other – we all have the only power and the huge and active role in solving world

problems. Among the most common values noted by respondents are tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability.

The concept of education for peace is most often associated by students with the words dialogue, empathy, non-violent communication. According to the respondents, it is education for peace that has the power to open the mind and heart, to promote mutual respect, to prevent conflicts through education.

The answers clearly show the interrelationship between the two concepts – global citizenship and education for peace. According to the students, they are inseparable elements of modern education, aimed at building a more just, sustainable and harmonious society, providing an opportunity for a better life for future generations.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we share that the results of the study clearly show that the training in "Civic Education" achieves its goals, namely: awareness of the place and importance of global citizenship and peace education in contemporary education. Responses demonstrate good theoretical preparation, but also personal commitment to values such as tolerance, respect, social justice and sustainability. The freedom to express one's own position led to authentic and diverse interpretations that emphasize the need for deeper integration of these topics in the academic preparation of future educators. The study confirms that global citizenship and peace education should be strategic focuses in teacher training in order to ensure the upbringing of active, responsible and empathetic citizens capable of building a more just and sustainable society.

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## Migration, Identity, and the Symbolic Weight of Place in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*

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### Abstract

The paper analyzes *Brooklyn* (2009) by Colm Tóibín through the lens of migration, identity, and urban symbolism, while placing it in a larger context of Irish literature's preoccupation with the themes of exile and belonging. *Brooklyn*, a celebrated work of modern Irish fiction, carries on the literary tradition of depicting the emigrant experience, which is a defining narrative arc in Irish literary and cultural memory that dates back, most famously, to Joyce and in this paper's case to Tóibín. Following the journey from a small Irish town of Enniscorthy to Brooklyn, New York, the novel is the best illustration of the psychological dislocation that accompanies migration, a theme that the paper will consider extensively as it remains especially relevant in today's globalized world, marked by economic displacement and the problem of belonging. Particular attention is given to the dual city-symbolism: Enniscorthy, the town of origin, and Brooklyn, the space of opportunity and personal transformation. Tóibín creates contrasting, liminal spaces as emotional and moral landscapes as a result of which, the city in Brooklyn acquires an agency of mediating identity, as a site of loss and transformation and a threshold that shapes identity. The Georgian translation of the novel (2021) adds special significance to the novel's resonance in a Georgian context, where questions of emigration and return are more relevant than ever in shaping the national psyche. The study examines how Tóibín's nuanced, emotionally restrained prose conveys the diasporic experience across cultures and nations.

*Keywords:* Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, Migration, Modernism, Recessive Action

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## Introduction

William Trevor, one of the most prominent, elder statesmen of the Irish literary world, offered an insightful judgment about the connection between writing fiction and the perception of social reality: “Novels have to roam, they even have to arrive in places where their authors have never been. Mixing experience with speculation and making something of the resultant compound” (Trevor, 1982, p. x). These words perfectly depict the most fundamental tension that characterizes the phenomenon of Irish literature: finding balance between the imaginary and real, between private vision and collective history. Trevor’s remark is especially noteworthy because his literature gazes predominantly at Ireland. Since 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish prose has been riddled with the question about what should be the main purpose of literature. 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish prose mirrors social issues and lacks experimental and creative feats that 20<sup>th</sup> century Literary Modernism established. Major works from this period are read as Modernist deviations which purposefully divert from English literary traditions. More specifically, it seems that *Ulysses* liberated and simultaneously burdened Irish prose by establishing an almost mythical standard of self-sufficient art. Despite this, the development of Irish literature opposes conventional literary standards. Asking what makes a novel “Irish” requires asking more questions: does it have to revolve around Ireland? Does it have to be written in Irish? Does it have to represent or refer to the country’s history and politics? Essentially, these inquiries revive Irish prose and connect its past Realism tradition with current, Postmodern, introspective narratives.

In this literary-historical discourse, Colm Tóibín stands as one of the most sophisticated descendants of Realist and Modernist traditions. His renowned novel *Brooklyn* (2009) revolves around familiar topics of belonging and roaming; however, the migration narrative becomes not only a social and historical chronicle, but a psychological inquiry about the intricate process of identity formation that takes place between liminal spaces – Ireland and the United States, home and emigrant life abroad, memory and constant reinvention. Tóibín’s reserved prose resembles that of Trevor’s and mirrors the emotional intensity and repression found across Irish short story anthologies. However, *Brooklyn* manages to extend this tradition by appointing symbolic weight to geography, as a result of which a distinct Irish conflict is dramatized: Enniscorthy and Brooklyn, not only cities, but emotionally conflicted moral thresholds. Tóibín’s frame of narration is significant as it depicts *Brooklyn* not only from a perspective of nostalgic retrospection but also as a novel which continues the century-long conversation over migration. If the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature is concerned with who speaks in the name of Ireland, 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernism poses a question whether it is possible for any narrator to undertake this mission. Tóibín inherits both questions, but applies them to the everyday. The threshold is no longer some kind of a manifesto; it is a door, a hall, a table at the store, etc.

### The Purpose of Structural Recessiveness in *Brooklyn*

The novel opens with a fairly simple scene: gazing at the outside world, a young woman, Eilis Lacey, sits by the window in a small Irish town. Anyone who is remotely familiar with the cornerstones of Irish literature is instantly reminded of one of the most eminent predecessors of this scene: Joyce’s “Eveline,” where a young woman sits by a different window, contemplating her expatriation from Ireland: “She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne” (Joyce, 1922, p. 26). “Eilis Lacey, sitting at the window of the upstairs living room in the house on Friary Street, noticed her sister walking briskly from work” (Tóibín, 2009, p. 3).

These parallel windows – parallel thresholds – underscore constant anxiety that is found in Irish fiction: an emigrant, hindered at a threshold, trapped between a place of origin and a place which is elsewhere. A superficial overview of these parallel plots suggests that Tóibín's protagonist does not want to leave the family home but is forced to, in fact – twice, as her mother allows it, while in Joyce's story, a young woman wants to leave the family but is compelled to stay because of her mother's dying request. In terms of determining protagonist agency, both characters are acted upon, not acting. It is almost instinctual to connect these two young women and their fates together. This is where Paul Ricoeur's concept of the "(as yet) untold story" can be applied successfully, a latent narrative which a text includes, but does not follow. *Brooklyn* tells a tale of what could have been if Eveline had sailed. Despite offering an enriching literary continuation of common motifs and storylines found across prominent Irish stories about staying and roaming, the novel has been criticized for having a too straightforward plot, where "very little happens" (Young, 2014, p. 129). Through analysis of this "very little" action that the novel does include, the paper argues that Tóibín offers a sophisticated experiment: dramatizing migration as a sequence of thresholds which must be crossed by characters, a process during which identity is formed not by daring actions, but by trivial gestures and symbolic weight of a place.

The failure to perceive action in the novel can be seen, ironically, as an accurate reading of Eilis's character. She is ambiguous, hence a multitude of critical interpretations, majority of which follow Young's idea Eilis is agentless, trapped, re-worked version of Eveline. But the style of narration – concise, non-historical, simple – mirrors the inner tactics of the protagonist who attempts to process her life so that it can be made bearable. As a result, non-action becomes action because denying and staying requires louder self-expression than what Eilis believes herself to have. Thus, *Brooklyn* transforms Joycean paralysis into a special condition where it is not posed as an existential crisis, but as a structural recessiveness, a survival strategy, which the novel complicates and simultaneously aligns itself to.

According to Raghinaru, reading the novel from a lens of "recessive action" transforms ideas of "nothing" into events which are allowed to happen. Eilis's silence, for instance, is a telling form of recessive action, self-presentation as self-concealment, which explains her hindered process of attachment to places, "she is silent, and allows herself to be silenced, in a way that contravenes with the normative narratives of female empowerment in the private and public spheres." (Raghinaru, 2018, p. 47). There are multiple important silences in the novel: her life's biggest decision is, for some reason, made in silence. She is depicted as outwardly conformist but inwardly unsure as she denies the terms according to which she is deemed successful.

Immigrant novels like Adichie's *Americanah* often prioritize the pace and action as the future conditions of the novel must be set expeditiously. *Brooklyn* does not follow this trend. It emphasizes long episodes of watching, standing, thinking, etc.; episodes where Eilis learns how to smile, breath, and operate again. Even the episode which takes place back in Ireland, the narration is a dreamlike narrative. If character agency aligns with "recessive action" principle, it is the opposite for the symbolic weight of place. Enniscorthy and Brooklyn are never just geographical backdrops – they are moral and emotional thresholds which mediate identity. In a classical migration narrative, a new city is a place for tangible reinvention. Tóibín complicates this scenario because for him, Brooklyn is a threshold rather than a destination. It is a place where habits need to be revalued, a place where a character must catch up with its own identity. On the other hand, Enniscorthy is a place of origin, riddled with gossip and memory, but also a source of strange comfort upon return. Eilis goes back to Enniscorthy and suddenly becomes a promising woman with a better job and partner than she could have ever



imagined. Therefore, these two cities share masks – Brooklyn becomes a place of routine and discipline, while Enniscorthy is depicted as a town of opportunities and risk. The most serious anxiety of the novel comes from the fact that Eilis never manages to belong in America and the sense of belonging becomes a moving target for her, a target that is not reached. Upon her return to Ireland, her mother's house becomes a stage where several scenarios merge: a caring and loyal daughter who stays, a cosmopolite young woman that might go back, a wife but also a potential fiancé; however, one of Tóibín's achievements is that he manages to avoid creating melodrama.

The critics of the novel who prefer to see more distinct and tangible narrative development, a sort of development where a narrator explains why Eilis does what she does, tend to seek Realism in the text, which is deliberately obscured by the author. Instead of a deep psychological insight, Tóibín pressures the readers. If the texture of the novel is perceived accordingly, the motifs become self-evident. This is a Modernist trick, often employed by Woolf, who believed that a character is best expressed when no one explains who he or she is. Therefore, this characteristic, among others, puts *Brooklyn* in a discussion with Irish and European Modernisms. The progression of Campbell's quest hero monomyth is consistently undermined by Modernist fiction, a tendency which can also be applied to Eilin as she goes against every traditional heroic pattern. *Brooklyn* contravenes transformation and sentimental return; it also denies triumphant arrival. Returning to a home country is not associated with romanticized scenarios which remedy problems, neither is it connected to some sort of an ambiguous immigrant myth. Instead, it offers a view that migrant identity is recessive; it is made up of silently crossed thresholds and it is best expressed in unremarkable spaces like bedrooms, random streets, shop counters, and windows.

Placing Tóibín in Irish literary tradition is especially interesting, mainly due to anxiety of influence. Similar to how it happened in this paper, discussions over his works often include Joyce's name, which is a tendency that follows, without exaggeration, every modern Irish prose writer that came after him. However, Irish literature is neither a social record about its history and politics, not a Modernist manifesto. It is a series of returns, where previous forms are reanimated into new forms (for instance, national tale transforms into an urban novel). Reading *Brooklyn* after "Eveline" does not necessarily mean submitting Tóibín to Joyce. It is a clear example of how an "untold story" can be told again, differently. This is also a part of Irish tradition, a talent for telling or retelling a story in a way, where a simple room is given a metaphysical weight.

Tóibín uses several thresholds for developing the plot. For instance, the opening window scene and the motif of window itself is a frame for recessive action. Eilis is never "seen" directly. She is fragmented and torn between choices that do not have any alternatives in a migrant's everyday reality. However, to reinforce the opposing side of novel's passivity concerns in criticism, this cannot be regarded as mere passivity of her character. It is a deliberate choice to refuse applying success metrics to personal identity only because modernity and migration demand it. Moreover, it is a narration technique which connects to readers so closely to the protagonist that they do not notice how the plot passes, because "nothing" happens; meanwhile, "nothing" happening is exactly what Eilin wants to achieve. This is what Irish literature does best; it roams among records and creative inventions, whereby the whole nation's arguments are squeezed in a small room. It is not surprising that the most memorable and distinctive revelation of the whole novel is said silently, "It had somehow been tacitly arranged that Eilis would go to America." (Tóibín, 2009, p. 26). The novel urges to feel the tension and to evaluate what kind of an identity can be built under such pressure. It is evident that the answer is not a

heroine with decisive gestures and eloquent speeches, but a recessive, Modernist anti-hero who delays, denies, and remains stubborn in her unchanging nature.

*Brooklyn* has been translated more than dozen times, but its Georgian translation (2021) came out during a period when the issues of migration, return, and cultural hybridity are alarmingly relevant. It is also interesting to connect the novel's prominent themes and motifs to Georgian migrant literary tradition. Tóibín's novel's translation gave it a new life in Georgian society. Much similar to mid-century Ireland, in contemporary Georgia, entire generations leave rural towns for distant cities – New York, Berlin, Athens, Rome, Barcelona – often through similar family arrangements to how it is portrayed in the book, where the decision is less chosen than tacitly agreed upon. In Georgia, as in Ireland, the emigration of young people in search of economic opportunity is not only a historical, statistical fact but a living reality. Therefore, the overwhelming reception of the novel's translation is understandable. Many Georgians are aware of what it means to become valuable elsewhere in order to send value home; to return and find oneself valuable in one's own city in ways which are both validating and alienating; to discover that the efforts made to survive elsewhere have taken roots at that place, against one's original intentions. Tóibín's trimmed dialogues, moments of restrained crises and silences help translate the diasporic experience into other languages without losing its intimacy. His style respects small gestures which often characterize migration: unsaid doubts, polite but confused smiles, which conceal nostalgia. The translation helps consider *Brooklyn* a part of global literature of journey and return. It shows how a mid-century Irish emigrant story can address the divided, conflicted sense of belonging that continues to define Georgia's and not only Georgia's present. This is, undoubtedly, Tóibín's great "message" and achievement: demonstrating that modern migration stories cannot be narratives merely about triumphant returns, but stories of cities themselves which act on characters while they seem to do nothing.

### Conclusion

Tóibín's recent novel *Long Island* (2024) revisits Eilis twenty years later, demonstrating how unresolved the migrant threshold remains. The protagonist is in her forties, settled in an Italian-American part of Long Island, but still feels her strongest ties to Ireland. The book makes visible what *Brooklyn* left implicit – migration rarely ends with the first crossing of the ocean. Mentioning *Long Island* reminds us that *Brooklyn* is not simply a historical love story but the opening movement of a larger quest and conversation on exile, belonging and unfinished return, themes that remain central to literature of ethnicity and displacement today. While *Long Island* does offer a fascinating continuation of Eilin's story, the paper's focus was on *Brooklyn* itself and the way it managed to establish the complex migrant threshold as a literary problem. Much like the contemporary intermedial works that re-imagine textuality through different means, in Tóibín's case, restrained prose reminds us that the modern quest story is carried in tone and silence as much as in plot; it suggests that literature about migration urges to notice subtle acts and sensory experiences as sites where ethnicity and belonging are continually reshaped and re-configured.

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## **Automated Detection of Hate Speech and Toxic Comments Using Machine Learning and Natural Language Processing**

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### **Abstract**

The proliferation of hate speech and toxic remarks in online communities presents considerable challenges to individuals, organisations, and society. This research examines the ramifications of detrimental communications and suggests an automated method for their identification utilising sophisticated machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) techniques. We examine multiple models, including deep learning architectures like BERT and GPT, to improve the precision of hate speech detection from extensive datasets obtained from platforms such as Twitter and Reddit. The study examines the complications involved with identifying hate speech, such as contextual reliance, sarcasm, and dataset biases, which frequently result in false positives and negatives. We provide a systematic review to assess current methodologies and their efficacy, while highlighting ethical considerations and the practical application of our approach. Our findings underscore significant deficiencies in existing research and propose new avenues for creating more efficient algorithms for identifying harmful information, thereby fostering healthier online environments.

*Keywords:* hate speech, machine learning, natural language processing, BERT, GPT, text classification

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## Introduction

Hate speech and toxic remarks are an escalating problem in online forums, adversely affecting individuals, organisations, and society at large (Patel et al., 2024). The heightened dependence on digital communication platforms, social media, and online forums has rendered the dissemination of hazardous content a significant issue. Hate speech denotes derogatory, discriminatory, or menacing remarks aimed against individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Toxic remarks, although typically not legally classified as hate speech, exacerbate online harassment, cyberbullying, and emotional distress (Akshaya et al., 2025). Automated methods for identifying and managing harmful content are essential for sustaining healthy and inclusive online ecosystems. Manual moderation, although advantageous in many instances, is labour-intensive, expensive, and often inconsistent due to individual biases and varying interpretations of objectionable content. Moreover, given the vast volume of user-generated content produced every second, reliance solely on human censors is impractical (Alrehili, 2019; Miran & Yahia, 2023).

Machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) have arisen as potent solutions for addressing this issue. Automated systems can categorise text as poisonous, offensive, or neutral employing supervised learning, deep learning frameworks (such as BERT and RoBERTa), and sentiment analysis methodologies. These algorithms can be trained to identify patterns of harmful discourse utilising extensive datasets of annotated comments from platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and Wikipedia (Devlin et al., 2018; Prabhu & Seethalakshmi, 2025). Detecting hate speech is challenging due to contextual reliance, irony, code-switching, and inherent biases in datasets. Current algorithms often demonstrate false positives (misidentifying neutral communication as hate speech) and false negatives (overlooking subtle or implicit toxicity). Resolving these challenges requires sophisticated NLP methodologies, robust datasets, and continuous enhancements in model fairness and interpretability (Mullah & Zainon, 2021).

This paper presents an AI-driven approach for the detection and classification of hate speech and toxic comments utilising advanced machine learning methodologies. Our research examines several NLP models, feature extraction techniques, and classification algorithms to enhance the precision and dependability of hate speech detection (Jahan & Oussalah, 2023). Furthermore, we analyse the ethical ramifications, constraints, and prospective applications of our methodology in practical scenarios. Hate speech can be identified by many approaches, including manual evaluation by trained human reviewers who search for certain terms or patterns. Machine learning algorithms can identify hate speech by examining text for prevalent patterns and characteristics. Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) transformed machine learning, particularly in simulating sequential data such as language (Binns, 2018). RNNs encounter significant challenges, such as vanishing gradients and the management of long-term dependencies (Irfan et al., 2024; White, 2024). The transformer architecture substantially enhanced large language models (LLMs) by overcoming the limitations of recurrent neural networks (RNNs).

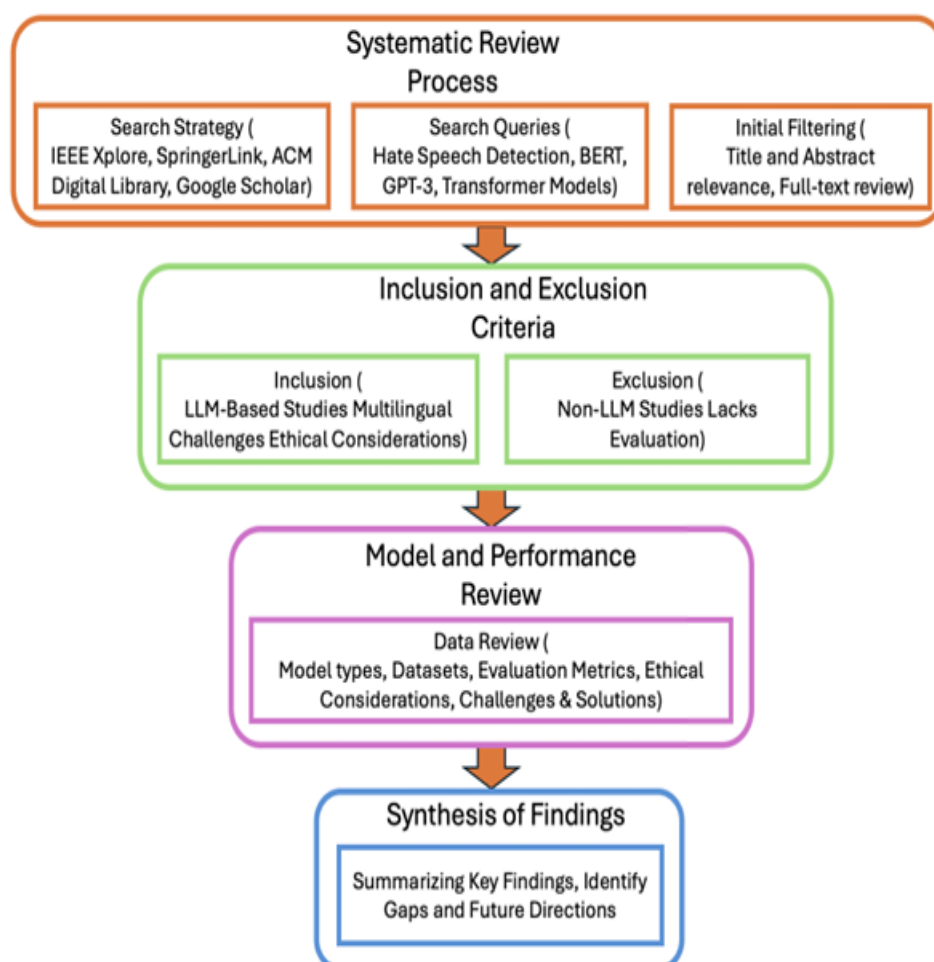
The transformer paradigm, with a self-attention mechanism, transformed the management of long-range dependencies by facilitating parallelisation and efficient processing of sequential data. This design facilitated the creation of sophisticated models, including Google's Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) and OpenAI's Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT) series (G et al., 2021; Guillaume et al., 2022). These models have established new standards in natural language processing, excelling in numerous tasks

and showcasing the transformative potential of the LLM architecture. Their success in machine translation and content generation illustrates their versatility and broadens the potential for academic research and commercial technology applications.

Figure 1 illustrates a representation of the manuscript review process (Alrehili, 2019; Mullah & Zainon, 2021). A comprehensive review was performed using databases like IEEE Xplore and Google Scholar, employing search terms such as “Hate Speech Detection” and “GPT-3.” Following preliminary evaluation based on title and abstract relevance, inclusion and exclusion criteria were used. We examined research on LLMs that tackles language issues and ethical implications, while omitting non-LLM studies and those lacking evaluation. The model and performance review examined data from selected research, emphasising model types, datasets, evaluation measures, ethical considerations, and persistent challenges and solutions. In conclusion, the synthesis of findings summarised significant lessons that underscore limitations in the research and offer future options for enhancing hate speech detection algorithms.

**Figure 1**

*A Representation of the Manuscript Review Process*



## Literature Review

### Background of LLM

Large language models (LLMs) represent a substantial advancement in natural language processing (NLP), employing deep learning techniques to comprehend and produce human language. Large Language Models have developed in conjunction with machine learning and artificial intelligence over several decades. Large Language Models (LLMs) originated in the 1950s, when pioneering AI systems, such as Alan Turing's Turing Test, sought to evaluate a machine's capacity to replicate human intelligence. The constraints of previous technology necessitated the advancement of superior approaches in later decades. GPT models, especially from GPT-2 onwards, have exhibited remarkable proficiency in producing cohesive and contextually relevant content across several subjects. These models are pre-trained on extensive datasets and subsequently fine-tuned for specific tasks, rendering them useful in many applications such as translation, summarisation, and creative writing (Alkomah & Ma, 2022). BERT introduced bidirectional training, enhancing performance on tasks such as question answering and sentiment analysis by considering both left and right context throughout all layers. Contemporary research emphasises on model bias, the requirement for substantial computational resources, and the difficulties of generalisation across languages and domains.

### Brief History of Hate Speech Detection Using LLM

During the 1980s and 1990s, neural networks advanced significantly, particularly due to the backpropagation algorithm. These networks facilitated the creation of intricate models proficient at learning from substantial datasets. These models were constrained in scale and complexity due to time limitations in computation. During the early 2000s, statistical techniques such as Hidden Markov Models (HMMs) were prominent in natural language processing (NLP). These methodologies have been extensively utilised for applications such as part-of-speech tagging, voice recognition, and machine translation. Nonetheless, these models were constrained in their capacity to manage long-range linguistic connections, necessitating the creation of more intricate designs (Nascimento et al., 2023; Parihar et al., 2021).

Recent improvements, including transformer models like GPT and cross-lingual LLMs, have enhanced hate speech identification since 2016. This image underscores the continuous enhancement of methodologies and the growing efficacy of large language models (LLMs) in identifying nuanced and contextually rich hate speech. Comprehending the progression of LLMs is essential for evaluating their constraints in identifying hate speech. Identifying hate speech online is essential due to the widespread presence of harmful content on social media and forums. Conventional hate speech detection systems, dependent on keyword-centric approaches and basic machine learning classifiers, encountered difficulties in addressing linguistic complexities such as irony, context, and evolving vernacular. The utilisation of LLMs has improved the precision and resilience of hate speech detection. Initial endeavours in deep learning addressing this issue employed convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs), which demonstrated potential but were constrained by their reliance on data type dependence and computational resources.

Refining large language models using hate speech datasets can markedly improve detection precision, as evidenced by studies. Research has utilised datasets such as the hate speech and

offensive language dataset and the multilingual hate speech dataset to develop computers proficient in recognising hate speech across many languages and cultural situations. Large language models surpass conventional methods and earlier deep learning architectures in generalisation across diverse datasets.

## **Methodology**

### **Modules Based Reservation**

The methodology section delineated a systematic framework for assessing the efficacy of large language models (LLMs) in identifying hate speech. The Modules Based Reservation technique divides the research process into discrete modules, each accountable for a certain aspect of the study. The following modules are included:

- **Literature Review and Search Strategy:** Development of targeted search queries based on keywords such as “LLMs and hate speech detection,” “NLP models,” and “toxic content,” alongside the identification of academic resources like IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library, Springer, and Google Scholar.
- **Screening and Filtering:** At first search is conducted, and duplicate entries are eliminated. Titles and abstracts are subsequently examined to exclude irrelevant studies.
- **Full-text Review:** A thorough evaluation of the selected papers is performed to confirm that each study satisfies the inclusion criteria.

Figure 1 illustrates the operational framework of the proposed system, visually depicting the modules and their interactions during the systematic review process.

### **Task Arrived Reservation**

In the Task Arrived Reservation approach, research tasks are prioritised according to their identification sequence, guaranteeing that each step receives prompt attention. The procedure commences with the identification of pertinent studies using exhaustive search searches. This is succeeded by a sequential methodology wherein duties such as screening, duplicate elimination, and comprehensive text evaluation are executed consecutively. This sequential approach ensures that each element—from query formulation to final study selection—is systematically processed, hence maintaining the rigour and integrity of the research.

### **Checkpoints Reservation**

The reservation of checkpoints is essential for upholding the quality and uniformity of the review process. During the study, multiple checkpoints are instituted to guarantee that the evaluation is thorough and methodologically rigorous:

- **Initial Screening Checkpoint:** Following the literature review and removal of duplicates, abstracts are assessed to swiftly discard irrelevant studies.
- **Full-text Review Checkpoint:** A comprehensive evaluation of the selected studies is conducted to ensure adherence to established inclusion criteria.
- **Data Extraction and Analysis Checkpoint:** Essential data components, such as model designs, datasets, and evaluation criteria, are methodically gathered and examined, guaranteeing that each study provides significant insights.

These checkpoints help to filter out irrelevant data while retaining high-quality, pertinent research for further analysis.



## Task Mapper Reservation

The Task Mapper Reservation procedure entails methodically aligning each research task with designated modules in the study's workflow. This technique guarantees clarity in task allocation and smooth integration throughout the research process:

- **Mapping Tasks to Modules:** Every element of the study, from the preliminary search to the comprehensive data analysis, is distinctly delineated and allocated to certain modules.
- **Ensuring Continuity:** A seamless transition is upheld between jobs, guaranteeing that no essential procedures are neglected.
- **Documentation and Review:** Comprehensive documentation of task advancement—encompassing research selection, screening results, and data extraction—is maintained to guarantee transparency and facilitate systematic evaluation.

This organised framework elucidates the responsibilities of each phase while simultaneously improving the overall efficiency and efficacy of the research process.

## Feedback-Based Reservation

Feedback-based Reservation employs an iterative methodology that perpetually enhances the research process through insights garnered at each phase. This flexible methodology guarantees that the research is both adaptable and comprehensive:

- **Iterative Query Refinement:** Initial search terms are optimised according to feedback from preliminary screenings to encompass all pertinent material.
- **Methodological and Ethical Feedback:** Ongoing assessment of methodological integrity and ethical implications, including model bias and the management of false positives/negatives, guides modifications to the study process.
- **Data-Driven Modifications:** The quantitative and qualitative evaluations of extracted data inform the enhancement of screening criteria and study selection, guaranteeing the retention of only the most relevant studies.

## Future Scope

The domain of hate speech identification utilising large language models (LLMs) is primed for substantial progress as research persists in tackling its existing constraints. The following delineates critical domains for further investigation, highlighting their potential influence on enhancing the efficacy, scalability, and ethical implementation of LLM-based systems.

## Advanced Detection of Implicit and Coded Hate Speech

A significant issue in hate speech detection is recognising implicit and coded hate speech. In contrast to explicit hate speech, characterised by direct slurs or abusive words, implicit hate speech utilises subtle indicators such as sarcasm, euphemisms, or cultural references, rendering it more difficult to identify. Future research should prioritise the creation of models that possess enhanced semantic and contextual comprehension, enabling them to decipher intricate verbal structures. Incorporating advancements in natural language processing, such as hierarchical attention mechanisms and sophisticated embeddings, can enhance LLMs' ability to analyse underlying intent. Furthermore, adaptive learning systems that consistently refresh depending on emerging patterns of coded language will be crucial in addressing the swiftly changing landscape of hate speech on internet platforms.

## **Strengthening Multilingual and Cross-Lingual Capabilities**

The international scope of internet communication requires hate speech detection technologies that function efficiently in various languages. Contemporary LLMs demonstrate robust efficacy in resource-abundant languages such as English, although they encounter considerable obstacles in low-resource and under-represented languages owing to insufficient high-quality training data. Future research should focus on the advancement of multilingual and cross-lingual LLMs that can generalise across linguistic and cultural borders. Methods like zero-shot and few-shot learning enable models to excel in low-resource languages with limited labelled data. Furthermore, developing extensive, varied multilingual datasets that integrate cultural subtleties would improve the relevance of these models.

## **Addressing Bias and Ethical Concerns**

Bias in training data and model predictions persists as a significant challenge in hate speech identification, frequently resulting in inequitable consequences, including the disproportionate targeting of certain groups while neglecting others. Future models must integrate comprehensive bias reduction measures throughout the data collecting and training phases (Cortiz & Zubiaga, 2021; Ullmann & Tomalin, 2020; White, 2024). This involves assembling balanced datasets that accurately reflect multiple viewpoints and employing methods such as adversarial training and counterfactual data augmentation to detect and rectify biases. Moreover, interpretability systems that offer transparent explanations for model decisions would enhance user confidence and accountability. Ethical issues must encompass not only justice but also openness, guaranteeing that content filtering systems do not stifle genuine speech.

## **Enhancing Scalability and Real-Time Moderation**

The scalability and efficiency of hate speech detection algorithms are essential for handling the immense volume of content produced every day on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Future developments should prioritise the optimisation of LLM designs for real-time applications by enhancing computational efficiency while maintaining performance standards. Methods including model compression, trimming, and distillation can diminish computing demands, facilitating expedited content processing. Furthermore, distributed systems and edge computing offer potential for decentralised processing, enabling local content analysis instead of dependence on centralised servers.

## **Integrating Multimodal and Context-Aware Systems**

Hate speech frequently extends beyond words, manifesting in multimodal formats including visuals, memes, and videos. Future research ought to concentrate on creating multimodal systems that integrate text analysis with visual and aural processing to identify hate speech across various formats (Irfan et al., 2024; Miran & Yahia, 2023). Models that can analyse text superimposed on photos or extract semantic intent from video captions will be crucial for moderating platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Moreover, context-aware systems that consider user history, conversational dynamics, and cultural contexts might enhance detection accuracy by differentiating between malicious intent and innocuous phrases (Kiritchenko et al., 2021; Kovács et al., 2021).

## Reducing Environmental Impact and Resource Requirements

The computing requirements for training and deploying large language models are substantial, prompting worries regarding their environmental impact and accessibility for smaller entities. Subsequent research ought to concentrate on creating energy-efficient designs and training methodologies to reduce the carbon impact of these models. Innovations including sparse attention mechanisms, efficient neural network architectures, and hardware acceleration can diminish energy consumption while maintaining performance integrity. Furthermore, utilising pre-trained models for transfer learning and fine-tuning might reduce the necessity for resource-demanding training cycles, hence enhancing the sustainability and accessibility of these models.

## Expanding Applications Beyond Social Media

Although social media platforms are the principal focus of hate speech detection systems, their applicability may extend to numerous other domains. Educational platforms can utilise tools that identify bullying and abusive language, hence promoting safer virtual classrooms. Workplace communication systems may integrate hate speech identification to foster courteous professional relationships. In online gaming communities, where toxic behaviour frequently dominates, LLMs can assist in identifying and mitigating damaging language, fostering a more conducive atmosphere for participants (Yuan et al., 2023). Extending the use of LLMs to these sectors necessitates tailored modifications and partnerships with industry stakeholders to tackle distinct issues in each environment.

## Algorithm

1. Initialise the pre-trained BERT model and the LSTM network for textual input processing.
2. Obtain reservation requests from users using the user interface.
3. Prepare each input by cleansing, normalising, and tokenising the text with the BERT tokenizer.
4. Input the tokenised data into the fine-tuned BERT model to obtain contextual embeddings.
5. Input the BERT embeddings into the LSTM network for sequential analysis and enhanced feature extraction.
6. Assess the LSTM outputs to ascertain the authenticity of reservations and their corresponding classifications.
7. Revise the reservation system by documenting the executed request and its result.
8. The amalgamation of fine-tuned BERT with LSTM facilitates the effective and efficient management of user reservation requests through deep contextual analysis and sequential processing (Tarun et al., 2024).

## Conclusion

Large Language Models have markedly progressed the domain of hate speech identification, with considerable enhancements in precision and contextual comprehension. Nonetheless, obstacles persist, especially in mitigating biases included in both the training data and the models themselves (Laaksonen et al., 2021). The analysis indicates that although LLMs are useful in numerous contexts, their implementation necessitates ethical concerns and ongoing attempts to reduce prejudice. Future research ought to concentrate on augmenting the

interpretability of these models, expanding their efficacy across many languages and circumstances, and establishing frameworks for equitable and transparent hate speech identification. By tackling these problems, we may harness the complete potential of LLMs to foster safer and more inclusive online environments (Albladi et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, despite the notable progress in LLM-based hate speech identification, some obstacles persist. Challenges such as model biases, the necessity for real-time processing optimisation, and cross-lingual generalisation remain inadequately addressed. These constraints underscore the necessity for continuous research aimed at augmenting model transparency, alleviating potential biases, and boosting generalisation across various languages and domains (Reyero Lobo, 2025). Future research should focus on enhancing bias detection and mitigation methodologies to guarantee that LLMs provide equitable and impartial predictions for hate speech identification. Furthermore, enhancing the scalability of LLMs for real-time moderation, especially on resource-constrained platforms, is a vital topic of investigation. Researchers should concentrate on creating more advanced multilingual models capable of functioning efficiently in low-resource language environments (Geetanjali & Kumar, 2025). The future of hate speech detection depends on the development of more resilient, egalitarian, and efficient LLM systems capable of adapting to the changing difficulties of online hate speech, hence fostering a safer digital world.

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## Why, Not Kollywood? Structural Dynamics and Identity Formation Through State-Led Representation in South Korea

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### Abstract

Korea's 2024 Global *Hallyu* Survey found that K-pop ranked as Korea's top image for seven years. While many global cultural industries like Bollywood derive their names from Hollywood and are genre-based, Korean popular culture evolved under a self-defined term, *Hallyu*. Though “K-pop” follows global naming patterns, the broader term *Hallyu* emerged as a state-led construct to symbolize national identity. This label symbolizes the Korean state beyond entertainment. Despite widespread global recognition, this phenomenon raises a key cultural question. Why did Korea promote its culture under a sovereign term like *Hallyu* rather than hybrid labels like Kollywood, and how this naming shaped national identity? Through a qualitative case study, it applies Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond framework to examine cultural objects (K-pop, K-drama), producers (entertainment agencies, state institutions), the social world (Korea's policy environment), and receivers (global audiences and diaspora communities). Stuart Hall's Representation Theory further explores how *Hallyu* operates as a strategy for constructing national identity on the global stage. Initiatives like the Ministry of Culture's K-Content strategies, *Hallyu*-focused diplomacy, and UNESCO-backed K-pop campaigns show how Korea shaped its image through cultural exports. *Hallyu* emerges not simply as entertainment but as a strategic convergence of culture and national identity, legitimized through policy and global media. By analyzing *Hallyu* through lenses of cultural structure and representational politics, the study shows how a mid-sized state institutionalizes symbolic authority through cultural branding. This contributes to discussions on how strategically mobilized culture is not only a vehicle for global recognition but central to state identity.

*Keywords:* *Hallyu*, Korean culture, soft power, national identity, cultural branding

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, global cultural industries have tended to name themselves in relation to Hollywood, whether by mimicry, adjacency, or playful portmanteau (e.g., Bollywood for Hindi cinema), indexing both genre and geo-linguistic niche (see also Anholt, 2007; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). South Korea's path diverges because instead of adopting a derivative hybrid like Bollywood, Korea consolidated a sovereign umbrella label, *Hallyu* (the "Korean Wave"), and institutionalized it through state policy, public-private consortia, and cultural diplomacy.

In the 2024/2025 wave of the Global Hallyu Survey conducted by the Korean government and Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange [KOFICE], global respondents continued to identify K-pop as the single most representative image of Korea for eight consecutive years since 2017, underscoring how a genre inside the wave functions as the front door to the nation-brand (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism [MCST], 2025). In other words, Hallyu names more than an entertainment category, performing national identity (MCST, 2025; Shim, 2006).

It performs national identity and raises a problem statement and puzzle. If most non-US industries borrow Hollywood's name to claim global legibility, why did Korea pursue Hallyu, a sovereign, umbrella signifier, rather than a Hollywood hybrid like Bollywood? What structural conditions and representational politics enabled this naming to travel, gain legitimacy, and crystallize as a vehicle of state identity? Framing Hallyu as symbolic sovereignty invites us to analyze not only export performance but the politics of naming: who names, who circulates the name, and what the name authorizes (Aronczyk, 2013; Jin, 2016).

The literature background and gap section begins by noting that scholars have richly mapped Hallyu's rise across two phases. The first phase, from the 1990s through the early 2000s, was led by TV dramas, exemplified by *Winter Sonata* and *Dae Jang Geum*. The second phase, after the mid-2000s, pivoted to idol-driven K-pop, which leveraged platforms such as YouTube, transnational fandoms, and sophisticated IP management (Jin, 2016; Kim, 2013; Shim, 2006). The term Hallyu itself entered circulation via Chinese-language media in the late 1990s. It was subsequently appropriated, reframed, and re-scaled by Korean state and quasi-state organs (Shim, 2006), signaling a crucial move from exonym to endonym and from label to brand. While research addresses export metrics, fandom practices, and creative labor, less attention has been paid to naming politics as statecraft, including how the state and industry co-produce a label that stands in for the nation across sectors and why opting for a sovereign umbrella term can be strategically superior to Hollywood-derived hybrids in a middle-power context (Aronczyk, 2013; Jin, 2016).

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine Hallyu. It applies Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond framework and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory to analyze cultural objects, producers, the social world, and receivers, exploring how Hallyu functions as a strategy for constructing national identity. The study also considers initiatives such as the Ministry of Culture's K-Content strategies, Hallyu-focused diplomacy, and UNESCO-backed K-pop campaigns to illustrate how Korea has shaped its international cultural image.

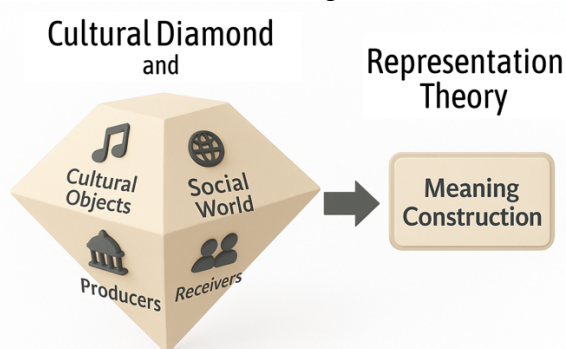
Guided by this puzzle, the study asks the following three central questions: (1) Why did Korea institutionalize a sovereign term, Hallyu, rather than adopt a Hollywood-hybrid label, such as Bollywood? (2) How did this naming shape the production, circulation, and reception of Korean popular culture as a form of national identity and soft power? (3) What structural interactions among cultural objects, producers, social worlds, and receivers stabilized Hallyu as national representation?

This paper's theoretical framework uses two complementary approaches to investigate the research questions. First, Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond (2013) maps relational dynamics among four vertices: cultural objects (e.g., K-pop songs, K-dramas), producers (entertainment agencies, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism [MCST]/ Korea Creative Content Agency [KOCCA]/ Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange [KOFICE]), the social world (policy regimes; platform capitalism; trade and IP rules), and receivers (global audiences and diasporas). The diamond framework allows observation of how a label, Hallyu, stabilizes when reciprocal feedback loops among objects, producers, worlds, and receivers align. For example, agencies design globally legible idols, platforms algorithmically amplify them, policy scaffolds export and brand narratives, and fans translate that into transnational sociality.

Second, Stuart Hall's representation theory (1997) grounds how signs do political work by showing that representation is not a mirror of reality but a productive practice that constructs meaning and positions subjects. Using Hall's framework, Hallyu functions as a signifying strategy through which the Korean state and cultural industries choreograph visibility, including idols, aesthetics, and narratives, to represent the nation in global circuits. This also clarifies why Hallyu's scope exceeds any single genre because the label sutures heterogeneous cultural products into a totalizing brand of "dynamic Korea" and thereby articulates a middle-power identity that is modern, creative, and cosmopolitan (Griswold, 2013; Hall, 1997).

**Figure 1**

*Cultural Diamond and Representation in Hallyu's National Identity*



### Hallyu as a Constructed National Identity

The empirical significance of this study is evident in the way the Hallyu label has been materially underwritten by policy and platform dynamics. On the policy side, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) coordinates K-culture promotion. Agencies such as KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency) and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange) produce industry statistics, support exports, organize global showcases, and run the annual Global Hallyu Survey. These activities effectively codify Hallyu as a cross-sector brand architecture (KOCCA, 2023; KOFICE/MCST, 2025). On the platform side, K-pop's globalization has been amplified by YouTube and social media logics (Jin, 2018).

Diplomatic spectacles, such as BTS's 2021 address at the UN's SDG Moment, have positioned K-pop idols as quasi-envoys. These events conjoin pop visibility with national representation (Washington Post/Reuters, 2021). These dynamics suggest that Hallyu is not merely an entertainment trend but a state-legible cultural infrastructure that travels with metrics, institutions, and rituals of public diplomacy.

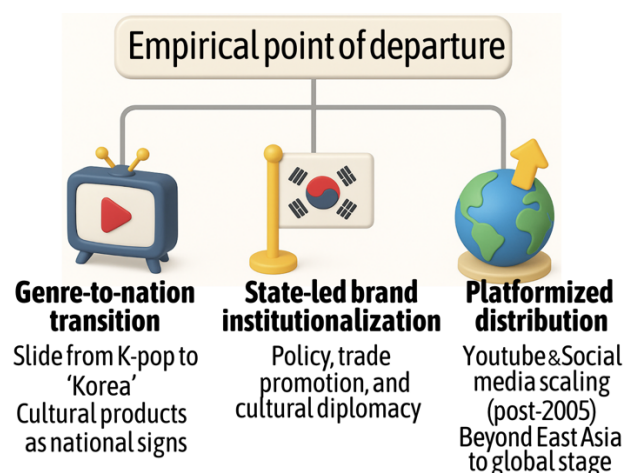
The following section provides a conceptual clarification by comparing Bollywood and Hallyu. This paper uses Bollywood heuristically as shorthand for Hollywood-hybrid naming in order to highlight contrast. In media vernacular, Bollywood ordinarily denotes the Hindi-language film industry in and around Mumbai (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). In comparison, Hallyu is not confined to a language-bounded cinema but operates as a sovereign umbrella spanning music, television, film, games, fashion and beauty, and even language learning. This distinction matters theoretically because whereas Hollywood-hybrids typically label industries, Hallyu labels a nation-brand in motion that is supported by policy, public diplomacy, and multisector coordination (MCST, 2025).

**Figure 2**

*Empirical Trajectory: Genre to State*

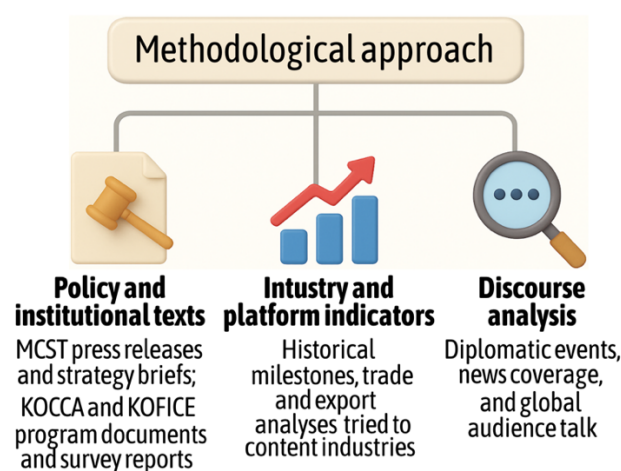


The empirical point of departure for this study arises from three observed regularities. First, there is genre-to-nation slippage. External audiences routinely slide from K-pop to "Korea," signaling metonymic uptake in which a genre acts as a national sign (MCST, 2025). Second, state-led brand consolidation occurs through MCST-led strategies, with KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency) and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange) as implementing arms. These strategies render Hallyu legible in policy, trade promotion, and cultural diplomacy, embedding the label into statistical and programmatic routines (KOCCA, 2023; MCST, 2025). Third, circulation through digital platforms has expanded Hallyu's reach. The post-2005 "new Hallyu" leveraged YouTube and social media to scale K-pop beyond East Asia. Formal recognitions such as Billboard's K-Pop Hot 100 (2011) have served as symbolic gateways into Western industry imaginaries (Billboard Staff, 2011; Jin, 2016, 2018; Shim, 2006).

**Figure 3***Empirical Trajectory: Genre to State*

### Data Collection & Key Findings

The methodological approach of this study is based on a qualitative case study that integrates three sources of evidence. The first source consists of policy and institutional texts, including press releases and strategy briefs from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, as well as program documents and survey reports from the Korea Creative Content Agency and the Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOCCA, 2023; MCST, 2025). Industry and platform indicators: historical milestones (e.g., Billboard's 2011 K-Pop Hot 100), trade and export analyses tied to content industries (UNCTAD, 2024). Discourse analysis: diplomatic events (e.g., UN SDG Moment address by BTS), news coverage, and global audience talk (Washington Post/Reuters, 2021). These data allow for an integrated analysis of label construction (how Hallyu is invoked and stabilized), structural dynamics (how policy and platforms align), and representational work (how objects stand in for the nation). The focus of analysis is not a single artist or show but the label Hallyu as it traverses the Cultural Diamond's vertices. The focus of analysis is not a single artist or show but the label Hallyu as it traverses the Cultural Diamond's vertices.

**Figure 4***Methodological Framework: Sources and Analytical Approaches*

This paper makes contributions to four key scholarly conversations. First, the paper contributes to cultural policy by showing how a label that is officially supported by the government can spread into many areas. This label helps decide budgets, supports exports, and guides cultural diplomacy. This process is distinct from bottom-up genre naming. Second, it contributes to research on representation and identity by demonstrating how Hallyu performs symbolic sovereignty. This allows a middle power to claim authorship over its global cultural image rather than borrowing Hollywood's lexicon (Hall, 1997). Third, this paper contributes to media industry studies. It shows how platform affordances such as YouTube and Western recognition rituals such as Billboard charts intersect with policy to create durable global visibility (Billboard Staff, 2011; Jin, 2018). Fourth, this paper contributes to nation branding studies. It argues that branding is a relational cultural process and not only a communications campaign. In this way, the analysis aligns Griswold's structural model with Hall's theory of signification. In this way, the analysis aligns Griswold's structural model with Hall's theory of signification (Griswold, 2013; Hall, 1997; Jin, 2018).

First, this study explores the historical emergence of Hallyu. Analysis of historical sources traces the genealogy of Hallyu from its early 1990s inception through successive phases of global expansion. Research evidence reveals the naming politics surrounding the term itself, showing that "Hallyu," first coined by Chinese journalists, was later reframed by Korean state actors as a tool of cultural diplomacy. The analysis indicates a distinction between the drama-led wave of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which was anchored in titles such as *Winter Sonata* and *Dae Jang Geum*, and the post-2005 transition to a K-pop-centered "new Hallyu." Examination of these phases demonstrates that this sequence is not merely chronological but also conceptual, as it shows how the label "Hallyu" became a contested yet institutionalized signifier. Data further reveal that media industries, governments, and audiences negotiated its scope and meaning. Finally, the study reconstructs the infrastructure of circulation, showing how terrestrial broadcasting syndication, the rise of cable networks and satellite distribution, and eventually digital platforms enabled Korean cultural products to cross linguistic and regional boundaries.

In addition, this study examines K-pop as the strategic vanguard of Hallyu. Building on soft power theory, analysis investigates how K-pop functions as a bridgehead for broader cultural and economic spillovers. Empirical evidence reveals tourism flows, including fan-driven pilgrimages to filming sites and concert venues, as well as cross-industry effects, notably cosmetics, fashion, and food exports. Data further show the structural role of entertainment agencies in establishing globalized training and production systems. Updated Korean-language policy and industry sources indicate that institutions such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), and the Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) have leveraged K-pop as both a symbolic and material resource. In this context, analysis demonstrates that K-pop operates not only as a cultural commodity but also as an infrastructural node positioned to attract investment, negotiate with global platforms, and extend Korea's visibility within international trade regimes.

## Results and Findings

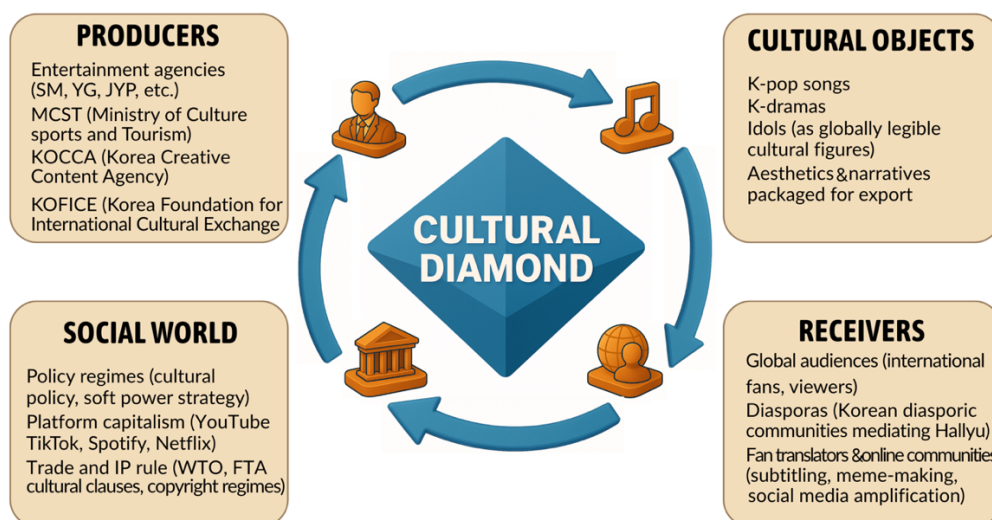
This study operationalizes Stuart Hall's theory of representation to analyze how Hallyu condenses and circulates national identity. Analysis shows that Korean cultural products simultaneously project a curated image of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and tradition. Historical dramas, for example, mediate Confucian heritage, while K-pop's aesthetics signal

hyper-modernity and global belonging. Applying Hall's framework demonstrates that meaning is not fixed but continually produced through encounters between texts and audiences. The representational dynamics of Hallyu oscillate between strategic essentialism, projecting a coherent image of "Korea," and polysemic openness, allowing international audiences to inscribe their own desires onto Korean cultural forms. Findings indicate that the "Korea" signified by Hallyu is not a stable national identity but a flexible discursive construct mobilized differently across diplomatic, commercial, and fan contexts.

This study applies Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond as a heuristic tool to explain how the label "Hallyu" is stabilized across multiple actors. Analysis maps four key nodes. First, objects include cultural products such as K-pop, dramas, films, games, cosmetics, and language-learning content. Second, producers consist of entertainment conglomerates, governmental agencies such as MCST (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), KOCCA (Korea Creative Content Agency), and KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange), and transnational platforms. Third, receivers encompass global audiences and fandoms who actively participate in translation, subtitling, streaming, and online activism. Fourth, the social world comprises the broader political-economic environment, including trade regimes, platform logics, and cultural diplomacy. Situating Hallyu at the intersection of these four nodes demonstrates that durability emerges from recursive processes of production, consumption, circulation, and regulation.

**Figure 5**

*The Cultural Diamond and Hallyu's National Signification*



The framework by itself cannot adequately account for how Hallyu represents Korea. In this context, Stuart Hall's Representation Theory offers a complementary perspective. Representation emphasizes that meaning is not inherent in cultural products but is created through patterns of communication and interpretation. Hallyu becomes recognizable internationally not only because its products circulate but also because they signify Korea in specific ways. Korean television dramas illustrate both heritage and modernity, K-pop conveys cosmopolitan aesthetics, and campaigns supported by international organizations such as UNESCO present Korean culture as a shared global resource. These cultural products therefore function as sites where national identity is continually negotiated between producers and audiences.



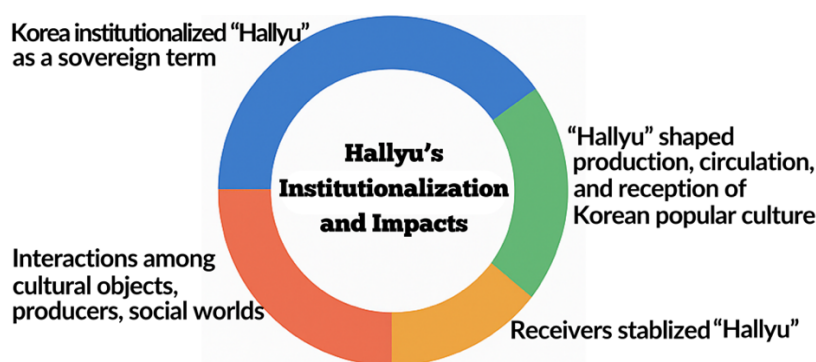
By integrating the two perspectives, the analysis shows that the Cultural Diamond explains how Hallyu circulates through institutions while Representation Theory explains how it conveys Korea's national image. These frameworks indicate that Hallyu functions not as a neutral label but as a performative construction of Korea's image, sustained through coordinated structural practices and through continuous negotiation of meaning.

### Implications & Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Korea's strategic use of Hallyu illustrates the interplay between cultural policy, industry practices, and global audiences in shaping national identity. The analysis shows that institutionalizing a sovereign term rather than adopting a Hollywood-derived hybrid enables coordinated management of cultural production and circulation while projecting a coherent national image abroad. In particular, examining the interactions among cultural products, producers, social environments, and audiences highlights how Hallyu becomes stabilized as a form of national representation, revealing the structural and symbolic mechanisms that sustain Korea's soft power.

**Figure 6**

*Summary of Hallyu's Institutionalization and Impacts*



First, Korea adopted Hallyu because the label could function as symbolic sovereignty as a brand that spans multiple sectors and is legible to the state, allowing the nation to assert authorship and circulate beyond a single industrial niche. In contrast to Hollywood-hybrids, which typically designate a specific industry or cinema defined by a particular language, such as Bollywood for Hindi films, Hallyu was appropriated from an exonym to an endonym. It was then institutionalized by the state and organizations associated with government agencies as a nation-level cultural architecture (Aronczyk, 2013; Shim, 2006). This process enabled Korea to transform an emerging media trend into both a policy instrument and a nation-branding asset capable of mobilization across music, television, film, gaming, fashion, and cultural education (KOCCA, 2023; MCST, 2025).

Second, the selection of a sovereign umbrella label materially influenced production, circulation, and reception in ways that enhanced Korea's soft power. In terms of production, entertainment firms and public agencies coordinated investments and narratives so that cultural objects, including K-pop songs, K-dramas, and fashion, were designed for transnational comprehensibility. In terms of circulation, platform affordances such as YouTube and social media, along with recognition rituals like Billboard milestones, enabled these objects to reach global audiences. In terms of reception, diasporic communities and international fandoms actively translated, remixed, and performed Korean cultural signifiers within their local contexts (Griswold, 2013; Jin, 2016). Applying Stuart Hall's representation theory clarifies the

significance of these processes, showing that Hallyu serves not only to export content but also to construct meaning. It frames attributes such as modernity, creativity, and aesthetic norms as metonyms for Korea, positioning K-pop stars as *de facto* cultural envoys (Hall, 1997; Washington Post/Reuters, 2021).

Third, Hallyu's stabilization as a national sign emerges from ongoing interactions among the Cultural Diamond's vertices. Institutional routines and policy programs managed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Korea Creative Content Agency, and the Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange establish production incentives and standard measurement practices. Cultural producers create texts that are legible to global audiences. Digital platforms promote certain patterns of consumption through algorithmic amplification. Audiences, including fans, diasporas, and cultural intermediaries, actively reinterpret and circulate these meanings through translation, tourism, and commercial engagement. These processes form a continuous cycle in which institutionalization shapes platform visibility, audience engagement feeds back into cultural interpretation, and policy programs are adjusted in response. This cycle produces a durable brand architecture that generates both material effects, such as economic spillovers, tourism growth, and export linkages, and symbolic effects, including enhanced national image and international affinity (Griswold, 2013; KOCCA, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024).

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it demonstrates how cultural infrastructure and representation are interconnected. By combining Griswold's Cultural Diamond with Hall's theory of representation, the study shows that structural arrangements, including institutions, markets, and platforms, interact with processes of meaning-making to shape the circulation of Hallyu. The Cultural Diamond explains how Hallyu is produced and reproduced across these structures, while Hall's framework clarifies why some circulations generate coherent national meanings (Griswold, 2013; Hall, 1997).

Second, the study introduces the concept of symbolic sovereignty. Nation-branding is reframed not merely as a rhetorical or marketing practice but as a deliberate collaboration between state and industry to claim authorship over a transnational image of the nation. This concept helps explain why a middle power like Korea invests both politically and financially in a name that extends across multiple cultural and industrial sectors (Aronczyk, 2013).

Third, the research highlights the role of platform-mediated circulation in nation-brand formation. Platform algorithms and transnational media rituals are shown to be central to the contemporary circulation of national culture. Platform affordances determine which texts gain global visibility and which aspects of national identity are amplified, illustrating how digital infrastructures shape both the scope and perception of Hallyu (Billboard Staff, 2011; Jin, 2016, 2018).

This study offers several policy and practical implications for cultural governance, industry practice, and diplomatic strategy. To begin with, state actors should sustain and diversify the cultural portfolio. Hallyu should be treated as a multi-faceted asset rather than a dependence on a single genre. Supporting independent film, games, webtoons, and regional cultural producers can reduce systemic risk from market fluctuations, political boycotts, or audience fatigue (KOCCA, 2023).

Moreover, investment in cultural labor protections and sustainability is crucial. The global success of the industry depends on the well-being of creative labor. Policies that provide



mental-health support, transparent contracts, and training programs balancing commercial pressures with ethical standards can ensure long-term creative capacity and legitimacy.

In addition, public sponsorship should be balanced with creative autonomy. State orchestration through grants, festivals, or diplomatic initiatives should avoid over-instrumentalizing culture. Programs ought to encourage experimentation and plural expressions of Korean culture that resist being reduced to a singular state narrative (Aronczyk, 2013).

Another priority is platform governance and algorithmic literacy require attention. Global visibility is shaped by digital platform dynamics, so government and industry coalitions should invest in understanding algorithms, forming data partnerships, and establishing ethical governance frameworks. This approach allows cultural value to be assessed beyond raw view counts, accounting for engagement depth, community translation work, and creative remixes.

Finally, cultural diplomacy should be embedded in multilateral venues while managing geopolitical risks. High-profile events, such as artists' participation in the United Nations, can have substantial impact but require careful calibration to prevent politicization. A diversified set of diplomatic channels, including cultural exchanges, scholarships, and collaborative productions, is likely to be more resilient than relying solely on a few spectacular initiatives (Washington Post/Reuters, 2021).

This study identifies several risks, limitations, and strategies for mitigating them within the Hallyu strategy. One key risk lies in the excessive focus on commercial profit and the production of cultural goods primarily for market demand. This focus can diminish perceived authenticity and provoke backlash when combined with brand homogenization. The preservation of independent and traditional cultural forms through targeted funding helps maintain the diversity and depth of Korea's cultural offerings.

Another challenge is the concentration risk arising from reliance on a small number of entertainment conglomerates, which centralizes both power and vulnerability. Supporting smaller producers, creators rooted in regional contexts, and collaborative production agreements between companies or countries can strengthen the creative ecosystem and reduce systemic exposure.

A further concern involves labor exploitation and reputational risk, which threaten the national brand. Incidents involving working conditions may tarnish the global image of Korean culture. Enforcing labor standards, increasing transparency in management and contracts, and establishing independent industry oversight mechanisms are crucial to protect creative labor and sustain credibility.

Finally, geopolitical vulnerability affects cultural exports. Diplomatic tensions, such as market restrictions, can disrupt circulation and reception. Diversifying international markets and promoting non-commercial forms of cultural diplomacy can reduce exposure to politically contingent disruptions and support the long-term soft power potential of Hallyu.

**Figure 7***Policy Recommendations for Sustaining Hallyu*

Limitations of this study stem from its qualitative, case-study design, which prioritized depth over breadth. The analysis relied on policy documents, industry reports, media events, and secondary literature. This approach provides rich interpretive insight but constrains the ability to generalize statistically. In particular, the precise quantification of economic spillovers and the causal effects of naming practices remain beyond the scope of this study.

Future research can build on these findings in several directions. First, comparative case studies could examine Korea's Hallyu alongside other nation-branding strategies such as Bollywood or Nollywood to identify when umbrella branding is effective and when industry-specific naming is more appropriate. Second, longitudinal audience research using mixed methods could trace how local audiences across different regions attach evolving meanings to Hallyu over time. Third, algorithmic and platform ethnographies could investigate how recommender systems and metadata practices shape the global circulation of cultural texts. Fourth, econometric modeling could quantify the long-term effects of Hallyu on GDP, trade, and tourism while accounting for other influencing factors. Finally, policy evaluation studies could assess which state programs including grants, festivals, and international partnerships generate measurable gains in cultural capital and support sustainable creative ecosystems.

Hallyu is best understood as a purposeful assemblage, in which the label was not merely discovered, but deliberately shaped by producers, platforms, policies, and audiences into a durable form of symbolic sovereignty. Its success stems from the coordinated interaction of institutional infrastructure and discursive practices. The Cultural Diamond illustrates the structural framework that supports Hallyu, while Representation Theory clarifies how cultural objects are transformed into national symbols through meaning-making. For mid-sized states seeking cultural influence in a platform-driven world, Hallyu provides both a model and a caution. It demonstrates how a carefully coordinated cultural strategy can enhance national visibility, while also highlighting the governance, labor, and authenticity challenges that must be addressed to maintain that visibility in an ethical and equitable manner.

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## **Elevating Creativity: The Rise of Digital Design in Art Education Classrooms**

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The Barcelona Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2025  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

In today's educational landscape, integrating digital design into the art classroom has become an important tool for engaging upper elementary and middle school students. With digital design in the curriculum, students can explore art beyond traditional media and develop essential skills in problem-solving, visual communication, and digital literacy. This paper explores how digital tools such as Google Draw, Canva, and Adobe Express are reshaping the way students approach creativity and artistic expression. These tools not only enhance artistic abilities but promote critical thinking as students manipulate digital elements to create visually compelling art. The interactive nature of digital design captures students' attention, making art more accessible and engaging for those who might otherwise struggle with conventional materials. Through digital design projects, idea generation using AI tools, and student-created digital portfolios, students experience a deeper connection to their work, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment. This approach to art education equips students with foundational digital skills and encourages self-expression and innovation, preparing them for a future where technology and creativity are seamlessly integrated.

*Keywords:* art education, design education, digital design, digital portfolios, idea generation

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## Introduction

By the time students reach sixth grade, they have an awareness of their ability to draw realistically. If they perceive themselves as unable to draw, the tendency to dismiss—or even to hate—art class may lead to disruptive behavior, poor self-esteem, and the lack of artistic confidence (see Figure 1 as an example). To better engage and inspire students, including digital design with traditional art education can turn their lack of confidence into feeling proud about their accomplishments. “Education has a pivotal role in fostering creativity and creative practices, and thus the skills needed to create new knowledge” (Henriksen et al., 2018, p. 412).

**Figure 1**

*Drawing Made by a Fifth-Grade Student on the First Day in Art Class*



Zabora et al. (2023) argued that “digital technology and interactive media challenge traditional notions of creativity, audience, and artist” (p. 300). Art educators need to understand the potential of digital design to build student self-esteem while leading to motivated students. “Cultivating students' innovative thinking can also avoid the phenomenon that students rely too much on computers or are restricted by computer graphic design software” (Han, 2020, p. 3). Giving students a chance to be creative can be one outcome of technology.

Traditional art education includes teaching students about artists, techniques, art history, and major movements in the art world. Visual art curricula can be enhanced through the inclusion of digital design. For example, educators can integrate technology by having students use digital tools to create art inspired by artists they have learned about. “Creativity is closely connected not only with the artistic world and the creation of products but also with science, engineering, innovative thinking and problem-solving” (Henriksen et al., 2018, p. 411). Successful integration of digital art requires an understanding of its possibilities. Dong and Sang (2024) argued that “with the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing prevalence of digital media technology, the role and significance of digital media art design in art education have become increasingly important” (p. 386). Combining digital techniques with traditional techniques helps students understand the different ways art can be created while challenging them to utilize technology in new ways.

If students have access to Chromebooks at school, art educators can teach digital design. There is a growing need for students to understand the many uses of technology, first, and second, to imagine alternatives to traditional art-making methods (Dufva & Dufva, 2019). Simple skill-

builder activities using Google Draw can help students learn how to use basic tools including shape, curve, polyline, fill bucket, custom gradient, and transparency. Once students feel confident navigating these tools, teachers can introduce digital design projects that are more complex and that integrate traditional and contemporary artists. Developing a blended curriculum not only engages students who lack confidence in their drawing ability but allows all students to gain digital design skills necessary in the global workforce.

### **A Blended Curriculum**

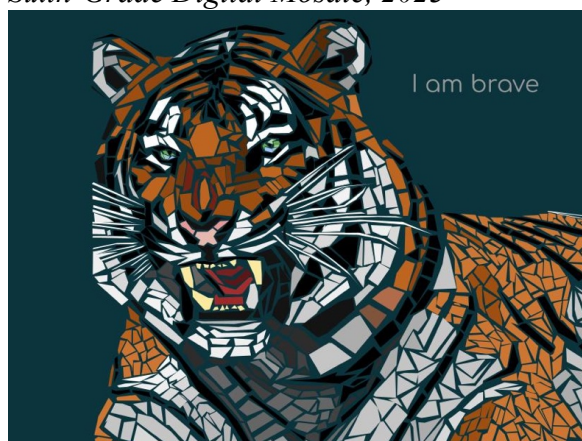
When developing a blended curriculum, educators who start with art history can provide rich content for student inspiration. “Artists and art educators increasingly recognize that both traditional and digital techniques have a powerful role to play in broadening our artistic horizons. The challenge lies in determining how to effectively integrate these two sides of the artistic world” (Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, 2024). In sixth grade social studies, for example, students learn about ancient civilizations, which includes Rome, Greece, India, Egypt, and China. “The international implementation of technologies in educational settings may be a way of grounding creativity in practice or could provide a tangible mechanism for fostering its development” (Henriksen et al., 2018, p. 412). Including digital design with art history allows students to develop confidence in using technology while gaining inspiration from the art of ancient civilizations.

### **Digital Mosaics**

One such blending occurred around the theme of animal mosaics from ancient civilizations. I instructed students to research animals that fit their personality or physical characteristics, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Using the polyline tool in Google Draw, students created contemporary mosaics. Through this digital design experience, students became familiar not only with the technology tools but the amount of time it takes to create a mosaic. Students received a color print of their finished mosaics.

**Figure 2**

*Sixth-Grade Digital Mosaic, 2023*



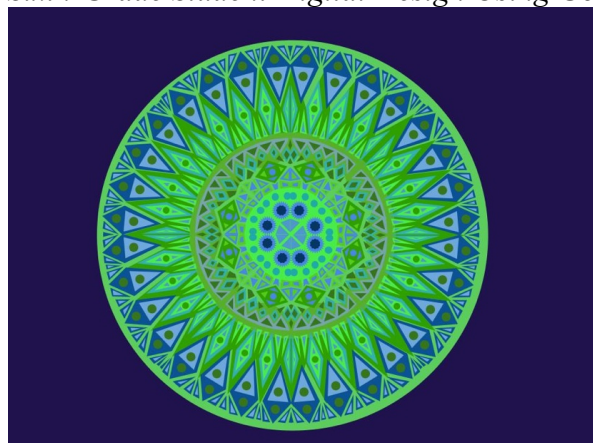


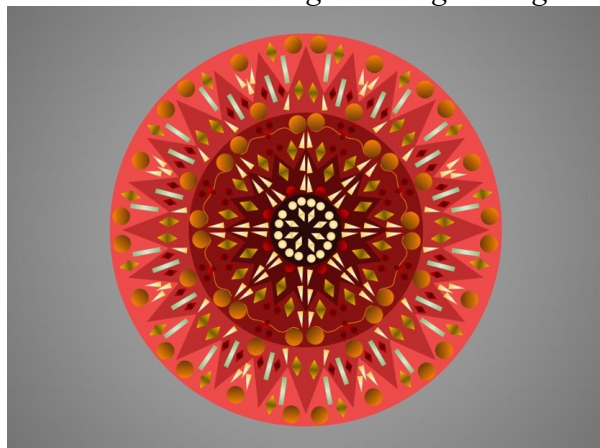
**Figure 3***Sixth-Grade Digital Mosaic, 2024***Digital Radial Symmetry**

Radial symmetry is a design technique that can be traced back to ancient civilizations. As stated by Vaia (2025):

Symmetry in art is a principle in design where elements are balanced and mirror each other on either side of a central axis, creating harmony and visual stability. This technique can be seen throughout cultures and art forms—from ancient Egyptian art to contemporary works. Symmetry creates aesthetic appeal and relays a sense of order. Recognizing and using symmetry can help artists and art students understand composition, engage viewers, and elevate creative expression. (para. 1)

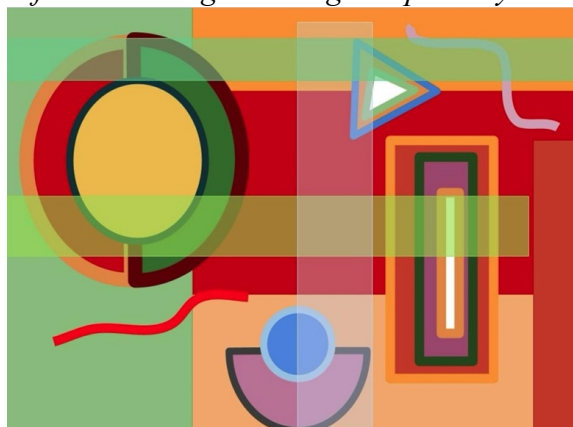
By learning symmetry through digital design, students learned what it means to have a center line with shapes flipped to mirror each other. Not only did digital design shorten the amount of time it takes to create a symmetrical design, but the visual impact and detail students created were vastly different than creating radial designs traditionally. (See Figures 4 and 5.) The process of creating these designs started with a circular template that contained lines dividing up the circle into eight slices. Students designed in only one slice and used the zoom tool to work 250% or higher; by zooming it, students created more intricate detailed shapes than working at the “fit” on screen size. Some students chose to use the radial gradient tool to fill the shapes, while other students used the general solid fill bucket.

**Figure 4***Sixth-Grade Student Digital Design Using Google Draw*

**Figure 5***Sixth-Grade Student Digital Design Using the Radial Gradient Tool in Google Draw***Artist-Inspired Digital Designs**

Introducing contemporary artists as well as artists from the past can inspire students to create digital designs in the manner of these artists while still developing their own creative solutions. Showing students art by famous artists, whether the work was made using paint, fabric, ink-printing, or sculpture, can help students expand their knowledge of art history while learning to use digital design tools. Before students began creating, I shared information about each artist in a slide presentation and sample shapes were made to review basic digital tools.

To introduce students to geometric shape tools, teachers can feature numerous artists. Two who are popular are French artist Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) and the contemporary American artist Jacob Hashimoto (b. 1973). While these artists are extremely different in their use of materials to create art, both are strong examples of shapes, color, balance, and composition. See Figures 6 and 7 for student work inspired by these artists. Jen Stark (b. 1983), a contemporary American artist, and pop artist, Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) also provide elements of design that translated well into digital art, as shown in Figures 8 and 9.

**Figure 6***Fifth-Grade Digital Design Inspired by Sonia Delaunay*



**Figure 7***Fifth-Grade Digital Design Inspired by Jacob Hashimoto***Figure 8***Fifth-Grade Digital Design Inspired by Jen Stark***Figure 9***Fifth-Grade Digital Design Inspired by Roy Lichtenstein*

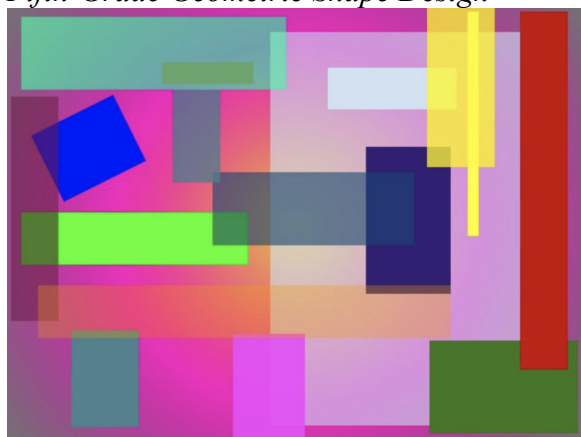
As part of the planning process, a blended curriculum that includes artists, art history, and digital design must incorporate the seven elements and principles of design (balance and alignment, contrast, emphasis, movement, proportion, repetition, and white space). In addition, there are seven elements of art: color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value. Projects that focus on these elements help students understand the connection between digital design and traditional art. Henriksen et al. (2018) argued that technology cannot solve all problems; rather, it is “a tool that is contingent on how it is used. It can be used to maximize affordances for

creative output or deep learning, or it can simply be a replacement device with shallow uses for learning” (p. 420). Including the elements and principles of designs provides substance for why art educators are incorporating digital design with traditional art curriculum.

The shape menu in Google Drawing tools can introduce students to geometric shapes. These beginner projects can also teach students how to use the fill bucket, including custom colors, as well as using the transparency tool for overlapping, as shown in Figure 10. Many famous abstract art images can be shown for inspiration, such as Helen Frankenthaler, Hilma af Klint, Piet Mondrian, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Mark Rothko.

**Figure 10**

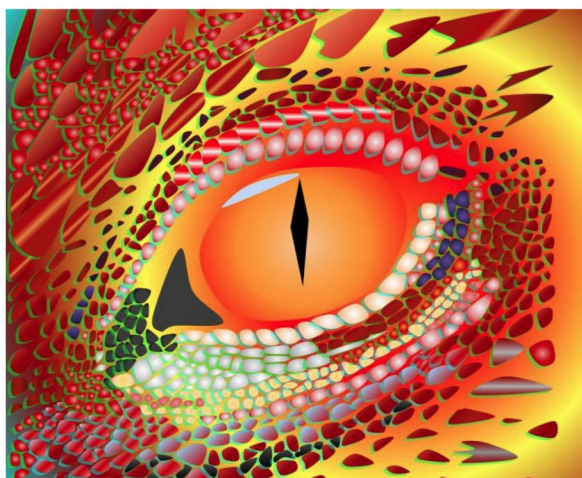
*Fifth-Grade Geometric Shape Design*



Once students have a solid grasp of the digital tools, more complex projects can be introduced, such as the Gradient Dragon Eye design, as shown in Figure 11. In this assignment, students were required to carefully use the curved line tool, along with radial and linear gradients, and the drop shadow. Sixth-grade students were extremely engaged in this assignment, and they received printed color copies upon completing their work.

**Figure 11**

*Sixth-Grade Gradient Dragon Eye Digital Design*



## Idea Generation and Artificial Intelligence

All creativity builds upon ideas and objects that already exist and thus an important element of creativity is not just deep background knowledge of a domain and our previous experiences with it, but also diverse experiences and knowledge of other domains that enrich our understanding of the core area, providing new and unique connections as the basis of creative (novel, effective, and whole) ideas. (Mishra et al., 2023, p. 209)

Including artificial intelligence (AI) in the idea generation or brainstorming phase of a design project can lead to quicker decisions about composition, space, colors, and overall aesthetic appeal. When directed to create a rough draft drawing, many students struggle to achieve what they visualize in their minds. Using AI as a resource to see their ideas without that frustration is not only a time saver but helps students learn other ways to show their creative thinking. In one example, the class responded to a series of questions:

- What images or symbols relate to the idea of peace?
- What animals do we associate with peace?
- What does a peaceful world look like?

Figure 12 shows results using the text-to-image Adobe Express AI tool for a peace poster design. The student's prompt included these words: white doves, rainbows, rivers, flowers, and trees. From the image that Adobe Express created, the student was able to create a peace poster that showed her initial thinking, and with the help of AI, provided a general style for her final painted poster design as shown in Figure 13.

**Figure 12**

*Sixth-Grade Student's AI Prompt Results*



**Figure 13***Sixth-Grade Student's Final Watercolor Painting of "Peace"*

Including AI in art education is a powerful way for students to learn how to understand how to use it as a tool, not a final solution, in the creative process. Creativity expert Dr. Ronald Beghetto (as quoted in Mishra & Henriksen, 2024) stated,

It is important to start with human-generated ideas, and then use GenAI to further analyze and enhance these ideas by identifying strengths, weaknesses, counter arguments, and new viewpoints. This iterative process, moving from human to AI and back to human input, offers a powerful method for enhancing creativity and ensuring a broader perspective. (p. 399)

Students are already engaged in AI, and art educators should provide these experimental opportunities. Black and Chaput (2024) stated, "Art educators should remember that AI, through all its innovation, is not a replacement for human creativity: rather it is useful to augment teacher and student-artistic creative processes" (p. 80).

### Assessment

Having students create portfolios showcasing their digital design projects provides a record of their work and consolidates assessment into one final grade. "Student portfolios that document learning over time are not a new concept. For decades, portfolios have been a staple of teachers' writing instruction" (O'Byrne & Hunter-Doniger, 2021, p. 446). However, digital portfolios in upper elementary schools are not widely utilized. With so many online platforms free for educational use, students can create their own portfolio showcasing their digital designs into one design template of their choice, as shown in Figure 14. Each digital assignment was included in these portfolios, and I tasked students with writing a brief explanation of the design process for each project, as shown in Figure 15. Assessing student work by way of digital portfolios provides ample opportunities for feedback between the student and me, allowing for suggestions, revisions, and final student reflections.



**Figure 14***Sixth-Grade Student Digital Portfolio Covers Designed Using Canva***Figure 15 (a, b, c)***Example of Part of a Student Digital Portfolio Designed Using Canva*

(a)



(b)



(c)



## Conclusion

Developing a blended art curriculum that includes both traditional techniques and digital design is one way to engage students in upper elementary art education. “Digital art is the marker of

our time, the basic aesthetic and cultural form that unites the intimate and the common” (Zabora et al., 2023, p. 304). Adding technology to the creative process not only inspires students to experiment more freely but may even lead to a future career in the field of design. As stated by Mishra et al. (2023):

Creativity, learning and technology all exist within the complex tapestry of human life, culture, and society. So does the phenomenon of education, which, as an innately human and designed system, is interconnected to the rest of human activity and society. This is a broader sociocultural view of creativity, learning, and technology, and their effects on education, recognizing that whether certain technologies are used in the classroom they still influence education, by changing the “ground rules” of the broader context for education. (p. 209)

Digital design is here to stay, and as art educators, we must embrace all that it has to offer our students. “While creativity has become a core issue for twenty-first century teaching and learning, it is still not clear what this means for the field of education—in policy, and therefore in practice,” (Henriksen et al., 2018, p. 420). If we can become experts in design, our students will benefit. “For teachers specifically, instrumental basic digital skills can function as a foundation for successful teaching with digital technology” (Lohr et al., 2024). Infusing digital design into traditional art education levels the playing field between students who may lack confidence in their drawing skills but who may flourish in the digital world.

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## Social Evolution of Order Observation in Art

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Official Conference Proceedings

### Abstract

This paper argues that authenticity, as a key dimension in the evolution of social dynamics, deserves focused analysis. Drawing on Moeller and D'Ambrosio's (2023) framework of sincerity, prolificity, and authenticity, I show how authenticity is uniquely positioned amid today's shifting identity formations. The concept of second-order observation (Luhmann, 1998) and the existential difference between pre-digital and post-digital paradigms highlight major changes in how social dynamics and self-presentation function. I will show how third-order observation, an often-overlooked layer, is crucial for understanding authentic self-expression and meaningful social evolution, particularly as revealed in art. Specifically, I analyze works by Osman Hamdi Bey, Caspar David Friedrich, Claude Monet, and La Robotte to contrast different observational paradigms and illustrate authenticity's relevance. Ultimately, I advocate for an authenticity-based approach to communication that moves beyond traditional constructivism to foster deeper, more genuine connections. The paper also explores the distinction between the infinite and finite nature of pre and post-digital art, clarifying its relevance to authenticity.

*Keywords:* authenticity, observation, art, prolificity

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## Introduction

The digital communication of our era has transformed the nature of interaction. This transformation is rooted in the idea of rethinking the future of humanity in a digitized world. In modern society, our future is closely tied to the concept of orientation, which highlights the significance of human orientation. According to Stegmaier,

In modern society, you cannot escape certain functional systems of communication; you must orient yourself to them: the systems of economics, politics, law, and, as far as it relates to these three (and more), mass media. On the contrary, you can decide whether or not to participate in science, art, or religio. (Stegmaier, 2016, p. 158)

Orientation highlights a phenomenological perspective focused on how individuals effectively navigate changing circumstances characterized by complexity, confusion, and uncertainty (Stegmaier, 2019). Furthermore, “human orientation is manifold.” In the context of art, Stegmaier discusses “artistic orientation,” which refers to an interest in specific means, objects, and styles of art (Stegmaier, 2019, p. 15). Through this lens, art serves as a form of orientation, similar to religious, moral, and sexual orientation, allowing individuals to express their perspectives in everyday life. Through artistic and scientific routines, humans differentiate themselves from animals, even though animals and plants may have their own forms of orientation. Nevertheless, art serves a specific function: it is about “transcending everyday practice” (Stegmaier, 2019, pp. 197-200). Human beings transcend routine through art, providing a means to navigate the individual, social, and political challenges they encounter. This engagement with art involves a dynamic interaction that is linked to communication with others. In essence, we orient ourselves in relation to and in communication with others, supporting the notion that art is a substantive form of orientation in interpersonal communication. Moreover, it reveals the essence of different individuals through the artistic elements it embodies. To explore how art reveals and transforms the identities of different beings, I will apply Luhmann’s concept of second-order observation, which involves the observation of observed entities. Before proceeding with this concept, I will explain Moeller & D’Ambrosio’s three relevant concepts: i) sincerity, ii) prolificity, and iii) authenticity. The notion of prolificity will be linked to Luhmann’s concept of second-order observation. Additionally, Section 2 will focus on various examples from art history to delve into the concept of authenticity, which opens a path to third-order observation.

## On Three Different Modes of Identity

Describing the term “authenticity” is complex, and it becomes even more challenging when considering the fast-changing dynamics of the digitized world and digital technologies. In their paper, “Orientation to Profiles: Identity in a Digitized World,” Moeller & D’Ambrosio (2023) suggest that “these technologies enhance a shift from authenticity, or inner-self-oriented identity, to prolificity, or profile-oriented identity” (p. 24). What do the terms authenticity and prolificity mean? Moeller & D’Ambrosio’s definitions will help clarify these concepts. They state: “We distinguish between three different modes of identity: sincerity shapes identity in orientation to social roles, authenticity shapes identity in orientation to an original self, and what we call ‘prolificity’ shapes identity in orientation to profiles” (Moeller & D’Ambrosio, 2023, p. 23). These three modes of identity represent different aspects of the changing dynamics of digital media and human orientation. Within the scope of this paper, these modes will be linked to art history and the evolution of art products.

Art products leave us with different observations, questions, and reflections. One of these implications is the way in which individual beings are exhibited and transformed through various art products, and how this is reflected in artistic orientations that reveal different identities. To elaborate on the relevant implication, three different modes of identity require further consideration. The concept of sincerity is more about the social roles we are engaged with and “sincere identification manifested in true devotion to a social role, could not only provide much needed orientation about what to do and why to do it, but also generate respect (*Achtung*)” (p. 36). For the concept of sincerity, social roles in Ancient Chinese thought and culture can be considered and “filial piety” in traditional Confucius texts is one of the key concepts of sincerity. Relevantly, Moeller & D’Ambrosio state that:

Philosophical texts from the Confucian tradition (such as the *Analects* of Confucius) tend to highlight just as much as popular treatises (such as the *24 Examples of Filial Piety*) that ‘esteem and fair repute’ are due to those who ‘live’ their roles *sincerely*, that is bodily, emotionally, and intellectually committed. They greatly praise dutiful sons, devoted wives, and loyal ministers. (Moeller & D’Ambrosio, 2023, p. 36)

The concept of sincerity encompasses a wide range of thoughts about individuals' belongings, which relate to the fulfillment of social roles within a given domain. For example, these social roles can tie us to family roles, nationality, or jobs, which lead a society to live in harmony and a balanced manner within the construction of their identities. The second mode of identity is authenticity, which plays a significant role in the scope of the paper.

The concept of authenticity is complex to define, and it is reflected in everyday interpersonal relations. As human beings, we tend to seek approval or love within our authentic selves, since it is ontologically more about us. When we alter the authentic aspects of our own being, it can be misleading or misguiding not only for others but also about ourselves. On the other hand, in a digitized world where communication can be more complex than ever and a role-based model of sincerity, it is not easy to determine the concept of authenticity and preserve it. Who is that original, authentic self? Although this question can be very philosophical and not directly related to the paper, in order to understand the concept of authenticity, it draws a line. Accordingly, “from an emerging perspective of authenticity, social roles appeared as merely staged and hiding an ‘original’ or ‘actual self’ underneath. To discover this true self, roles need to be discarded or disregarded” (Moeller & D’Ambrosio, *ibid.*, p. 38). The authentic self highlights the inner space of one's own being, while sincerity reflects the relationship between this inner space and social expectations and the public realm. Therefore, authenticity separates us from the outside world at some levels. By emphasizing this separation, Charles Taylor (1991) seems to define authenticity as follows:

The understanding of life which emerged with the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century gives a new importance to being true to oneself. What this consists in is the idea that each one of us has an original way of being human: each person has his or her own measure. There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this notion gives a new importance to originality: being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. (pp. 28–29)

In terms of modernity, Taylor explores the relationship between one's realization of their authentic self and various external influences. According to Charles Taylor (1991), the modern

ideal of authenticity arose from the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century. This view holds that each person has a unique way of being human and should strive to discover and live out this individuality, rather than conforming to externally imposed models from society, tradition, religion, or political authority (Taylor, *ibid*, pp. 28–29).

These impositions can vary in different contexts. For example, if you live in a very religious and conservative domain, the political and social authorities can impose on you the need to act within acceptable and suitable norms. The relevant authority can impose on you to act in a way that is justifiable in a given conservative domain, and this can be about how you dress, speak, and even with whom to marry. Different domains impose different models of imposition, and this can be linked to social positions such as gender, religion, class, and ethnicity.

In the modern world, any definition of authenticity can be complex and even deeply paradoxical, as stated by Moeller & D'Ambrosio. Authenticity can imply both originality and inoriginality since the authenticity is not fixed and it can be a kind of construction in a digitized world that can be defined by “reading novels, watching movies or hearing stories about authentic people” (Moeller & D'Ambrosia, *ibid.*, p. 40). This paradoxical aspect of authenticity needs to be kept in mind, as authenticity may not only be recognized by revealing the true self or discovering it, but also involves creating the relevant self. Nevertheless, what can be exempted from the concept of authenticity in relation to Romantic expressivism is its connection to one's own autonomous being to realize his or her own values and humanity, which has been emphasized by Taylor (1991) above. This humanity within authenticity can only be fulfilled by living and finding one's own; therefore, it is linked to autonomous being. Can we really become what we really are? This question is linked to the concept of authenticity and sincerity mentioned earlier, which poses a challenge to authenticity because sincerity ties us to external positions.

To understand the concept of authenticity as an autonomous being and follow the mentioned question, Casper David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (Friedrich, 1818), a particular example of Romantic period art, can be cited. This painting depicts a lone figure standing on a rocky precipice, gazing out over a sea of fog. The figure's posture and the vast, misty landscape convey a sense of individuality and self-discovery, aligning with Romantic expressivism and the concept of authenticity discussed earlier.

### Figure 1

*Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich (1818)



Above, in the painting, a figure of a man stands upon a rocky precipice, and his back is to the viewer. He seems to gaze at the landscape with a blurry image, and the viewer can see and feel the uncertainty of the cloudy and misty landscape through the trees and mountains. From this uncertainty of landscape, a man's figure is vivid and stunning within his existential position and authentic being. From the subject's way of dressing, one may infer their position, class, or nationality; nevertheless, since contemplation of the subject is prominent, it is not clearly defined by external positions such as religion, which can be interpreted as a self-discovery of the central figure in the painting. Therefore, the concept of authenticity has a double-sided aspect, as it involves both the discovery and revelation of oneself, and remains paradoxical. The concept of authenticity will be called again later. For now, let me refer to the concept of proficity, which is the third mode of identity.

When they first introduce the concept of proficity, Moeller & D'Ambrosio mention "proficity or profile-oriented identity or its role in shaping identity in orientation to profiles" (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2023, pp. 23-24). Proficity refers to a profile-oriented identity that can be characterized by following a specific profile. They state If the "age of authenticity" was characterized by the pursuit of an original self, then the present age may be characterized by the pursuit of a profile—it is an "age of proficity" (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2023, p. 41). The distinction between the concepts of authenticity and proficity is an existentialist question to consider. To understand this existentialist difference through art and media, the concept of proficity requires further elaboration.

The concept of proficity refers to creating profiles to reshape identity. Within the scope of this paper, it is linked to the influential German social system theorist Luhmann's concept of "second-order observation." Second-order Observation, or simply Observation of Observation or observer(s), is a prevalent concept, particularly considering the sharp shift in digital media. Luhmann (1998) describes the concept as follows:

The Observation of the observers—that is, a shift from a consciousness of reality to a description of descriptions, or the perception of what others say or do not say—has become the advanced mode of perceiving the world in modern society. This is true in all major functional domains, in academia as much as in the economy, in art as well as in politics. (p. 100)

Luhmann, who is not only considered a social system theorist but also one of the influential new media theorists, emphasized the functional differentiation that the modern era has experienced. The transition from first-order Observation to second-order Observation becomes relevant in consideration of the transition from the modern era to the digital era. To illustrate the differences between first-order and second-order observations, one might consider the evolution of photography. When a photographer takes a photo of someone walking on the street or a beautiful landscape, it is a first-order observation in terms of the relationship between the photographer and the person or landscape being photographed. Observation is made by the first-order.

Nevertheless, second-order Observation is different in terms of the relevant relational dynamics between the photographer or someone who takes the photo and someone or thing whose photo is taken. For example, suppose someone takes a photo of a landscape, and another person takes a photo of that person trying to take a photo. In that case, this can be called a second-order Observation because it involves the Observation of an Observation. Moeller and D'Ambrosio states, "In the mode of second-order observation, we look at the world (including ourselves) in

terms of how it appears in the observations of others.” In the mode of second-order, a different dynamic of Observation occurs, in which we are engaged with the Observation of Observation or the Observation of observed one (s). The first transition is about the change in Observation. The second transition is about existential difference, and this is linked to being and seeing. According to Moeller and D’Ambrosio, second-order Observation is more complex than first-order Observation because “one must observe something and at the same time think about how it will be observed. *In second-order observation, we orient ourselves to the world (including ourselves) as it is seen by others*” (Moeller & D’Ambrosio, 2023, p. 42). Within the second-order Observation, the impression is kept with multi-layers of Observation, including the relation between seeing and being. Moeller & D’Ambrosio mention this as second-order following social media.

Influencers or academics can be some of the examples for this. Alternatively, even artists nowadays can be included in this.

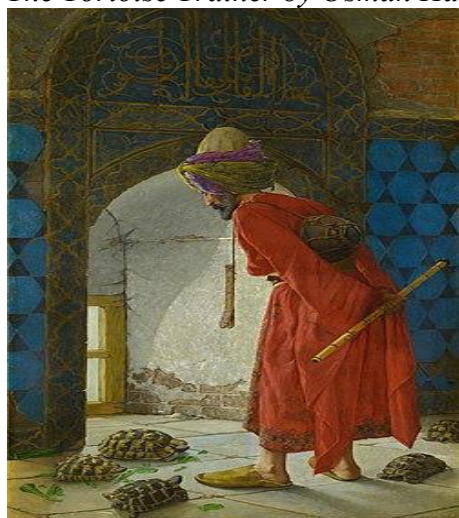
Observation becomes a path, a habit, a routine, dependent on a ‘feed’ on the web (which is less static than a ‘site’), constantly extending further into the future, always leading followers, always anticipating. Observation turns into a dynamic relation between seeing and being, and something is seen as being followed, and then the followers are being followed.

This kind of anticipation comes with a burden. Sincerity and authenticity seem to be lost in a digital world where numbers and algorithms are prioritized over human connection. If seeing is such a profound experience in the digital world, what happens to authenticity in art? This question is complicated, but it is still on the right track.

### **Authenticity in Pre-digital and Post-digital Art**

The concept of authenticity pertains to genuine reflections and expressions of one's true self. In this section, I argue that pre-digital art maintains a higher level of originality across different degrees of observation. The first aspect relates to first-order observation, while the second addresses second-order observation. In contrast, post-digital art struggles to preserve authenticity to the same extent as pre-digital art. This is because pre-digital art captures the essence of characters in a manner that suggests an infinite chain of interpretations.

In contrast, post-digital art reflects authenticity in a more confined manner. This distinction raises an important question: What is third-order observation, and how does it relate to authenticity? To answer this, we must first clarify the differences between pre-digital and post-digital art in terms of their evaluative frameworks, supported by relevant examples.

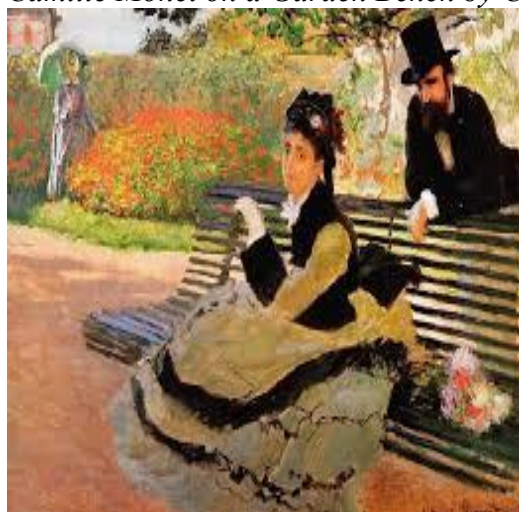
**Figure 2***The Tortoise Trainer by Osman Hamdi Bey (1906)*

The Tortoise Trainer (Turkish: *Kaplumbağa Terbiyecisi*) is a captivating painting by the renowned artist Osman Hamdi Bey (1906). This work vividly portrays an anachronistic character—a traditional Ottoman figure striving to train tortoises—and is commonly interpreted as a poignant satire on the sluggish and often ineffective attempts at reforming the Ottoman Empire during that era. The first version of the painting debuted at the Grand Palais in the prestigious 1906 Paris Salon, where it was showcased under the evocative title *L'homme aux Tortues* (Osman Hamdi Bey, 1906, *The Tortoise Trainer*). In this intricately detailed painting, an older man is depicted wearing a rich, traditional Ottoman costume that reflects the cultural heritage of the time. However, he is also influenced by the Western styles emerging from the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-19th century, which aimed to modernize the empire. The man holds a flute, seemingly attempting to direct the tortoises, who are far more interested in the soft, green leaves around them than in his musical coaxing. *The Tortoise Trainer* exemplifies the concept of first-order observation, where the main character engages in direct observation of the tortoises. One distinct and striking feature of this painting lies in its representation of first-order observation as a powerful lens through which to view pre-digital art. The character's perspective acts as the primary and singular vantage point, creating a unique connection between the observer and the observed. Additionally, the painting immerses viewers in ambiguity, revealing a sense of uncertainty through the older man's gaze. Both *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* and *The Tortoise Trainer* share this intriguing aspect, depicting characters who confront a kind of obscurity that invites deeper contemplation within the realm of first-order observation.

### Second-Order Observation in Art

Second-order observation, as previously introduced, refers to the act of observing observers or the meta-cognitive process of observing oneself. It is more frequently associated with post-digital media; however, this concept also finds relevance in pre-digital art. For instance, in Claude Monet's enchanting *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* (1873), the viewer is drawn into a reflective moment, capturing not only the subject but also the experience of observation. Similarly, La Robotte's innovative digital artwork *Janvier L'attente* (2001) explores the nuanced layers of perception and awareness, further exemplifying the rich tapestry of second-order observation in both historical and contemporary contexts.



**Figure 3***Camille Monet on a Garden Bench by Claude Monet (1873)*

*Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* is a stunning example of Monet's art and Impressionism. The painting depicts Monet's wife sitting on a garden bench within a strong harmony of lights, colors, and elements surrounding her. Monet's wife, Camille Doncieux, is as easily recognizable as the mounds of geraniums in the garden of the couple's rented house in Argenteuil. One of the explanations about the painting is as follows: "Painted the year Camille's father died, she telegraphs sadness while holding a note in her gloved hand. The top-hatted gentleman, later identified as a neighbor, has perhaps called to offer his condolences and a consoling bouquet" (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.).

Though the exact story behind the painting can be definitely known, one thing is clear: Monet's art reveals a profound observation of his environment, and this is why "Camille Monet on a Garden Bench" is chosen in the scope of this paper. Camille depicts a strong version of second-order observation, which is characteristic of pre-digital art. Relevantly, the way Camille looks at the Monet seems to enlighten the concept of second-order observation in pre-digital art in relation to the observation of the observer. Monet, as the painter, can be considered the one observing the observer, who is Camille. In other words, the second dimension of the observation comes to the stage, which is about the observation of the observer. While Monet observes Camille, Camille somehow seems to be engaged with how she is being observed, and she calmly or sadly gazes at Monet. Within the second-order observation, Monet is the one who observes the other, through which Camille turns into an observer spontaneously. This spontaneous observation highlights a different layer of second-order observation that should not be overlooked in art and media studies. What makes *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* a unique example is its authentic aspect, in which Camille seems to observe the observer, or, in other words, Monet observes the observer. This unique character of the art raises the concept of second-order observation, which is not only linked to post-digital art but also to pre-digital art, and the concept of third-order observation accompanies it. The concept of third-order observation will be elaborated in terms of *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* soon.

Before this, another example to represent second-order observation in art, and how second-order observation has transformed from pre-digital art into post-digital art, is La Robotte's digital artwork titled *Janvier L'attente* (La Robotte, *Janvier L'attente* in *Artsper Magazine*, 2001). Digital artwork *Janvier L'attente* (La Robotte, 2001) represents a free digital style by

the lesser-known artist La Robotte. In *Janvier L'attente*, La Robotte (2001) applies imaginary forms and scientific exploration through contemporary digital art. This is stated as follows:

**Figure 4**

*Janvier L'attente* by La Robotte (2001)



This digital artwork presents three women and two dogs, all gazing toward the painter. With its surreal and scientific precision, the piece exemplifies the concept of second-order observation in digital art, exploring how observers and the observed interact in contemporary visual culture.

Whether it is digital work, 2D animation, or paintings, the artist La Robotte gives us an eyeful with each new creation. Very intense, her work gambols between the worlds of natural science and the world of the imaginary. Thanks to an artistic technique of scientific precision, she offers spectators a dreamlike journey, one that transcends reality. If La Robotte brings so much to contemporary digital art, it is because of an incredibly dualistic and surrealist approach. Anchored in a very concrete life yet floating in a miraculous universe, her creations are breathtaking. (Halconrui, 2022)

The artwork *Janvier L'attente* (La Robotte, 2001) serves as an example of second-order observation in digital art. According to Halconrui (2022), La Robotte's work gambols between natural science and the world of the imaginary, offering spectators a dreamlike journey that transcends reality. The scene, where three women and two dogs gaze at the painter, seems to be from an imaginary world. This gaze, which encompasses the concept of observing the observer and how observers are observed in turn, is a key aspect of second-order observation. The woman in pink, with her harmonious gesture and contemplative smoking, seems to be engaged in this observation and her own appearance. La Robotte's digital painting is just one instance of digital art in relation to second-order observation, and the examples can be numerous depending on the application of the concept. However, the concept of authenticity in second-order observation in the context of digital art remains ambiguous and this needs to be further explored.

Monet's *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* holds a specific position for authenticity and third-order observation. This work has significantly impacted the evaluation of third-order observation and its relationship with authenticity. Within the scope of the paper, *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* possesses the most profound character of authenticity, as it incorporates a strong version of analog and observational elements. By this, it is meant that a substantial and

plural number of observations by the observer can play a role in evaluating and reshaping authenticity. *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* leaves us with one of the strongest versions of authenticity. If carefully examined, the gentleman, defined as a neighbor by Monet, later, perhaps one who had called to offer his condolences and a consoling bouquet, observes Camille and how she feels being observed (See Figure 3).

### Concluding Remarks

The gentleman in *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* is relevant to another aspect of observational evaluation, which is often overlooked in studies, and it is third-order observation. Third-order observation, a concept that means the observation of the observer's observation, is exemplified in the gentleman's observation of Camille. This form of observation is directly linked to authenticity, which is substantive and reveals the original position of the self. Revealing the self within the other self, like in the example of the gentleman's observation of Camille, opens the third-order observation in relation to authenticity. Authenticity can be satisfied by revealing the self within the other self; therefore, the third-order observation's authentic character is based on its communicative function with the other self. This matters for the social evolution of observation because the gentleman's observation transcends traditional constructivism, which can be associated with single- or first-order observation and communication with the external world. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* and *The Tortoise Trainer* are examples of first-order observation in traditional constructivism, and they also exhibit authentic character; nevertheless, they are not as strong as in third-order observation. Here, the paper's main question needs to be recalled: What does an authenticity-oriented approach to communication and art look like? One possible response would be that more extensive and analog observations need to be explored for future studies. This is not only relevant to authenticity and its relation to the “seeing is being” theme discussed earlier by Moeller & D'Ambrosia, but also its limitation with first-order observation.

The paper's primary motivation is rooted in the question: “How did the Social Evolution of Order Observation Evolve Through Time?” To illustrate this, examples from art history are presented to explain the complexity of the authenticity-oriented approach. This approach is not easily defined, as one specific definition would negate the others. However, the gentleman *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* opens up a more expansive room for authenticity. It's important to note that authenticity can be maintained, even with an infinite number of observations, and it is not sufficiently found in digital art. The paper does not claim that social evolution or order observation has not evolved, but rather that it has lost its authentic character. One of the internal criticisms of this paper is as follows: Many studies overlook the infinite character of order observation, including third-order observation in pre-digital art. An authenticity-oriented approach to art can address this. By this approach, unique aspects of characters and the way characters reveal themselves within different layers of observation can be made visible. The social evolution of order observation unfolds across different layers over time, and this is due to the (in)finite characteristics of order observation hidden in art. One of the outputs of this research is to highlight the (in) finite characters of analog and observational art in different periods throughout art history, and how they transform from pre-digital art to post-digital art. The details about differences between analog and observational art are intentionally left blank for future studies in communication and art.

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## Global Threads: The Influence of British Calicos on Traditional Kalamkari Textile

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### Abstract

This study examines the historical development of Indian Kalamkari, a traditional hand-painted and dyed textile art form, in the context of British colonial trade. Rooted in religious and cultural narratives, Kalamkari once portrayed Indian Hindu mythological and spiritual scenes from epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (Divakala & Vasantha, 2014). However, European market demands during the colonial period initiated a transformation in Kalamkari in its surface design print direction, favoring floral and geometric motifs in its historically rooted narrative compositions. These adaptations gave rise to what is now commonly known as calico, a printed cotton fabric tailored for export, marking a crucial turning point in the evolution of Indian textiles. To trace these shifts, this research adopts a two-method framework of comparative visual analysis supported by surface design observation in liaison with the tracing of historical texts and documentation. By examining the colonial-era calicos and Kalamkari prints, the study identifies compositional and iconographic modifications that reveal how colonial aesthetics displaced indigenous narrative structures. The analysis demonstrates that while the craft's technical processes endured, its narrative essence was gradually replaced by decorative repetition. The findings from this research indicate that many contemporary artisans, often unknowingly, reproduce surface designs derived from colonial calico templates. This continuity reflects an enduring legacy of cultural erasure, in which colonial design values persist in modern craft production. By uncovering these transformations, the study emphasizes the importance of educating towards Kalamkari's narrative integrity and recognizing the colonial residues embedded within its current visual identity.

*Keywords:* Kalamkari, textiles, calicos, surface design, cultural continuity

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## Introduction

Kalamkari, derived from the Persian words *kalam* (pen) and *kari* (craftsmanship), is one of India's most storied textile traditions (Chandra, 2015). Practiced for centuries in the southern regions of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, Kalamkari production embodies a unique blend of artistry, spirituality, and cultural storytelling. Historically, artisans used bamboo or palm pens to sketch intricate designs on cotton cloth, applying natural dyes in meticulous layers to bring mythological scenes to life (Chandra, 2015). These textiles, especially those created in the Srikalahasti style of kalamkari, use freehand drawing (with a *kalam*, or bamboo pen) and multiple layers of natural dyes to depict mythological scenes. Originating in the temple town of Srikalahasti in Andhra Pradesh, this hand-painted form contrasts with the block-printed Machilipatnam tradition (Chandra, 2015; Sengupta, 2013). The Srikalahasti style served as a visual scripture, illustrating episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India that narrate moral, philosophical, and mythological tales central to Hindu culture (Dehejia, 1997; Michell, 1989). Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these textiles played an essential role in Hindu temple rituals and communal religious practices in South India, particularly within the Shaivite temples of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. They were used as temple hangings, narrative scrolls, and chariot banners depicting episodes from Hindu epics and Puranas, thereby transforming cloth into a sacred medium of devotion and instruction (Dehejia, 1997; Divakala & Vasantha, 2014).

However, this narrative tradition did not remain untouched by external influences that reshaped its production and purpose. With the arrival of British traders in the seventeenth century, Kalamkari entered the global arena of commerce and underwent profound transformations (Gächter, 2009). As the British East India Company expanded control over Indian textile exports, artisans adapted their printed surface designs to satisfy European tastes (Gupta, 2009a). Floral, geometric, and symmetrical motifs replaced traditional depictions of gods, epics, and moral parables (Lemire, 2003). These adaptations marked the rise of calicos, a new identity for Indian cotton textiles that prioritized decorative appeal and commercial viability over cultural meaning (Douglas, 1969). What was once sacred narrative art became commodified fabric, stripped of its original spiritual resonance.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the historical trajectory of Kalamkari under British colonial influence and to investigate how these colonial transformations continue to shape contemporary perceptions of the textile art form. This research asks: how did British colonial trade practices alter Kalamkari, and what are the lasting effects of these transformations on artisans, designs, and modern audiences?

This question is significant for two reasons. First, it highlights the process of cultural erasure, showing how colonial trade redefined indigenous artistic traditions to serve foreign markets. Second, it reveals how these historical interventions remain embedded in current practice. Many artisans and designers today unknowingly reproduce colonial-era calico motifs, unaware of their departure from traditional storytelling roots (Chamarty, 2024). The persistence of these patterns highlights the enduring cultural legacy of colonialism, prompting urgent questions about authenticity, preservation, and cultural identity.

Beyond reconstructing how Kalamkari was transformed under colonial pressures, this study emphasizes why these questions matter today. The persistence of floral and geometric repeats introduced for colonial export has led to a widespread conflation of calico aesthetics with indigenous tradition, resulting in cultural erasure that obscures Kalamkari's origins as a sacred

narrative art (Hows, 2020). By explicitly distinguishing between narrative Srikalahasti cloths and calico-derived repeats, this research supports artisans' creative agency, strengthens educational and archival efforts, and equips consumers and institutions with the knowledge needed to recognize and value Kalamkari as a living heritage with both spiritual and artistic dimensions. In this way, the study positions itself not only as a historical analysis but also as an act of cultural recognition and education.

To address these aims, the paper focuses solely on the printed visual surface of textiles and employs a comparative visual analysis, supported by surface design observation, that links historical evidence to contemporary practice.

## **Literature Review**

### **Origins and Traditional Practices**

Kalamkari, rooted in the Persian terms *kalam* (pen) and *kari* (craft), has historically been more than simply a decorative textile tradition. Its original narrative-driven imagery depicted episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata Hindu holy scriptures that chronicle divine and moral narratives central to Indian culture, serving as a sacred form of storytelling for temple rituals and community gatherings (Dehejia, 1997; Ramabadran, 2016). The Kalamkari surface decoration process was highly labour-intensive, involving the pre-treatment of cotton cloth with organic mordant and milk solutions, the freehand drawing of outlines using bamboo or palm pens, and the application of natural dyes in carefully controlled layers. The result was both durable and deeply symbolic, with motifs representing gods, epics, and cosmic principles (Rani, 2021).

Within this larger tradition, two primary stylistic schools developed: Srikalahasti and Masulipatnam. The Srikalahasti style relied on freehand drawing, enabling intricate depictions of mythological narratives directly on cloth (British Museum, 2010). These textiles were primarily linked with temple settings, where they acted as visual scriptures and devotional tools (Divakala & Muthian, 2017b). The Masulipatnam style, by contrast, employed block-printing techniques influenced by Persian aesthetics (Kalamkari Rumal, 1640). Its repeating floral and geometric motifs lent themselves to trade, as designs could be easily reproduced for commercial use (Ghosh, 2018). Museum collections illustrate this divide clearly. A Late 19th-early 20th century kalamkari hanging: A large textile featuring Vishnu and scenes from the *Mahabharata* in a comic strip format housed at the British Museum depicts epic narratives in layered detail, while a contemporaneous Kalamkari Masulipatnam rumal (1640-50) at the version housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art features stylized vines and floral repeats, reflecting Kalamkari's adaptability to foreign markets (British Museum, 2010; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.).

The coexistence of these two traditions demonstrates the dual nature of Kalamkari: as both a sacred, narrative art and a commercial product. This tension between devotion and commerce laid the groundwork for how colonial forces later transformed the craft (Interwoven Globe, 2023).

### **The East India Company and Colonial Restructuring**

The establishment of the British East India Company in the early seventeenth century marked a profound turning point for Indian textiles, including Kalamkari. With its monopoly over trade



in the subcontinent, the East India Company prioritized exports to Britain and Europe, reshaping production to align with foreign tastes (Douglas, 1969).

As demand grew, artisans were pressured to simplify complex mythological designs in favor of symmetrical, decorative motifs such as floral borders and repeating geometric patterns. (Rani, 2021). Large-scale production centers were established to meet export quotas, often under exploitative conditions. Skilled artisans who had once worked in temple settings or small workshops were forced into regimented labor structures (Watt, 2016). The emphasis shifted from artistry and spirituality to uniformity and speed. While the Srialahasti style suffered marginalization due to its narrative complexity, the Masulipatnam style gained prominence, as its block-printed motifs were easier to standardize for trade (Lemire, 2003).

The economic effects were equally devastating. While Britain reaped immense profits from the booming textile trade, Indian artisans were left with declining local markets and exploitative wages (Watt, 2016). The East India Company's policies redirected local economies toward export, leaving artisans dependent on foreign demand while stripping away the cultural depth of their craft (Gupta, 2009b).

### **Calicos in Britain: Fashion, Domesticity, and Influence**

The British reception of calico underscores how deeply Indian textiles penetrated European culture. Calico, derived from the city of Calicut (now Kozhikode) in Kerala, India, quickly became a staple of British fashion and domestic life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The term was used by the British to describe the printed and painted cotton fabrics imported from India (Riello, 2010; Thomas, 1924). Lightweight, versatile, and vividly patterned, these cotton fabrics were accessible across social strata (Sengupta, 2019). Initially hand-painted or block-printed, calicos adapted Indian artistry to align with European preferences for symmetry and repetition (Baines, 2002).

Influential figures accelerated their popularity. Queen Charlotte of Great Britain (1744–1818), the wife of King George III, embraced printed cotton fabrics, giving calico royal endorsement and making it fashionable in aristocratic circles (Smith, 2007). Jane Austen's novels, which often referenced the everyday use of calico dresses, embedded the fabric into the literary imagination of Britain's middle class (Fennetaux, 2018). Dorothy Wordsworth's journals, written between 1798 and 1820, provide further evidence of calico's ubiquity in daily life, documenting its presence in household wardrobes and interiors (Fennetaux, 2018). Collectively, these examples illustrate calico's versatility as both a fashionable and practical material.

The immense popularity of calicos created friction with domestic textile industries. The Calico Acts of the early eighteenth century attempted to restrict the importation and use of Indian printed cottons to protect Britain's silk and wool markets (Eacott, 2012). Ironically, these restrictions only underscored calico's desirability, prompting local industrialists to replicate Indian designs through mechanized processes (Baines, 2002). This transition signaled a broader cultural and economic shift: the gradual replacement of artisanal Indian textiles by British industrial production, which both commodified and overshadowed traditional craftsmanship.

## Cultural Erasure and Colonial Legacy

The transformation of Kalamkari into calicos during colonial rule represented not only economic exploitation but also cultural dilution. The deeply symbolic and narrative-driven textiles of the Srikalahasti tradition were supplanted by decorative motifs devoid of spiritual content (Ramabadran, 2016). What had once been visual scriptures telling the stories of gods and heroes was reduced to fashionable cloth designed for foreign consumption (Khare, 2021).

This shift exemplifies a broader colonial pattern in which indigenous cultural practices were commodified to serve imperial economic interests (Divakala & Vasantha, 2014). The long-term consequences of this transformation are evident in contemporary design. Believing these motifs to be authentic, they inadvertently replicate calico aesthetics while marginalizing mythological storytelling. For example, designers who claim fidelity to Kalamkari often focus on floral repeats or simplified geometric structures, unaware of their colonial origins (Iftikhar & Tariq, 2024). The result is a subtle yet pervasive form of cultural erasure, where colonial influences are naturalized and traditional practices are forgotten.

Another challenge lies in the limited documentation of pre-colonial Kalamkari. Unlike other Indian art forms that benefited from textual or visual archiving, much of Kalamkari's early repertoire was passed down orally or through practice (Ghosh, 2018). This lack of documentation has made it difficult to reconstruct its full narrative richness, leaving artisans vulnerable to reproducing colonial patterns under the guise of tradition.

Economic pressures further compound these cultural challenges. In today's globalized textile markets, mass-produced fabrics often overshadow handcrafted Kalamkari, which is more labor-intensive and expensive. To remain viable, artisans frequently adapt to market tastes, which favor simplified decorative designs reminiscent of colonial calicos (Sengupta, 2021). This creates a cycle where colonial adaptations persist not only through historical legacy but also through present-day economic necessity.

The reviewed literature highlights four essential points. First, the dual traditions of Srikalahasti and Masulipatnam illustrate Kalamkari's origins as both a sacred and commercial practice. Second, the East India Company reoriented production toward export, privileging simplified motifs over mythological storytelling. Third, the reception of calicos in Britain underscores how Indian textiles reshaped European culture while simultaneously marginalizing Indian artisans. Finally, the legacy of colonial adaptations continues to shape contemporary design practices, as artisans unknowingly perpetuate motifs introduced during colonial rule.

## Methodology

This study adopts a focused qualitative framework, grounded in comparative visual analysis and surface design observation, to examine the transformation of Kalamkari's printed surface designs across three key periods: pre-colonial narrative practice, colonial adaptation into calicos, and contemporary reinterpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017).

The first phase involved surface design observation, in which historical and contemporary Kalamkari textiles were closely studied through high-resolution images, museum archives, and published catalogues. The observation focused on identifying the visual characteristics of printed surfaces, including motif construction, compositional layout, color palette, and stylistic execution. Particular attention was given to detecting the transition from asymmetrical

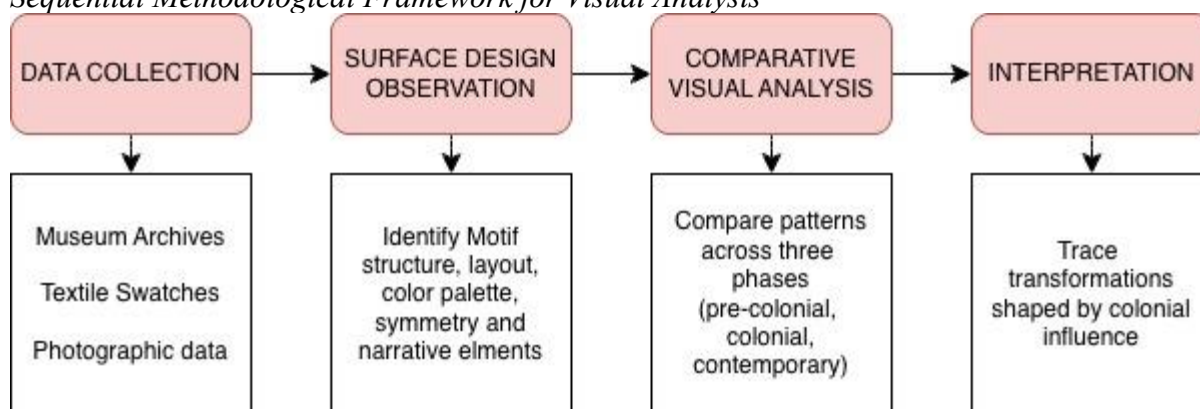
narrative compositions characteristic of Srikalahasti to the modular repeats and symmetrical layouts that became prominent during the colonial period. This stage provided the descriptive foundation for a structured comparative analysis.

The comparative visual analysis systematically compared printed surface designs from three chronological and stylistic categories. First: pre-colonial narrative cloths from the Srikalahasti tradition characterized by hand-drawn mythological scenes and sacred storytelling; second: colonial-era calicos that display floral and geometric repeats developed for European markets; and third: contemporary Kalamkari prints that often merge or misinterpret colonial and traditional motifs. Each textile was analyzed through a visual rubric encompassing five parameters: composition, iconography, line and contour, color scheme, and border treatment. Through this lens, the study identified formal and aesthetic continuities across time, revealing how colonial export aesthetics reshaped the visual identity of Kalamkari and how these motifs persist in present day.

Particular attention was given to detecting the transition from asymmetrical narrative compositions characteristic of Srikalahasti to the modular repeats and symmetrical layouts that became prominent during the colonial period. This stage provided the descriptive foundation for a structured comparative analysis. The overall methodological flow of this research, which begins with surface design observation and proceeds to comparative visual analysis, is summarized in Figure 1. This infographic visually maps how each phase builds upon the previous one to trace transformations across historical periods.

**Figure 1**

*Sequential Methodological Framework for Visual Analysis*



## Sampling and Documentation

Sampling followed a purposive strategy designed to capture stylistic and chronological diversity. Fifty-two Kalamkari samples and forty-five calico textiles were examined in total as seen in Tables 1 and 2, located in the Appendix section. The dataset included museum collections, archival imagery, and physical swatches sourced from textile stores in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India (British Museum, 2010, Kalamkari Rupal, 1640). The selection ensured representation of both temple-based narrative cloths and export-oriented printed cottons. Each sample was photographed and catalogued with descriptive notes on motif structure, color scheme, and compositional arrangement, symbolic theme and technique to ensure analytical consistency and transparency. Patterns emerging from this dataset were then cross-referenced to trace recurring motifs, formal parallels, and aesthetic transformations across the three chronological phases (see Table 3, included below). This process allowed the

comparative visual analysis to move beyond stylistic observation toward identifying, more profound structural continuities and disruptions shaped by colonial influence.

**Table 1**

*Visual Analysis of Kalamkari Samples*

Sample ID	Motif Structure	Color Scheme	Compositional Arrangement	Symbolic Theme	Technique/ Material Notes
S1	Floral lattice with central deity	Indigo, madder, alum mordant	Symmetrical temple panel	Divine protection	Hand-painted, natural dye
S2	Mythological scene (Ramayana)	Iron-black outlines, vegetable dyes	Narrative scroll	Devotion and moral virtue	Kalam on cotton
S3	Stylized floral repeats	Red, yellow, blue	Export pattern	Adaptation for trade	Hybrid natural/chemical dyes
S4	Cosmic mandala	Earth tones with contrast borders	Circular composition	Creation and order	Late 19th c. Srikalahasti

Recognizing the colonial history of many museum collections, interpretive caution was applied to acknowledge curatorial bias and the potential overrepresentation of export pieces. The study privileges the visual surface as both evidence and argument, using design comparison as a decolonial strategy that reveals how colonial taste redefined indigenous aesthetics. Access to pre-colonial Kalamkari remains limited, as surviving examples are primarily housed in colonial-era institutions. Nevertheless, by centering its analysis on visual evidence rather than oral or material data, the study mitigates interpretive bias and remains focused on identifying stylistic shifts within printed surface design.

This refined methodological approach enables a deeper understanding of how British colonial trade aesthetics displaced the narrative functions of Kalamkari, transforming it from sacred storytelling into a decorative commodity. It also provides a replicable model for future textile scholarship focused on visual transformations within postcolonial contexts.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a layered transformation of Kalamkari, beginning with its pre-colonial roots as a sacred narrative textile and culminating in its contemporary practice shaped by colonial trade aesthetics. Drawing from surface design observation and comparative visual analysis, three major themes emerge: the dilution of mythological storytelling into decorative motifs, the privileging of block-printed Masulipatnam designs over pen-drawn Srikalahasti cloths, and the enduring presence of colonial aesthetics in modern Kalamkari. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that British colonial influence not only disrupted but also permanently redefined the visual and cultural identity of the craft.

## Transformation of Narrative Into Ornament

A visual comparison of these historical textiles shows a clear shift from narrative compositions to ornamental repetition. Traditional Srikalahasti textiles depict scenes from the holy Hindu scriptures, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in asymmetrical, story-driven layouts filled with layered figures, symbolic color use, and spatial rhythm (Modi, 2024). These cloths functioned as visual scriptures, guiding religious storytelling and temple performance. In contrast, the Masulipatnam block-printed samples, particularly those produced under colonial trade, emphasize floral vines, rosettes, and repeating geometries (Chamarty, 2024). The transformation from sacred story to surface decoration marks the displacement of narrative meaning by pattern repetition.

The comparative analysis shows that the British East India Company accelerated this transition. Export demand required designs that could be standardized and quickly reproduced, leading artisans to replace figural compositions with modular floral patterns. This was not a neutral change in style but a realignment of purpose: Kalamkari shifted from a communicative medium of devotion to an object of visual consumption.

## Colonial Restructuring of Production

Surface design observation also revealed material and technical changes accompanying this aesthetic shift. Traditional Kalamkari used natural dyes such as indigo, madder, and myrobalan to create layered tonal depth. Under colonial influence, artisans increasingly adopted block printing and synthetic dyes to meet export quotas. Archival images of Company workshops depict hierarchical production structures where repetition and uniformity replaced individuality and spiritual authorship (Interwoven Globe, 2023).

This restructuring marginalized the Srikalahasti narrative tradition, which could not easily conform to mass production, while elevating the Masulipatnam style that aligned with the demands of the export market. The result was a fundamental transformation of Kalamkari from a sacred textile to standardized commodity.

## Calicos in Britain: Adoption and Popularity

Analysis of surviving calico samples, as seen in tables 1 and 2 from the British and European museums, confirms how Indian motifs were adapted into Western fashion and domestic use (British Museum, 2010). The visual record shows consistent simplification and repetition of motifs suited for mass appeal. These patterns, originating in Indian craftsmanship, became key references for early industrial printing in Britain.

The widespread presence of calicos in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain is evident across both visual and literary records. Queen Charlotte's portraits, Jane Austen's novels, and Dorothy Wordsworth's journals all point to calico's integration into everyday life. These fabrics embodied modernity and refinement for European consumers, yet their popularity obscured the colonial hierarchies that produced them. Calico thus became a site where Indian artistry was aestheticized but detached from its cultural and spiritual context.

## **Persistence of Colonial Aesthetics in Contemporary Practice**

The comparative analysis of contemporary Kalamkari textiles sourced from India, the United Kingdom, and the United States revealed the endurance of colonial-era motifs. Many recent samples display floral and geometric repeats nearly identical to those documented in eighteenth-century calicos. Only a small number of modern pieces preserve figural, or narrative imagery linked to the Srikalahasti tradition.

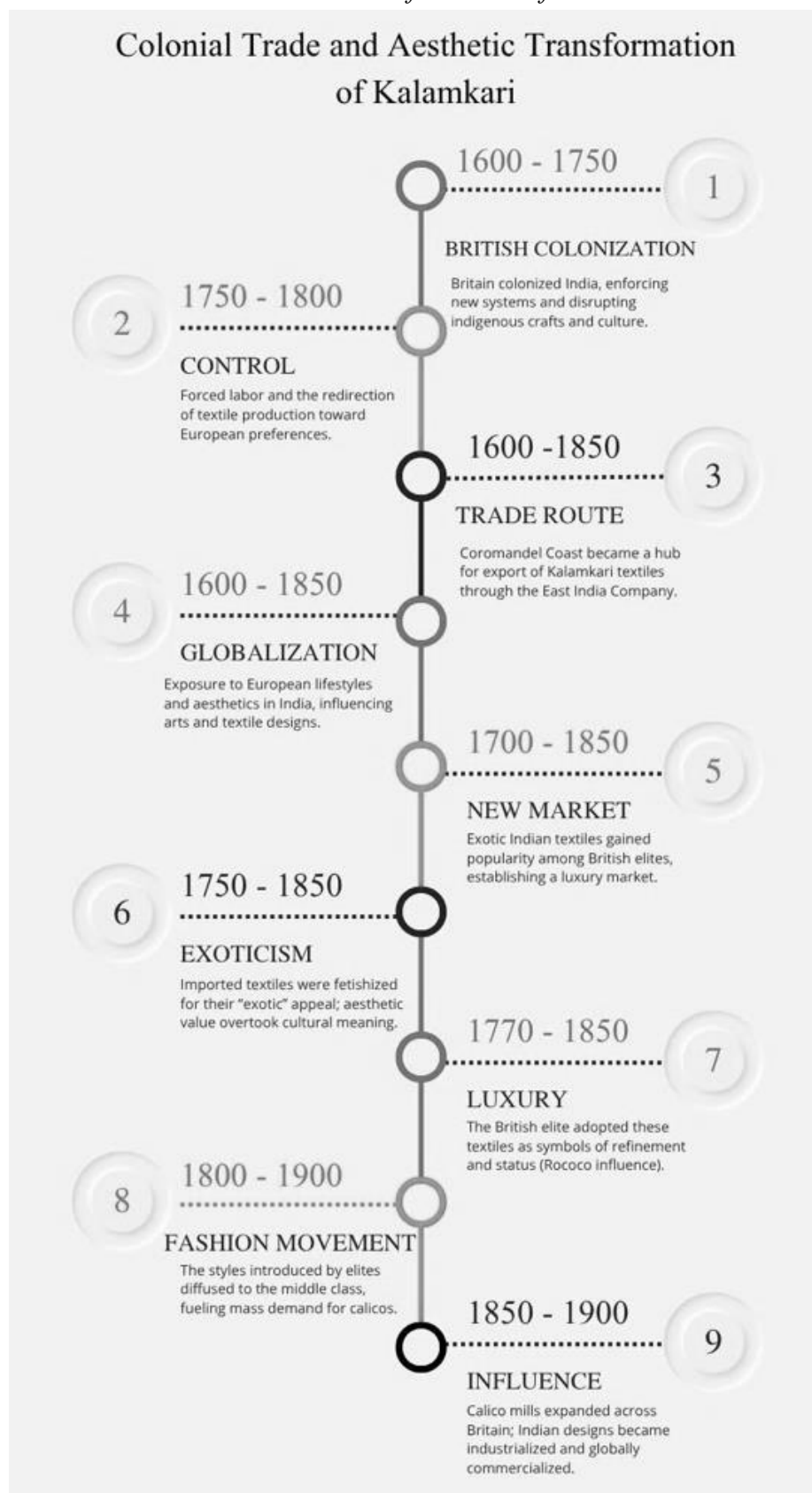
This continuity demonstrates that colonial design values, which are symmetry, repetition, and decorative neutrality, remain embedded within present-day practice. The persistence of these visual patterns underscores the long-term impact of colonial design interventions and highlights the importance of educational engagement in tracing their origins. Recognizing these motifs as colonial inheritances allows scholars, educators, and consumers to read the surface design of Kalamkari with greater historical awareness and interpretive accuracy.

## **The Role of Education and Critical Awareness**

The significance of these findings lies in their potential to reshape how Kalamkari is taught, curated, and understood. This research emphasizes the need for educational frameworks that reveal the colonial imprint on the visual language of Kalamkari. When students, designers, and consumers learn to identify the differences between narrative compositions and colonial calico repeats, they gain tools to distinguish adaptation from authenticity. Such awareness has broader implications for textile education and cultural interpretation. By tracing how colonial trade aesthetics displaced indigenous storytelling, educators can frame Kalamkari not only as an artistic tradition but also as a historical document of cross-cultural exchange, power, and redefinition. Through this lens, understanding becomes an act of preservation, ensuring that the visual legacies of colonialism are acknowledged rather than unknowingly perpetuated.

## **Implications**

The implications of this study extend to both education and cultural literacy. First, the findings invite a re-evaluation of how Kalamkari is represented within art history curricula, museum exhibitions, and design education. Presenting it solely as a decorative textile obscures its narrative and spiritual dimensions; acknowledging its colonial transformation, however, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of its evolution.

**Figure 2***Colonial Trade and Aesthetic Transformation of Kalamkari*

Second, the study highlights the importance of teaching visual literacy within design education. By learning to identify the characteristics of colonial calico aesthetics that are symmetry, repetition, and decorative neutrality, students and practitioners can engage critically with inherited design traditions. This approach moves beyond celebration to contextual understanding, fostering design practices that are historically informed and culturally responsible.

Finally, these insights contribute to decolonial education by positioning Kalamkari as a case study in how art and commerce intersect under empire, as shown below in the Figure 2. Recognizing its layered history encourages ongoing dialogue between historians, educators, and artisans, ensuring that the craft's visual language continues to be studied, taught, and interpreted with clarity and respect.

### **Limitations**

This research acknowledges certain limitations that shape its scope and findings. Access to pre-colonial Kalamkari textiles remains limited, as surviving examples are primarily preserved within museum collections established during the colonial period. These holdings may overrepresent export-oriented pieces while underrepresenting domestic or ritual cloths. The visual comparisons, therefore, rely on available documentation, catalogues, and high-resolution imagery rather than direct access to every extant sample.

Another limitation concerns the interpretive focus on visual and compositional features. While this approach provides clarity in tracing formal transformations, it does not account for the intangible cultural dimensions of Kalamkari practice, such as ritual use or oral transmission. Future research may integrate technical dye studies, regional ethnographic work, or digital pattern analysis to expand this foundation.

Despite these constraints, the study's emphasis on comparative visual analysis provides a consistent, replicable framework. By centering on the observable transformation of printed surface designs, it contributes valuable insight into how colonial aesthetics became naturalized within Kalamkari. It establishes a foundation for further educational and curatorial research on textile heritage.

### **Conclusion**

This study traced the visual transformation of Kalamkari from its pre-colonial origins as a sacred narrative textile to its colonial adaptation into calicos and its continued reinterpretation in contemporary practice. Through comparative visual analysis and surface design observation, it was demonstrated that British colonial trade fundamentally restructured Kalamkari's printed surface designs, replacing narrative storytelling with ornamental repetition and aligning production with European market demands.

The findings show that colonial aesthetics marked by symmetry, standardization, and decorative neutrality became deeply embedded within the visual language of Kalamkari. This transformation extended beyond form to meaning, shifting the textile's role from a medium of religious narrative to a product of global commerce. The survival of these motifs in present-day Kalamkari reveals how colonial influence persists visually and conceptually, often mistaken for authentic tradition. Understanding how colonial systems shaped Kalamkari's design vocabulary enables a more informed interpretation of its visual history. By



distinguishing between sacred narrative structures and colonial export aesthetics, educators, researchers, and consumers can engage with the textile not only as an art form but also as a document of cultural negotiation.

Kalamkari becomes a vital educational resource one that teaches how visual traditions can embody complex histories of adaptation, resistance, and redefinition. Recognizing these layered influences allows the craft to be valued for its aesthetic richness and its role in revealing the intersections of art, culture, and colonial history.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The authors declare that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, rephrasing applications were used solely for proofreading and refining the language of this manuscript. Additionally, Gemini was used to rephrase tabular headings and organize the structure of visual elements for clarified reading. Their use was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for clarity and accuracy. Apart from the above-mentioned tools, no other generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used to generate or alter the manuscript's content. All ideas, research design, methodologies, findings, analyses, and discussions presented in this paper are the original work of the authors, derived from the careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Kalamkari Textiles Samples*

KALAMKARI TEXTILE SAMPLES			
ITEM	NAME	LOCATION	STYLE
1	Visnu lying on the serpent Ananta	The British Museum	Srikalahasti
2	The Kalamkari Rumal	The Met Museum	Masulipatnam
3	Hanging, 18 <sup>th</sup> century	The Met Museum	Masulipatnam
4	Forms of Vishnu, c.1900	Harvard Art Museum	Srikalahasti
5	Textile, Canopy - Dasaravatara	The British Museum	Srikalahasti
6	Wall Hanging, prayer Mat, AD.1789	MFA Boston	Masulipatnam
7	Kalamkari Panel with Niche, c.1700	The Met Museum	Masulipatnam
8	Temple Cloth, c.1900	Victoria & Albert Museum	Srikalahasti
9	Rama and Sita	University of Manchester	Srikalahasti
10	Mat (Kalamkari), c.1700	RISD Museum	Masulipatnam
11	Scenes from a South Indian Court	ROM Museum	Srikalahasti
12	Tree of Life, c.1850s	Kalamkari Museum in Pedana	Masulipatnam
13	Coronation of Rama, Rumal	Museum of Art, Bangalore	Srikalahasti
14	Lifestyle and Riches, 17 <sup>th</sup> century	The Met Museum	Srikalahasti
15	Ritual Hanging showing a dancing lady, c.1700	Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore	Srikalahasti
16	The Vedic Scriptures, c.1850	The Textile Museum, GWU	Srikalahasti
17	The Tree of Life, c.1700s	Children's art museum, India	Masulipatnam
18	Floor spread	Victoria & Albert Museum	Masulipatnam
19	The Mahabharata War – Gita, c.1720	Salar Jung Museum, India	Srikalahasti
20	Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi c.1820	The Textile Museum, GWU	Srikalahasti
21	Katamaraju Katha Scroll, c.1850s	Salar Jung Museum, India	Srikalahasti
22	Religious Cloth of the Gods c.1760s	Salar Jung Museum, India	Srikalahasti
23	Ramayana and the Tale of Lord Rama c.1987	Ethnographic Museum, Zurich	Srikalahasti
24	The Tales of Indian Myth, c.1850s	Victoria & Albert Museum	Srikalahasti
25	Miniature paintings of Gods, c.1800	The Calico Museum, India	Srikalahasti
26	A NamaVali textile (woven with the name of Lord Ram)	The Calico Museum, India	Srikalahasti
27	Vrindavani Vastra	The Calico Museum, India	Srikalahasti
28	Mahishasuramardini, c.1950	The Vimor Museum of Living Textiles, India	Srikalahasti
29	Kalamkari fabric samples from India c.1985	Powerhouse Collection	Srikalahasti
30	Lord Vishnu and his Avatars	Author's family heirloom	Srikalahasti
31	Temple Hanging Depicting Scenes from the Indian Epic Poem Rāmāyana, c.1800s	Saint Louis Art Museum	Srikalahasti
32	Kalamkari Kurtha, 2017 collection	Author's personal collection Sourced from Andra Pradesh	Masulipatnam

33	The Visvakarma interventions 2010	National Institute of Fashion Technology	Modern Srikalahasti
34	The Story of Lazarus, 2014	National Institute of Fashion Technology	Modern Srikalahasti
35	Buddha flanked by Bodhisatvas 2014	National Institute of Fashion Technology	Modern Srikalahasti
36	Crafts Maps of India - Andhra Pradesh, 1993	Sanskriti Museum of Indian Textiles	Modern Masulipatnam
37	Ganesh Puja, 20th century CE	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS)	Modern Srikalahasti
38	Ceremonial cloth (kalamkari) 1875	Asian Art Museum	Masulipatnam
39	Altar Hanging, 18 <sup>th</sup> century	Tokyo National Museum	Masulipatnam
40	Cover (Rumal) first half 17th century	The Met Museum	Masulipatnam
41	Detail of Temple Cloth, c.75-1886	Victoria & Albert Museum	Srikalahasti
42	Kalamkari Costumes, c.1720	The Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation Collections	Masulipatnam
43	Export Textiles, c.1850	The Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation Collections	Masulipatnam
44	Textiles from the Mughal Court, c.1800	The Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation Collections	Masulipatnam
45	Ramayana Visual Wall hanging	Author's Family Heirloom	Srikalahasti
46	Kalamkari Chanderi Cotton Dupatta	Kalamkari Design Studio	Modern Masulipatnam
47	Black & Orange Colour Crepe Silk Saree	Kalamkari Design Studio	Modern Masulipatnam
48	Kalamkari Art, Tree of Life (KIA13)	San Francisco Museum	Modern Masulipatnam
49	A Timeless Tapestry: The Sacred Union of Rama and Sita	Curated from Exotic India	Modern Srikalahasti
50	Kalamkari Fabric Samples	Sourced from Hyderabad, India	Modern Srikalahasti
51	Designer Saree featuring Gods	Sourced from Pothys Fabric Store	Modern Masulipatnam
52	The Tale of Lord Krishna	Kalamkari Art Museum	Srikalahasti

**Appendix B***Calico Textiles Samples*

<b>CALICO TEXTILES - SAMPLES</b>		
ITEM	NAME	LOCATION
1	An Anglo-Indian Wall Hanging	The Met Museum
2	Fragment of Kalamkari, c.1855	Victoria & Albert Museum
3	A palempore, c.1850 - with tree of life motif	RIJK museum, BK-1971-118
4	The Floral Spread – 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century	Museum of Art Bangalore
5	A Rumal Coverlet	Victoria & Albert Museum
6	Kalamkari mat made for Iranian Market, c.1900	National Taiwan Museum
7	Temple Hanging Depicting Scenes from the Indian Epic Poem Rāmāyana,	The Met Museum
8	Vices (Vanity), 2012	Origins of Mumbai, Museum of Art
9	Door Curtain, late 19 <sup>th</sup> to early 20 <sup>th</sup> century	Sanskriti Museum of Indian Textiles
10	Crafts Maps of India - Andhra Pradesh	Sanskriti Museum of Indian Textiles
11	Thalposh or Tray cover, 1775	Golconda Exhibit, India
12	Jaa-namaz (Prayer Carpet), early 19 <sup>th</sup> century	National Museum – New Delhi
13	Chasuble, ca. 1725 - Chintz	The Met Museum
14	Floral Decorated Textile, early 18 <sup>th</sup> century	The Met Museum
15	Hanging or Bed Cover/ Palampore	The Met Museum
16	Kalamkari Hanging with Figures in an Architectural Setting, 1640	The Met Museum
17	Morning dress, 1850 - 65	The Met Museum
18	Export Textiles, c.1850	The Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation Collections
19	Lavender and blue calico cotton dress with floral pattern, c.1997	Gilcrease Museum
20	Textile Panel of Chintz, 18 <sup>th</sup> century	The Met Museum
21	Chintz: Cotton in Bloom, 18 <sup>th</sup> century	Fashion textile museum
22	Jacket, ca.1750	Victoria & Albert Museum
23	Textile Panel, ca, 1640-1650	Victoria & Albert Museum
24	Chintz, ca.1715 - 1725	Victoria & Albert Museum
25	Chintz Strip, Indian for the European market, c.1700	The Met Museum
26	Young girl's jacket in red ground chintz.	Fries Museum, Netherlands
27	Detail of a kraplap, Indian chintz with a white ground. c.1780	Fries Museum, Netherlands
28	Overdress of a Robe à l'Anglaise, English dress Ca.1780	Royal Ontario Museum of Canada
29	The Japanese robe (japanese rok) derives from the kimono	RIJKS museum
30	Jacket of an English dress, ca.1780	Royal Ontario Museum of Canada
31	Milk & blood chintz on a kassekijntje, or cassaquin from Hindeloopen c.1780	Fries Museum, Netherlands

32	Man's Morning Gown (Banyan), mid-18th century	The Met Museum
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35	18th century chintz petticoat and jacket	Victoria and Albert Museum, London
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## **Indigenous Dance as a Healing Modality Indigenous Epistemologies**

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### **Abstract**

In the Sub-Saharan countries of South Africa and Botswana, indigenous dance is known to transcends social, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual realms. Batswana indigenous dance called Mmino wa Setswana or Borankana, when danced on a regular basis alone, with others or imagined, offers a healing and coping mechanism for many indigenous people including the youth and elderly. This paper explores the Setswana indigenous dance and the healing power of dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author presents, through using an ethnographic approach, audio and video interviews and maeto (visits, discussions and interviews), how Borankana provides healing and support through dancing. This may be experienced physically or by watching an audience member and through imagination dancing (ID). The concept of dancing in the mind (IID) may be referred to as visualization by some dance teachers and choreographers. It is used by many elderly indigenous Batswana people including people living with disability, who are unable to dance. IID does not require movement, it allows the person to open their mind to imagine themselves dancing and ultimately experience the same feeling as in actual physical movement. This exudes the same psychological and emotional effects for both the dancer moving physically, and the one imagining. There is certainty that dance builds confidence, enhances cognitive ability, supports emotional stability, grows creativity and allows freedom and acceptance of self.

*Keywords:* African healing, visualization, dance therapy, indigenous imagination dancing, indigenous dance

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## Introduction

The contemporary world presents an exhilarating, yet overwhelming and challenging landscape for numerous individuals globally. The reality of a swiftly evolving environment, coupled with the advancements in artificial intelligence, driven by the fourth industrial revolution, necessitates that communities worldwide adapt to these transformations. It is widely acknowledged that change if not universally embraced; can be difficult, and for some, it poses a threat to their established way of life.

Indigenous populations are also contending with the repercussions of a rapidly evolving world, which jeopardizes their history, culture, practices, and beliefs. Consequently, the contributions of scholars and researchers are vital for the preservation of indigenous anthropologies, histories, and cultures.

Indigenous people have historically engaged in practices and rituals that catered for their psychological, emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs. These ancient, deeply rooted traditions were integral to their lives, shaping, enabling, and sustaining their rich existence. The Western perspective often reflects a limited view, perception, and observation of indigenous people and their cultures. Historically, the external viewpoint has distorted the authentic narrative surrounding indigenous communities and their cultural practices. At the heart of their existence, lies their indigenous culture, encompassing their methods of healing, which address the body, mind, spirit, and soul. Healing among indigenous people is approached through various means and by diverse gifted individuals, who specialize in distinct healing methodologies, ranging from standard medical care to intricate healing processes that require spiritual intervention and advanced forms of indigenous care.

This study concentrated on the healing practices within the Batswana indigenous community. The Batswana, also known as Tswana, inhabit Botswana as well as the North West, Free State, and Northern Cape provinces of South Africa. The exploration of healing was a component of a broader doctoral research project concerning Batswana indigenous practices in both nations of Botswana and South Africa. Throughout the research, interviews with dance masters, dingaka (traditional healers) and knowledge custodians, along with comprehensive discussions, led to the emergence of the concept of “imagination dancing,” which was notably prevalent among the dance masters, particularly those with extensive experience in dance. Indigenous healing practices have been shaped and guided by indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Indigenous healers, referred to as ngaka/izangoma or shamans, utilize dance as a means to connect with ancestors and spiritual beings for guidance and messages. Additionally, they employ dance to expel illnesses through medicinal songs that possess supernatural efficacy, resonating throughout the cosmos. For the Batswana, healing is articulated in diverse contexts and through various methodologies, including dance (Ntuli, 2009).

The research was carried out through dialogues and interviews with fifteen Batswana dance masters, who were actively teaching and performing or had done so extensively in the past. All participants were Batswana males and females, each with a dancing history exceeding 18 years. A significant number of dance masters have ceased teaching due to the necessity of earning a livelihood, as teaching dance does not provide sufficient income. Instruction in indigenous dance is regarded as a form of community service with individuals who join dance groups not required to pay for these classes; the dancers' dedication is deemed adequate. Currently, dance groups are established for performance purposes and dance competitions, which offer monetary rewards in the form of performance fees or prizes for winning.

In the course of the research, participants were invited to articulate their understanding of dance as perceived by the Batswana. Their responses characterized dance not in terms of movement, but rather as an experience, a spirit, and a connection to the divine. As they elaborated on the significance of dance, they conveyed the essence of dance as a spiritual experience encountered in both dreams and waking moments. These narratives contributed to a broader understanding of the influence and significance of dance in their lives, particularly its therapeutic effects. This inquiry was motivated by a desire to uncover other healing modalities within indigenous cultural practices, such as dance, that enhance the well-being of its practitioners. Through the conducted interviews, the research delves into the perspectives of the indigenous Batswana regarding IID and its role as an unconventional therapeutic and healing approach.

The primary objective of the research was to investigate whether IID could be considered a form of self-hypnosis facilitated by dance, which alters the mind to a state that embodies the experience of a dancer or induces a dance trance. Furthermore, the study sought to determine if indigenous imagination dancing qualifies as dance therapy or a method of visualization.

### **Literature Review**

The existing literature elucidates the concepts of visualization and dance therapy, aiming to ascertain whether IID could serve as an additional modality within these practices. This examination facilitates the identification of both differences and similarities, ultimately leading to a conclusion regarding the classification of this therapeutic approach within the realm of either therapy.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study was carried out utilizing interview techniques, specifically through semi-structured interviews and survey questions. Semi-structured interviews provide a framework of questions while allowing the flexibility to pose follow-up inquiries based on the responses of the participants. The advantages of conducting interviews include the ability to gather rich, detailed information regarding participants' feelings and thoughts. Furthermore, this method offers the chance to delve into complex issues that may be challenging to address through alternative approaches. Ethnography was employed as a methodological approach for this research, facilitating the capture of Setswana cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions through interviews and survey questions. The second methodological approach utilized in this study was phenomenology. This Phenomenology focuses on comprehending the lived experiences of individuals and deriving meaning from those experiences. The researcher conducted interviews and distributed surveys to seasoned indigenous Setswana dancers and educators who had extensive experience in dance, with many having practiced for over 20 years.

The researcher adopted an interpretive analysis, as the majority of the participants were dance masters, and identified ID as a recurring theme among them. This phenomenon occurs periodically or arises when the participant experiences heightened anxiety, or feelings of being stuck, trapped, or defeated. Some participants equate this to a visionary experience. There was a significant understanding that this phenomenon was perceived by the participants as a gift bestowed by (Modimo le Badimo) God and the ancestors.

## **Indigenous Imagination Dance**

IID refers to the experience of engaging in indigenous dance within the mind, occurring during various states of consciousness, including both wakefulness and sleep. IID manifests unconsciously and emerges spontaneously, devoid of any deliberate planning, preparation, guidance, or structured approach. This phenomenon transpires independently of external influences, instruction, or training. It typically arises when an individual is experiencing extreme stress, anxiety, or depression. Participants consistently expressed a diminished enthusiasm for life, a tendency to withdraw from family and social activities; among the primary contributing factors were unemployment, physical health issues, the loss of loved ones, stress, and a perceived lack of progress. The participants articulated a desire for salvation, release, escape, or redemption. With this information, the author aimed to investigate whether IID is synonymous with visualization or dance therapy and to determine if it serves as a healing modality.

## **Dance and Healing**

The prolonged periods of colonization, oppression and alienation experienced by African populations have resulted in fragmented communities that are disunited, traumatized, fearful, and distrustful of one another. This has led to the emergence of antagonistic African communities both within their homelands and in the diaspora. Nevertheless, in spite of this challenging history, African communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of ongoing adversity. A significant aspect of their survival has been rooted in their indigenous cultural practices, which encompass storytelling, music, dance, drama, art, and other creative expressions. These forms have served as both conscious and subconscious methods of healing. Monteiro and Wall (2011) elucidate how dance within the African diaspora acts as a catalyst for healing and transformation, impacting communities on social, spiritual, mental, and physical levels.

## **Healing and Imagination**

The empirical research substantiating the efficacy of dance, music and art therapy, provides a robust basis for investigating and enhancing healing methodologies that are inspired by imagination. By integrating creativity with findings from neuroscience and psychology, these therapeutic approaches present comprehensive strategies for healing that encompass the mind, body, and spirit (Koch et al., 2019).

There is a thought-provoking question regarding the premise that if imagination is the key to healing, why does not all art possess the capacity to heal? The answer could lie in the relationship between the artist, space and time and audience. The process of creation represents a generous and welcoming act by the artist, aimed at mending the divides that exist within both the creator and the observer. Imagination plays a crucial role in various alternative healing methods, allowing individuals to:

- explore or reshape their identity within a conceptual framework
- experience a sense of freedom and release through the expressive mediums of dance and the arts
- reinterpret negative experiences and imagine positive outcomes
- effectively confront and process pain
- access subconscious emotions and memories that may be challenging to articulate and,
- foster a sense of urgency and control over their healing journey

## **Visualisation**

Visualization holds a crucial and multifaceted role in African cultures, deeply intertwined with spirituality, communal identity, and daily life. It goes beyond simple cognitive processes, serving as a dynamic practice that establishes bonds between individuals and their ancestors, the environment, and the divine. The ensuing discussion explores the importance of visualization for Africans and its function within their cultural context. Fully supported by Stein and Stein (2017) who conclude visualization not merely as a minor technique, but rather as a crucial cognitive and cultural process that is integral to religious, magical, and shamanic practices. From their anthropological perspective, the effectiveness of visualization is assessed not by its objective reality, but by its social and psychological impact — its ability to provide comfort, facilitate healing, offer explanations, exert control, and foster unity among individuals within a common symbolic framework. Visualisation holds the following significance for African people:

### **A Spiritual Connection**

Visualization is commonly viewed as a way to connect with the spiritual realm, encompassing ancestors, deities, and universal energies. It serves as a channel for meditation, prayer, and ceremonial practices, enabling individuals to rise above the physical realm and receive insights or blessings. For instance, in numerous African cultural traditions, visualization is employed in rituals to summon the presence of ancestors or spirits, forming a mental image of their guidance and support (Mndende, 2018).

### **A Process of Healing**

Visualization is a fundamental aspect of traditional healing methods. Healers, shamans or medicine practitioners utilize mental imagery to identify ailments, direct healing energies, or eliminate spiritual barriers. For example, in South African Zulu traditions, sangomas (healers) may visualize the flow of energy (umoya) within a patient's body to restore equilibrium and health. Mlisa (2019) confirms this in his study about a sangoma's method of healing using visualisation and dreams.

### **A Method of Storytelling and Cultural Preservation**

Visualization is vital in oral traditions, where storytellers employ vivid imagery to animate myths, legends, and historical narratives. This practice safeguards cultural wisdom and moral lessons for future generations. As an illustration: Griots in West Africa, utilize visualization to narrate grand tales, allowing audiences to “see” the stories in their minds and forge an emotional connection with their cultural heritage.

### **A Path to Manifestation and Altered States**

Visualization is often associated with the belief in the influence of thought and intention in shaping reality. By envisioning desired outcomes, individuals align with creative forces to realize their aspirations. By concentrating deeply on mental imagery - such as a journey, a spirit animal, or a cosmic landscape - the shaman or participant in the ritual is able to transform his/her consciousness. This imagined journey is regarded not merely as "imagination" but as a genuine spiritual expedition into a non-ordinary reality, where participants can engage with spirits, acquire wisdom, or recover souls (Stein & Stein, 2017).

In conclusion, visualization is integral to rites of passage, including birth, initiation, marriage, and death. Participants engage in mental imagery to connect with ancestral spirits, seek blessings, or signify transition. It is significant to the cultural ritual and ceremonies that are part of the cultural practices. This explanation is thoroughly argued by the Asante (1987) theory of Afrocentricity, which highlights that visualisation is not an accidental practice but a logical expression of how culture, healing and spirituality is viewed by Africans.

### **Dance Therapy**

Dance therapy, also known as dance/movement therapy (DMT), is a form of expressive therapy that utilizes movement and dance to promote emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration. This therapeutic method is based on the premise that the mind and body are fundamentally interconnected, suggesting that movement acts as a vital tool for healing and self-expression. The leading professional association, the American Dance Therapy Association, defines dance therapy as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual” (American Dance Therapy Association, 2024). Guan (2023) explains dance therapy as a therapeutic method that employs movement to assist individuals in achieving emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration. It is conducted by trained dance therapists, who guide participants in utilizing movement to convey emotions, process trauma, and enhance overall well-being (Guan, 2023).

There are many types of DMTs that are used as part of treatment support, amongst them are authentic, psychiatric or clinical developmental, trauma- informed, medical and clinical dance therapies.

### **Types of Dance Therapy**

#### ***Authentic Movement Therapy***

Developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse - this is a modality of dance therapy, where individuals partake in spontaneous movement driven by internal impulses, usually with their eyes closed, while a witness observes and provides feedback. The aim is to access the subconscious through movement in order to connect the body with the ego (Adler, 2002; Whitehouse, 1999).

#### ***Developmental Dance Therapy***

This targets children and individuals with developmental disabilities, fostering improvements in motor skills, communication abilities, and social interactions. This methodology is significantly shaped by the contributions of Rudolf Laban and Irmgard Bartenieff. Practitioners employ the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Bartenieff Fundamentals™ as a basis for evaluating a client's movement behaviours. The therapeutic process is grounded in the idea that human growth adheres to a progressive motor sequence (for instance, yielding, pushing, reaching, grasping). By tackling interruptions in these foundational developmental sequences through movement, it is aimed to facilitate both psychological and physical integration (Payne, 2017).

#### ***Trauma-Informed Dance Therapy***

This is designed to aid in the processing and healing of trauma through intentional movement and increased body awareness.

### ***Clinical DMT or Psychiatric DMT***

This is utilized in psychiatric hospitals, clinics, and private practices to address mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and eating disorders (Koch et al., 2019).

The above therapies showcase the importance of DMT as a support therapy for patients, it is a known fact and a growing field in research that the combination mind-body-movement play a major role in facilitating healing and wellbeing.

### **Imagination**

Imagination is a fundamental human capability that allows the mind to generate ideas, images, and thoughts about various subjects, thereby fostering creativity and comprehension. Its interpretation and significance can vary greatly across different cultures and philosophical traditions. Eurocentric definitions of imagination differ from those in African contexts; the Western tradition has predominantly characterized imagination as an individual, creative force that enables the human subject to transform or escape the world through art and thought (Kearney, 2021). This conception of imagination is often viewed as an internal mental process, encompassing Aristotelian, romantic, and psychological perspectives. In contrast, the African perspective, particularly from Southern Africa, defines imagination in the following manner:

#### **Ubuntu Perspective**

The ubuntu perspective, prevalent in Southern Africa, regards imagination as a collective and relational capacity that empowers individuals to envision a harmonious and interconnected existence. It is closely associated with empathy, narrative creation, and the overall well-being of the community. Its importance lies in fostering social unity, ethical responsibility, and the preservation of cultural heritage through oral traditions and communal storytelling (Metz, 2017).

#### **Ancestral Connection**

The ancestral connection perspective, found in parts of West Africa, views imagination as a spiritual and ancestral gift that enables communication across temporal boundaries — encompassing the past, present, and future. It acts as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds, facilitating visions, dreams, and creative expressions. Imagination serves as a means to honour ancestors, interpret divine messages, and maintain cultural continuity through rituals, artistic endeavours, and storytelling.

#### **Creative Energy or Vital Force**

The creative vital force perspective, primarily observed in Central and East Africa, perceives imagination as a manifestation of the life force (Seriti or Chi) that exists within all living beings. It represents the ability to shape reality through thought, intention, and creativity, in harmony with both natural and cosmic principles.

## Comparative Insights

Eurocentric interpretations often highlight imagination as a personal, cognitive, or artistic ability, rooted in philosophical and scientific contexts. In contrast, African perspectives on imagination are typically characterized as collective, spiritual, and relational, intricately linked to cultural identity, ancestral knowledge, and the environment. While both viewpoints underscoring the transformative power of imagination, they diverge in their emphasis - Eurocentric frameworks tend to focus on individual creativity and rational thought, whereas African frameworks highlight communal welfare and spiritual ties. Collectively, these perspectives provide a comprehensive and nuanced appreciation of this fundamental human trait.

## The Findings

### IID

The phenomenon of IID can be characterized as a psychological and semi-physical condition experienced by individuals, who find themselves engaged in an imagined dance scenario during sleep or in a hypnagogic state. This state is not facilitated by another individual nor is it the result of any form of training; rather, it occurs spontaneously and unintentionally. The individuals envision themselves dancing - actually performing, expressing, emoting, and exhibiting heightened respiration. This process unfolds automatically, involuntarily, and unsolicited while in bed. Participants report awakening with heavy breathing, perspiration, and disarranged bedding, with some even finding themselves partially off the bed. Given that all participants were navigating, particularly challenging periods in their lives, marked by extreme stress, anxiety, depression, illness, and despair, these occurrences appeared to resemble a form of ritual. It seemed as though their ancestors were visiting them, utilizing the gift of dance to assist, heal, and guide them through their current life circumstances.

All participants articulated their experiences of IID as transcendental and uniquely personal, noting that they felt and appeared different afterwards. Some reported that others perceived them as looking younger and more vibrant. This phenomenon often occurs in environments, where movement is restricted or impossible (such as hospitals) or when individuals seek to escape their present reality. It arises when individuals attempt to soothe themselves, build their resilience, or become lost in the act of dancing, ultimately leading to healing.

### Emerging Themes

The findings from the study on IID were encapsulated in several prominent themes identified by the participants, which included the following:

#### *A Lightened Spirit and an Immediate Sense of Relief and Joy*

All participants conveyed a sensation of renewal and an uplifting of their spirits, describing the removal of a dark cloud or oppressive energy that had previously enveloped them, enabling them to experience joy in life, home, and well-being.

### ***A Revived and Renewed Enthusiasm for Life***

The participants expressed a newfound happiness in being alive and a desire to continue living, with some indicating that they felt they were on a path toward recovery. The sensation of joy in being alive and a desire to continue living was expressed by some participants, who conveyed a belief that they were on a trajectory towards death. They felt as though they were dying internally, leading their bodies to inevitably follow suit. They struggled to comprehend their feelings, yet they accepted their current existence, contrasting sharply with a profound disconnection from the act of living.

### ***An Increase in Self-Confidence***

Participants articulated a return to their new selves, filled with excitement about the future; they began to discuss upcoming possibilities rather than awaiting death.

### ***A Liberation From the Negative Feelings of Defeat***

Three participants, who had previously attempted suicide, described their existence as one of depression. These individuals indicated that 84% of the participants shared similar sentiments.

### ***An Optimistic Outlook on Life***

All participants began to formulate plans for the future, engaging in household responsibilities, reconnecting with loved ones, and showing interest in their family members' lives. They attended church, participated in funerals, and rejoined cultural clubs they had once belonged to. Some reported that they started to leave their bedrooms, shedding the shame that had confined them.

### ***An Enhanced Sense of Vitality***

All participants commenced taking better care of themselves, with many noting a decline in their overall health and hygiene, which they had previously neglected.

### ***A General Resurgence of Energy***

All participants felt as though they had received a direct gift from God and their ancestors, with some describing themselves as feeling powerful and chosen.

### ***A Sensation of Healing***

70% of participants reported experiencing a sense of tranquillity in their spirits, bodies, and minds. Everything appeared clear and organized, as it ought to be. This reflects a physical and mental rejuvenation of their bodies and minds. Participants recovering from illnesses and accidents noted a considerable enhancement in their recovery process.

### ***A Persistent Belief of Second Chances/Next Life***

13 out of 15 participants conveyed a feeling of accountability and clarity regarding their roles in the world, particularly in relation to their families and communities.



The participants' descriptions of their ID resembled a vision or a higher spiritual experience. Some articulated it as transcending the natural realm and entering different dimensions, where they were guided to dance. This ritual represented a transition to a higher level of existence, a rite of passage in their lives. This occurrence was not merely a dream; it was perceived as God and the ancestors reassuring them, as if they had paid their dues through suffering, thus earning their place and the next phase of their lives.

**Table 1**

*Explanation of the Difference Between IDD and Visualization*

<b>Indigenous Imagination Dancing</b>	<b>Visualisation</b>
It is self-induced or triggered by an event / happening	It is normally guided by a teacher or trainer
It is used to self-heal	It is used to measure improvement in specific technique
The person feel physically and emotionally better (the psyche and soma is healed)	The dancer feels the movement and the actions targeted are increased
It has a long span of staying healing properties	Its impact can be short lived therefore would need to be practiced all the time
It is personal and not often shared with anyone	It can be measured as the teacher or trainer would see a visible improvement
It can be in an awake state or in a sleep dream state	It is practiced during the day as part of dance training to improve technical aspects
It is not often talked about	It is known as a teaching and healing practise

**Table 2**

*Explanation of the Differences Between DMT and IID*

<b>Dance Movement Therapy</b>	<b>Indigenous Imagination Dancing</b>
Is supervised by a therapist	Occurs alone without any witnesses
Is a well-established form of psychotherapy	Has not been researched and is difficult to measure
Is a practiced and successful therapy	Is unknown and currently experienced by indigenous Batswana dance masters
Is for all ages, children to the elderly	Is known to be used by indigenous Batswana adult dance masters
Has a personal significance	Has a spiritual and cultural significance

There were more similarities found than differences between DMT and IID, as both therapies are aimed at improving the general well-being of individuals. The standout difference is that IID is not supervised by a therapist. The following were similarities:

- both have healing and therapeutic results for the person
- both release endorphins, enhancing a feeling of buoyancy and joy
- both have positive psychological effects, changing the state of body as a result of therapy (depression, PTSD, general dissatisfaction)
- improves general well-being of individuals

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of visualisation, DMT and IID, revealed that all shared characteristics and distinct differences that set them apart. The fundamental fact that IID functions independently of third-party oversight and occurs in isolation, complicates the measurement process, particularly in the absence of a witness to validate the variations. In IID, the therapeutic outcomes manifest randomly, making their effects more discernible over time rather than being immediately noticeable. There are significant similarities among visualization, DMT and imagination. The benefits encompass a reduction in anxiety and stress, an improvement in mood, a decrease in levels of depression, and an enhancement in confidence, self-esteem, and a positive body image. All these modalities promote emotional expression through dance while concurrently allowing the body to release accumulated trauma.

This research faced particular limitations as it was exclusively conducted among Batswana men and women, who were both dancers and instructors. Although the participants were proficient dance masters, their numbers were limited, considering that there are relatively few dance masters, many of whom have unfortunately passed away. The study did not encompass individuals who are non-dancers, despite the fact that all Batswana may have been exposed to dance and music throughout their lives. This raises the question of whether IID is also experienced by non-dancers. Furthermore, the authors, a Motswana woman and a man, who respectively are a dancer and an educator, may have introduced a degree of bias, as their perspective was inherently favourable towards Batswana culture. Nonetheless, it can be argued that an emic perspective and narrative of indigenous peoples and cultures hold greater significance than a narrative from an outsider.

The research further highlights the phenomenon of indigenous ID as a healing modality, which all participants had previously been unaware of collectively experiencing. This also emphasizes the intricate healing practices that indigenous peoples possess, many of which remain undocumented, and some of which may never be recorded or tested. Nonetheless, these practices continue to offer protection and healing to numerous gifted individuals within the African indigenous communities. As the world progresses and cultures evolve, certain events will transpire that will remain unknown and sacred to indigenous communities. The indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing and existing, will perpetually manifest through dreams, storytelling, art, dance, and music. This illustrates the power of Africans to quietly preserve their culture.

The study concludes with the assertion that IID serves as a healing modality and a form of visualization, even though it occurs subconsciously; it cannot be planned, does not inhibit imagination, and possesses potent power. IID is a type of dance movement therapy, akin to other imagination-focused therapies, and it holds significant potential for enhancing healing and overall well-being, particularly in psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. As research in this domain advances, there is a likelihood that these methodologies will be increasingly integrated into conventional healthcare, offering creative and comprehensive solutions for both individuals and communities in the future.

## **Acknowledgement**

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conveyed as it was, along with the intention to share, preserve, and protect indigenous knowledge.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author declares that the manuscript is originally written and only made use of ahrefs sentence rewrite tool for improving language. The author further declares that apart from ahrefs, no other AI or AI assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript.

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## **Musical Identity and Cultural Resilience: An Analysis of Nasep Music in Thai Muslim Communities**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines Nasep music as a crucial cultural mechanism for identity construction and preservation within Muslim communities in southern Thailand. Through ethnomusicological analysis combining structural musical examination with cultural studies methodology, this research reveals how Nasep functions as both artistic expression and social cohesion tool in multicultural Thai society. Employing qualitative research methodology, this case study focuses on the Ramadan ensemble in Santisuk Village, Satun Province. Data collection involved participant observation of performances, audio-visual documentation, and detailed musical analysis of representative songs. Thematic content analysis examined multilingual textual composition and cultural meanings, while structural analysis documented melodic patterns and instrumental arrangements. The investigation demonstrates how Malay musical influences have been adapted within local Islamic religious contexts. Analysis reveals sophisticated techniques including ornamental vocal styling, multilingual composition spanning Malay, Arabic, and Thai languages, and innovative arrangements blending traditional ramana drums with contemporary accordions and bongos. Findings indicate that Nasep serves multiple sociocultural functions beyond entertainment, operating as a medium for religious instruction, community solidarity building, and cultural boundary maintenance. The music's adaptability across ceremonial contexts, from nikah weddings to religious festivals, demonstrates remarkable cultural flexibility while preserving core Islamic values and Malay aesthetic sensibilities. This research offers valuable insights into music's role as cultural capital in multicultural societies, particularly regarding how peripheral communities employ artistic practices to assert identity and resist cultural homogenization in globalization.

*Keywords:* ethnomusicology, cultural identity, musical adaptation

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## Introduction

Nasep music represents a significant form of folk musical performance that plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of Muslim communities in southern Thailand (Kartomi, 2012; Matusky & Tan, 2017). This cultural heritage has been transmitted through the influence of Malay musical traditions. Nasep music functions not merely as a performing art form, but also serves as a vital mechanism for connecting religious values, social traditions, and the preservation of community identity within the context of a multicultural society (Barendregt, 2014; Said, 2009).

The study of music through the lens of Cultural Studies enables us to understand that music is not simply an arrangement of sounds and rhythms, but rather constitutes a symbolic system that reflects social structures, beliefs, and the way of life of particular groups of people (DeNora, 2000; Small, 1998). Nasep music therefore presents a compelling case study for examining how music can function as an instrument for creating and maintaining the cultural identity of minority communities within larger societies (Stokes, 1994; Turino, 2008).

Within the context of Thai society, amid the currents of globalization that bring rapid social transformation, the study of folk music such as nasep music becomes increasingly significant for understanding the processes of adaptation and cultural persistence at the local level (Appadurai, 1996; Robertson, 1992). An analysis of the melodic and rhythmic structures of nasep music will help reveal the musical characteristics that distinguish it from mainstream Thai music. Furthermore, studying the role of music within communities will demonstrate how music can serve as a crucial factor in creating unity and fostering pride in community identity (Ethnomusicology Forum, 2018; Slobin, 1993).

This translation maintains the academic tone and scholarly language appropriate for musicological research while ensuring clarity and readability in English. The complex concepts about cultural identity, globalization, and ethnomusicological analysis are presented in a way that builds understanding progressively, moving from the specific case of nasep music to broader theoretical frameworks in cultural studies and ethnomusicology.

## Objectives of Study

1. To analyze the musical structures and performance practices of nasep music in southern Thailand's Muslim communities.
2. To examine how nasep music functions in constructing and maintaining cultural identity within multicultural Thai society.

## Methodology

### Structural Musical Analysis

Musical transcription and analysis focused on melodic contours, rhythmic patterns, harmonic structures, and instrumental arrangements. Analysis examined the integration of traditional Malay musical elements with contemporary instruments, documenting how musical adaptation occurs while maintaining cultural authenticity.

## Thematic Content Analysis

Lyrics and textual content were analyzed for themes, cultural references, and linguistic patterns across Malay, Arabic, and Thai languages. This analysis revealed how multilingual composition serves identity formation and community boundary maintenance. Content analysis also examined how songs function as vehicles for religious instruction and social commentary.

## Cultural Interpretation

Data interpretation employed cultural studies methodology to understand nasep's role in identity construction, community cohesion, and cultural resistance. Analysis drew on theoretical frameworks from ethnomusicology and cultural studies to examine how musical practices serve broader sociocultural functions

## Conclusion

### Analysis of Melodic and Rhythmic Structures in Nasep Music

#### *Tonal System and Melodic Structure*

Nasep music possesses distinctive musical characteristics that reflect the synthesis between the Thai tonal system and the influence of Malay musical traditions. Analysis of song examples such as “Nam Ta To Seia” and “Siang Klong Dang Tung” reveals that Nasep music employs the seven-tone Thai scale system yet applies it in a manner that creates a unique tonal color and identity.

The melodic structure of Nasep music follows a strophic form pattern, where the main melody is repeated with different lyrical content. Melodic movement typically occurs within a relatively narrow range and primarily employs stepwise motion, which creates melodic fluidity and ease of memorization.

The distinctive characteristic of Nasep melodies lies in the use of ornamentation that reflects Malay vocal stylistic inflections. The employment of glissando techniques and natural vibrato creates tonal colors that differ from traditional Thai vocal styles. These elements not only generate musical beauty but also express the linguistic and cultural identity of the community.

### Figure 1

#### *Drum Louder Song*

เพลง A

Piano

Moderato (♩ = 60)

8



**Figure 2**  
*Tear of Tho Sei*

Piano

เพลง B

Moderato (♩ = 60)

9

17

24

32

39

### Rhythmic Structure and Instrumental Coordination

The rhythmic system of Nasep music demonstrates fascinating complexity, particularly in the utilization of various percussion instruments, each playing a specific role in creating rhythmic texture. The ramana drum serves as the rhythmic foundation through the use of two basic sounds: “ting” and “jok,” which establish fundamental rhythmic patterns.

The rhythmic coordination between different instruments reveals a clear system of role distribution. The ching cymbals control the main rhythm with “ching” and “chab” sounds, while the chab cymbals and tambourines add color and density to the rhythmic texture. The incorporation of modern instruments such as bongo drums and tom-toms does not destroy the traditional rhythmic structure but rather enhances and expands the scope of rhythmic expression.

Particularly interesting is the use of “cha cha cha” rhythm in newly arranged songs, which demonstrates Nasep music's adaptation to contemporary audience preferences while maintaining its core performance identity. This integration exemplifies the flexibility and adaptability of folk music traditions.

### Characteristics of Instrumental Ensemble Arrangement

The study of Nasep musical ensemble organization reveals principles of instrumental coordination rooted in regional musical philosophy. The division of instruments into functional groups—melodic instruments (accordion), primary rhythm section (Ramana drum, ching cymbals), and auxiliary rhythm section (chab cymbals, tambourine, shakers)—reflects an understanding of creating appropriate sonic balance.

The use of accordion as the primary melodic instrument represents an intelligent adaptation, as this instrument can produce continuous sound and precise pitch control, making it suitable for the characteristics of Nasep melodies that require fluidity and delicate nuance control. The accordion's equal temperament system, similar to Western music, also facilitates easier recording and melodic transmission.

### Figure 3

#### *Nasep Instruments*



Accordion



Cymbals



Cymbals



Ramana Drum



Bongo



Tambourine



Conga



Maracus

## **The Role of Nasep Music in Creating Muslim Community Identity**

### ***Music as Religious and Social Medium***

Nasep music functions as a crucial mediator connecting religious beliefs with social practices. The use of music in Islamic religious ceremonies, such as nikah (wedding ceremonies) and circumcision rituals, demonstrates that music does not conflict with religious principles but rather serves as an instrument for creating appropriate atmosphere and enhancing ceremonial meaning.

The acceptance of Nasep music in various auspicious occasions reflects the interpretation of Islamic principles within the local community context, exemplifying cultural adaptation that balances adherence to religious doctrine with the preservation of local traditions. The use of

lyrical content emphasizing praise to God, religious teachings, and reflection on social issues transforms Nasep music into more than entertainment—it becomes an instrument for education and social communication.

### ***Creating Unity and Expressing Identity***

Nasep music serves as a symbol of unity for Muslim communities in the region. Participation in musical performance, whether as performers or audience members, creates a sense of shared ownership and reinforces pride in cultural heritage. The transmission of music through kinship and community systems helps maintain identity continuity and creates connections between different generations.

The use of Malay and Arabic languages in songs expresses connections with the broader regional Muslim community, while the use of Thai demonstrates integration within Thai society. This linguistic integration reflects the complex and multidimensional identity of communities that can maintain their Muslim identity while remaining Thai.

### ***Adaptation and Persistence in Changing Society***

The adaptability of Nasep music demonstrates cultural strategies for maintaining identity in a changing society. The addition of modern instruments to traditional ensembles does not constitute abandonment of tradition but rather expansion of expressive scope to align with contemporary tastes. This adaptation helps Nasep music remain relevant and attractive to younger generations.

The expansion of performance contexts from religious events to general social functions, such as provincial-level Father's Day and Mother's Day celebrations, demonstrates opening to broader society. This represents a strategy for maintaining folk music survival in an era of high modern entertainment influence. This transformation also helps non-Muslim Thai society become more familiar with and understanding of Muslim community culture.

## **Nasep Music in the Context of Thai Multiculturalism**

### ***Representing Cultural Diversity***

Nasep music provides a clear example of cultural diversity in Thai society. The study of this musical form helps us understand that Thai identity does not have a single definition but comprises diverse cultural groups, each with distinctive characteristics. The ability of Nasep music to persist and continue developing in Thai society demonstrates tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences.

The study of Nasep music also opens opportunities to question concepts of mainstream and peripheral cultures. The serious study and documentation of minority community folk music reflects changing attitudes toward cultural diversity and recognition that the cultures of various communities all possess equal value and importance.

### ***Role in Creating Multicultural Awareness***

Nasep music has potential as an instrument for creating multicultural awareness in Thai society. Providing knowledge about this musical form to the general public will help reduce prejudice and enhance mutual understanding between different cultural groups. When non-Muslim Thais learn about and understand Nasep music, it creates appreciation for the beauty and depth of cultures different from their own.

Promoting exchange and collaborative learning between folk music of different cultural groups in Thailand may lead to the emergence of new musical forms that clearly reflect Thai society's multicultural nature. Comparative studies between Nasep music and folk music of other ethnic groups in Thailand will help reveal both similarities and differences, and understand the processes of cultural exchange occurring within Thai territory.

### **Significance for Cultural Heritage Conservation**

#### **Mechanisms of Transmission and Innovation**

The study of Nasep music reveals effective patterns of cultural conservation. The combination of preserving the authentic core of traditional culture with improvements to suit contemporary times represents a strategy that enables folk culture to survive and remain meaningful to new generations. The success of the Romdorn ensemble in transmitting from founding generations to youth demonstrates the importance of community participation in conservation efforts.

The use of modern technology in recording and disseminating Nasep music, such as using Western musical notation for melodic documentation, represents the application of modern tools for conservation purposes. This method enables knowledge transmission with greater accuracy and broader accessibility.

#### **Creating Value Awareness**

Systematic research and study of Nasep music helps elevate the status of folk music from merely local entertainment to valuable cultural heritage with academic merit. Quality research documentation and analysis will help society recognize the importance and complexity of folk music and may lead to government and social support for conservation and promotion.

The integration of Nasep music into formal education systems, both at basic education and higher education levels, will guarantee long-term cultural survival. Providing knowledge to youth who are not members of Muslim communities will help expand the support base and create deeper understanding.

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## **Tradition in Transition: Contemporary Miniature Painting and Global Cross-Cultural Flows**

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### **Abstract**

The Indian subcontinent has been home to very rich artistic traditions, among which some of the finest examples are in the schools of miniature painting that flourished here in the medieval period. Generally, the miniature painting tradition is perceived as rooted in cultural traditions and yet an examination of the practice suggests global cross-cultural influences. And interestingly, this has always been the case, as seen in the different schools of miniature paintings in India. Persian and Sienese art' influences are seen in Mughal and Deccani miniature paintings, respectively, whereas miniature paintings in Rajasthan and Punjab Hills draw upon Mughal art while indigenizing it. Contemporary times have allowed this cross-cultural aspect to become trans-cultural with artists who are working in the miniature genre spread across the subcontinent and further across the globe. This has imparted a vibrant contemporaneity to their expression. Some artists from the subcontinent are practicing an expression that is closely aligned to the traditions of this painting style, be it in symbols, themes, or motifs, whereas some have employed the painterly style to envision a modern visual and thematic oeuvre. Diasporic artists, situated in a different cultural milieu, employ a somewhat transformed miniature style to reflect on the contemporary and topical in the country of their residence and of origin, where they trace their roots. This paper seeks to examine the continuations, elisions, and transformations that continue to enrich the visual vocabulary and thematic richness of the miniature tradition in contemporary times, thus situating the "tradition" within a globalized art.

*Keywords:* Indian art, miniature painting, contemporary Indian art, South Asian diaspora art

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## Introduction

The tradition of miniature painting in the Indian subcontinent can be traced to extant examples dated to the eleventh century AD, which in turn clearly suggest that this art had been in existence from much earlier. Ancient textual sources and travelogues of travellers to the subcontinent, underline that the art of painting was one of the *kalas* considered essential (Goswamy & Agrawal, 2018) and that it was practised across the continent, from Tamluk in the East to Marwar in the West (Chandra, 1949; Saraswati, 1971) respectively. And it was an art form that retained its vitality as it showed an openness to influences from different cultural milieus. Such as seen in Indian manuscript painting of the fifteenth century from Western India where the influences of art from Persia, in the form of border decorations as a significant part of paintings, to Chinese ribbon like clouds, evidence the ingress of non-Indian influences. This cross-cultural influence was to escalate with the Mughal emperor Humayun inviting Persian masters to work for him, laying the foundation of what was to become the Mughal atelier (Chakraverty, 1996). The Mughal style of painting encompassed within it the best from Indian, Persian and European painting thus exemplifying what is now termed trans culturalism in art. Almost parallel to it towards peninsular India emerged Deccani painting in the kingdoms of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golconda that too drew upon Persian and Turkish artistic and cultural influences while also being rooted in the indigenous milieu. These examples limn the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Indian subcontinent, that is now also a shared heritage of both India and Pakistan.

It was in the early twentieth century that scholars of Indian art began to bring back the limelight on to the art of Indian miniature painting, thus saving it from relative obscurity that had befallen it during British rule. Their focus on this traditional form of Indian art kept the flame alive, which later led to Indian artists turning towards this art for inspiration. The Bengal School of painting is one such example that, to some extent, is inspired by Indian miniature painting. However, since independence and partition, there has been a more concentrated revival of interest among artists of both India and Pakistan in the miniature style of painting. Although it is essential to mention that the formal training of miniature painting in any art school of the subcontinent was first initiated in the National College of Arts, Lahore, in the 1980s but in the present times, some institutions, like Punjabi University, Patiala, in India, also run such academic programmes. Training in miniature painting was also imparted in various workshops in Jaipur, New Delhi, and other centres of tourism and schools of painting from earlier times.

Analyses of the works have led to the understanding that the contemporary miniatures may be grouped under two categories, one, where the traditional and contemporary meet, and from which emerge elisions in themes and techniques, and the other where for diaspora artists the form of the miniature and its traditions connect their artistic expression to cultural pasts and histories that are reimagined in global terms.

## Tradition Meets Contemporary

It is interesting to know that certain families who were custodians of the art of miniature painting passed their skill to their future generations. Even today, artists like Mohan Kumar from Jaipur and Prakash Paliwal from Udaipur are continuing their family tradition of creating miniature paintings. Besides them, there are other artists too who have made a conscious effort to self-learn and practice this traditional style of painting. Vijay Sharma, artist and art historian, from Chamba in Himachal Pradesh, is one such artist who learned the art despite not coming from a family of miniature painters. He is known for preserving the art of three-hundred-year

miniature painting. In fact, Vijay Sharma was awarded the Padmashri for his contribution in reviving miniature painting by learning, practising and also teaching the art (Karelia, 2020). Sharma creates his paintings by employing traditional techniques and generally shows traditional themes in them. However, he also sometimes gives a contemporary twist to his works by adding contemporary elements. Here, Vijay Sharma has painted Westerners in the guise of Indian royalties in the Basoli style of miniature painting (see Figure 1). By adding these figures, he induces a cross-cultural reference in his work. It is an attempt to connect with the world outside the sub-continent. By including people of a foreign ethnicity in traditional Indian paintings, he also reflects the contemporary times where the world is a global village and nobody is an outsider.

**Figure 1**

*Sharma, Vijay. Contemporary Basoli Miniature Painting, © By Sakoya Foundation.*



There are other artists like Nilima Sheikh who have borrowed influences from Central Asian, Persian, Chinese, pre-Renaissance European and Indian miniature, with which she creates her own visual vocabulary (Sahasrabuddhe, 2016). Her paintings are an amalgamation of the visual cultures from around the world. In her Mountain Tales-2 (see Figure 2), we can see the influence of the Chinese landscape while she narrates the story of the Bodhisattva. Nilima creates an interesting texture by blurring the background, adding mystery to her painting.

**Figure 2**

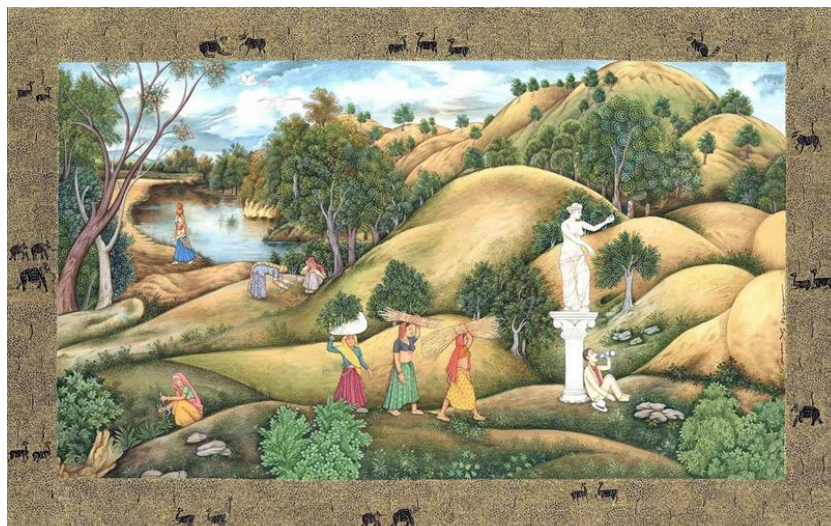
Sheikh, Nilima. (2003). *Mountain Tales-2*, Watercolour and Monoprint on Paper, ©2024 Artnet Worldwide Corporation.



Waswo X. Waswo, besides being an artist, is an American poet, photographer, and traveller who has lived and exhibited in India for more than two decades (Singh, 2019). He is known for creating contemporary miniature paintings, with meticulous detail and with clear influences of the visual traditions of Mughal and Mewar court painting and also the Company School. Waswo, often works in collaboration with a team of skilled traditional painters from Udaipur, Rajasthan (Bhuyan, 2022), transforming narratives into richly symbolic and visually layered compositions. These works are an intricate alliance of Indian and colonial history, contemporary identities, creating and narrating multi-genre stories. He adds a personal touch in these creations by putting his own image in the paintings, generally looking out of place (see Figure 3). However, his presence creates a feeling of an outsider observing and being absorbed by Indian society. It is a semi-autobiographical approach where a feeling of harmony is juxtaposed with the awkwardness of being the “Other,” addressing its tensions while simultaneously suggesting the possibility of its transcendence in ways that are as problematic as they are poignant.

**Figure 3**

X Waswo, Waswo. (2025). *The Mother Earth Series*, New Delhi, © Waswo X Waswo.





Imran Qureshi is another South Asian artist whose work sprouts from the sixteenth-century Mughal miniature style of painting (Jalil, 2025). His paintings deal with contemporary issues while incorporating traditional motifs and techniques. His paintings are concerned with political and environmental threats wrapped in the visual language of traditional paintings. “Threatened” indicates the dangers of war that engulf everyone, and “Other Side Story” is a painting in which the globe is seen from afar, where all humanity is seen as one, facing similar issues and threats (see Figure 4). In his works, he brings the world together in its worries as his medium of expression unites various influences in its pictorial style. Qureshi lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan.

#### Figure 4

Qureshi, Imran. (2023). (L) *Threatened*, Gouache and Gold Leaf on Wasli Paper (R) *Other Side Story*, Gouache and Gold Leaf on Wasli Paper, © 2025 Thaddaeus Ropac.



Contemporary themes in Manjot Kaur’s paintings suggest her preoccupation with the environment as well. However, she expresses her concerns with a feminist accent by painting the protagonist in a female form. In “Hybrid Being”, Kaur portrays the nayika in one of the eight states of relationship (see Figure 5), as described in the Indian treatise *Natyashastra*. Her “While She Births an Ecosystem” (see Figure 5) shows the mother goddess giving birth to ecosystems and trees. The woman in this painting is reclaiming her body and the dominion of nature. Kaur is an Indian artist from the state of Punjab (Grewal, 2019).

**Figure 5**

Kaur, Manjot. (L) (2022). *Hybrid Being 1*, Watercolour and Gouache on Paper; (R) (2020). *While She Births an Ecosystem*, MANJOT KAUR STUDIO © 2019.



### Memory, Nostalgia and Hybrid Identities

The South Asian diaspora has produced many influential visual artists who reflect on questions of identity, migration, memory, hybridity and cultural belonging in their art. Their art often reflects a concern for both their cultural heritage and the global contexts in which they live and work, creating art that speaks to both personal and collective experiences. Interesting, some of these artists have chosen the medium of miniature painting to express themselves, leading to a vibrant body of art that is both rooted in tradition and a global outlook. These works create bridges between cultures, histories and contemporary issues.

**Figure 6**

The Singh Twins, (L) (2022). *Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Dawn*, Mixed Media and Digital (R) (2000). *Laird Singhs His Tartan's Praises*, Poster Paint, Gouache & Gold Dust on Mountboard, © The Singh Twins.





The Singh Twins, Amrit Singh and Rabindra Kaur Singh, are internationally acclaimed contemporary British artists whose award-winning work challenges social, political, and cultural issues while redefining Eurocentric perceptions of art, heritage, and identity. In the artwork, “Laird Singhs His Tartan’s Praises” (see (R) Figure 6), the Singh Twins reflect on the assimilation of Sikhs into Western society by accumulating large estates like a Scottish laird. This also indicates the financial success of the Sikhs in a foreign land. Here, the Sikh gentleman is shown wearing a Tartan (A textile generally used for Scottish kilts), and interestingly, the two weavers at the bottom are Indians as well, who are busy weaving Tartan and presumably Indian patterned textiles on their traditional looms. The Sikh man in this painting wears his turban, holding on to his cultural as well as religious identity. The Singh Twins’ connection to Punjab is reflected in the works that are on the religious history of the Sikhs and also the history of Punjab. Their works include regal images of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, evoking the nostalgic memory of the golden era of Punjab (see (L) Figure 6). Here, they have used mixed media while maintaining the visual imagery of the miniature painting. Their works reflect both tradition and contemporary outlook.

### Figure 7

*Durhailay, Jatinder Singh. (2024). (L) Panth Patshah 96k Akali Baba Santa Singh Ji (R) Two Lovers, Natural Stone Pigments Heightened With Gold and Silver on Handmade Wasli Paper, © Jatinder Singh Durhailay.*



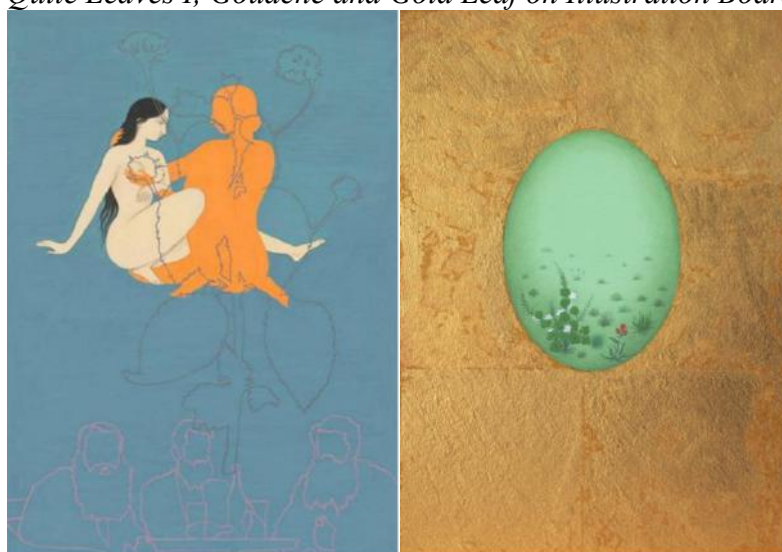
Jatinder Singh Durhailay is another artist of the Indian diaspora from London. Durhailay is particularly fascinated by the use of naturally derived pigments and is also trained in Indian classical music, both of which influence his creative process. In his art, Durhailay blends myths with contemporary culture, offering a unique portrayal of the Sikh community and its culture. Through his art, Durhailay navigates the intersection of tradition and modernity, offering nuanced perspectives on cultural identity and societal issues. His work serves as a vibrant reflection of the diverse influences that shape his artistic vision and the rich tapestry of contemporary Sikh culture (Banerjee, 2025).

The people in Jatinder’s paintings are real people who look like him, heroes who represent his race. In the Western world, it is not very often that he sees people belonging to Punjab hailed

as heroes. The paintings here show Sikhs as central characters. While giving the Mughal background to his “Two Lovers”, he adds a contemporary essence by showing a Sikh man attired in contemporary clothing (see (R) Figure 5). In the other painting, a scene from Hindu mythology depicting Lord Vishnu in Varaha avatar challenging the demon Hiranyaksha (see (L) Figure 5), a copy of an 18th-century Pahari miniature painting by Manaku of Guler (Goswamy, 2014), forms the lower part of the work, while the top part consists of a Sikh sant with his disciples, both of Indian and European origin. The group is surrounded by images of the WWF wrestlers, emphasising the warriorship in the work. The Pahari miniature refers to the emergence of Lord Vishnu in Varaha Avatara to eliminate the threat posed by the *daitya* Hiranyaksha.

### Figure 8

*Qureshi, Nusra Latif. (L) (2002). Gardens of Desire II, Gouache on Wasli Paper, (R) (2017). Quite Leaves I, Gouache and Gold Leaf on Illustration Board, © Nusra Qureshi.*



Through a research-oriented practice, Nusra Latif Qureshi draws upon diverse visual sources such as colonial-era photography, botanical and anatomical illustrations, and historical textile designs to reimagine the connection between subject and environment. While deeply rooted in the formal discipline of classical miniature painting, Qureshi gives a feel of Nostalgia when she paints plants in an oval, as if seen from afar through a lens. This work of hers seems heavily influenced in its pictorial representation by the eighteenth-century miniature painting titled “Hiranyagarbha”; however, Qureshi has painted the background opaque gold while in the original painting (see (R) Figure 8), the oval or the egg was painted opaque gold, floating in swirling lines depicting the whirlpools of timeless waters (Goswamy, 2014). She lives and works in Melbourne, Australia. In her works, she uses the imagery of Mughal miniature painting to reflect on the colonial past and memories of her homeland. In the work “Gardens of desire II” (see (L) Figure 5), the image of lovers from the Pahari miniature painting titled “The Pavilion of Love” by a member of the first generation after renowned artist Nainsukh, painted in c. 1775 (Goswamy, 2014) is superimposed on the outline of a botanical study of a plant, below which the outline of three men is shown drinking, probably a reference to a colonial photograph.

## Conclusion

The Indian miniature painting was a jewel of the royal ateliers of the Indian subcontinent, and it has never been a static tradition. From its earliest appearance, it absorbed and transformed diverse influences like Persian, Central Asian, and European into a uniquely local idiom. The contemporary miniature painting shows an adaptive capacity to incorporate global influences, enriching it further and allowing it to flourish as both a preserved craft and a contemporary language of pictorial expression. Artists from India, Pakistan and their wider diaspora continue to paint in this tradition, while dabbling between their heritage and modernity. They also incorporate both local and global aspects, often relying on the collective memory of the community applied in an innovative way.

Artists like Vijay Sharma uphold the legitimacy of the traditional miniature painting techniques and themes in his work. Other practitioners, such as Nilima Sheikh, Waswo X. Waswo, Imram Qureshi, Manjot Kaur, the Singh Twins, Jatinder Durhailay, and Nusra Qureshi, bring new cultural and political aspects of the contemporary world. Their works reflect issues of environment, gender, identity, colonial memory, and diasporic belonging, proving that the miniature painting in the present times also retains its resilience and relevance.

Thus, miniature painting as practised in present times exemplifies how in present times, the tradition has transformed itself into an art that in its vocabulary, both pictorial and thematic, is bridging the past and the present, allowing artists to evolve a modern heritage in their work. Today's practice of miniature painting is transcultural and transhistorical, taking one forward to the past, and emerging as an art form that exemplifies how tradition can be reinvented in a manner that cements its relevance in a globalised world and yet retains the essence of its rich history.

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## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

In writing this paper, Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. We further declare that, apart from these, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.



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## **Real Estate and Construction Employees' Challenges and Needs of English Communication for Phuket's Growing Tourism Industry**

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### **Abstract**

Phuket's real estate and construction sectors have played a vital through tourism and foreign investment. As international stakeholders continue to influence the Phuket's development, English communication has become a critical skill for professionals in these industries. However, limited English proficiency has hindered effective workplace communication and career progression among local employees. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to investigate the challenges faced by real estate and construction employees in using English communication in the workplace and to identify their needs for English skill development. The study employed a qualitative approach, analyzing real estate and construction industry documents such as local business news, business journals, job advertisements, training manuals, and project reports from 100 top-performing real estate and construction companies in Phuket selected from Department of Business Development data warehouse in 2024 (Department of Business Development, 2024). Data were examined using thematic analysis. The results revealed that major communication challenges included limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, and low speaking confidence. The most needed improvements were in listening, speaking, and real estate and construction terminology. The findings of this study can serve as a guideline for designing English training programs tailored to the real estate and construction employees. Training should emphasize adaptive learning approaches that address specific job functions and language needs. Such initiatives could enhance the global competitiveness of Phuket's employees and contribute to more inclusive economic development in tourism regions.

*Keywords:* real estate and construction, English communication, need analysis, adaptive learning, ESP, Phuket

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## Introduction

The rapid growth of Phuket's real estate and construction industries, driven by foreign investment and tourism, has surged the need for proficient English communication among professionals. In real estate and construction, employees must engage with foreign buyers, international contractors, and corporations. Among these domains, the real estate and construction industries rely heavily on English proficiency to facilitate smooth and effective communication between real estate agents and international investors (Astruc, 2022; Jitaksorn et al., 2024; Sermsook et al., 2021). Apparently, the Phuket property market has boomed in recent years. As once said by Ho Kwon Ping, founder and executive chairman of Banyan Group "I find that property markets worldwide, including China, Bangkok, the US and Europe, are at best in a doldrum, and at worst crashing down after a decade of growth. But Phuket is a remarkable exception" (Katharangsiporn, 2024). In the first half of 2024, approximately 60% of the buyers at The Standard Residences, Phuket Bang Tao are foreigners, acquiring units for both investment purposes and personal use (Carlisle, 2024). Given Phuket's position as a destination of global tourism and real estate, English language competency is a key for businesses catering to foreign customers (Prachanant, 2012).

However, many Thai workers in these fields face challenges, particularly in listening, speaking, and contract comprehension, which hinders their ability to engage effectively with international clients, both Asians and Westerns (Jongwanich, 2014; Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). This deficiency has led to increased reliance on foreign staff, limiting local career progression and reducing international competitiveness (Duangdee, 2023). To address these challenges, the study advocates for adaptive learning approaches, which tailor the curriculum to individual needs, learning styles, and specific requirements (Beldagli & Adiguzel, 2010). This method is particularly relevant for real estate and construction employees, who must master technical terms related to property transactions, construction materials, and legal terminology (Richardson, 2003).

A crucial aspect of adaptive learning is the needs analysis, which plays a foundational role in the learning process. Before designing any curriculum, it is essential to first identify their specific needs. This ensures that the course content is aligned with both their specific requirements and individual learning goals. A thorough needs analysis not only helps in customizing the course content but also enhances engagement. This ultimately bridges the language proficiency gap and improving workplace communication (Dewi & Qamariah, 2023; Höver & Steiner, 2009). As employees in real estate and construction improve their English proficiency, it may open up new opportunities for increased income in a city with high economic competition in tourism. Therefore, it is essential to examine the specific challenges that real estate and construction employees face when using English communication in the workplace. In particular, identifying their English communication improvement needs is crucial for enhancing their professional performance.

## Research Objectives

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the challenges encountered by real estate and construction employees in using English communication in the workplace
2. To identify the needs for improving real estate and construction employees' English communication skills

## Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored English communication challenges within Thailand's tourism industries, especially in areas such as hotels, restaurants, and tour agencies where interactions with international tourists are frequent (Alenezi et al., 2023; Bousri, 2018). Those studies highlight issues such as limited vocabulary, and lack of business English writing such as letters and e-mails.

Phuket, being one of Thailand's most prominent international tourist destinations, has received particular attention in this regard. As the island's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, English has become a vital tool for professional communication, particularly in service industries (Durongkaveroj, 2013; Marzuki, 2012). However, despite the growing economic importance of the real estate and construction industries in Phuket—which have been significantly dominated by foreign demand—very few empirical studies have examined English communication challenges and the need for English communication improvement in these specific sectors.

While several international studies have examined the challenges and needs of English communication among real estate and construction workers, such research remains limited in the Thai context (Park, 2024; Teixeira et al., 2006). For instance, Trajkovski and Loosemore (2006) explored the challenges and the needs of English language among migrant construction workers in Australia. Their findings highlighted how low English proficiency can lead to significant communication breakdowns, particularly in safety training. In Thailand, previous studies have examined English communication needs in hospitality and service industries contexts; however, the real estate and construction workforce remains overlooked (Chiablaem, 2020; Tarrayo et al., 2025).

According to Cornwall and Srilapung (2013), Rajprasit and Hemchua (2015), and Prakaiborisuth (2023), have acknowledged the growing demand for communicative English among tourism enterprises such as flight attendants, airport officers, hotel staff, and shop owners. The studies indicate that although these employees generally perform a good command of English—due to job requirements that demand strong English proficiency—they still occasionally struggle with specialized English used in various contexts, such as legal, political, or social issues. Based on these findings, little attention has been given to the language needs of employees who work in real estate and construction. This lack of focus is surprisingly given the international nature of real estate and construction businesses in Phuket and the growing need for employees who can communicate fluently and accurately in English.

In many cases, deficiency of English skills has led companies to rely on foreign staff to handle international clients (Saksiriruthai, 2015). It limited local career growth and reinforced labor market dependency on expatriates. Similarly, a study by Kolbe (2023) conducted on Phi Phi Island, Phuket, revealed the increasing employment of foreign workers, which has led to a decline in job opportunities for local Thai residents, as foreign employees are perceived to better meet service expectations and communicate more effectively in English.

To address this research gap, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis among employees in the real estate and construction industries. Needs analysis refers to the process of systematically identifying learners' current abilities, workplace language requirements, and specific training objectives (Dewi et al., 2016). It is also considered the key component

of the adaptive learning approach, as mentioned by Woodrow (2006) that it is the first step towards preparation of language course by laying the foundation for customizing instruction to fit individual learners' profiles. This process helps ensure that language training programs are designed to actual communicative demands rather than relying on generic or broad curricula (Mansor et al., 2024).

In this context, needs analysis functions as a foundation for curriculum design, facilitating instructors and course developers to identify what types of English skills—such as technical vocabulary, contract negotiation, sale and marketing—are most urgently required by employees. Studies have shown that when course content aligns with learners' job roles and goals, training becomes significantly more effective and engaging (Alenezi et al., 2023; Otilia, 2015). Additionally, a well-conducted needs analysis helps learners feel that their context is acknowledged, thereby increasing motivation and retention (Rajprasit & Hemchua, 2015).

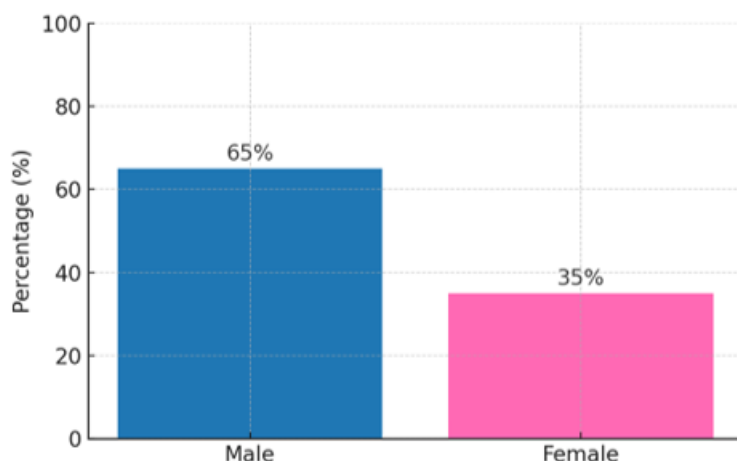
In summary, although many studies have addressed English language challenges in Thailand's tourism fields, little attention has been given to the real estate and construction industries, particularly in Phuket. There is an urgent need to investigate the specific communication challenges encountered by employees in these industries, as well as their needs for English communication development. This study aims to fill this gap by examining both the difficulties encountered in using English in the workplace and the specific needs for English communication improvement among employees in Phuket's real estate and construction sectors.

## **Methodology**

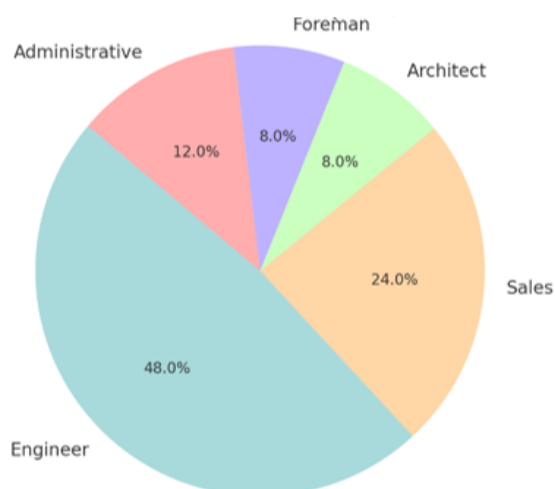
### **Populations and Sample**

This study employed a qualitative research design. The participants were 100 employees from 20 selected real estate and construction companies in Phuket. These companies were purposively selected from a total of 449 firms in the area based on the top 20 highest revenue in 2024 and frequent engagement with international clients (Department of Business Development, 2024). Phuket was chosen as the research site due to its significant growth in the real estate and construction sectors, largely driven by tourism, with a strong demand for condominiums and vacation villas.

The participants consisted of both male and female employees, with 65% being male and 35% female with 3-20 years of working experiences. The following figures provide a demographic profile of the participants. Figure 1 presents a number of participants by genders.

**Figure 1***A Number of Participants According to Genders*

According to Figure 1, there were 65 males and 35 females participating in this research project, which indicates that the real estate and construction sectors are typically male-dominated fields. They held various positions such as engineer, sale agent, and architect etc. Figure 2 shows a number of the participants according to their job positions.

**Figure 2***A Number of Participants According to Job Positions*

According to Figure 2, nearly half of the respondents (48%) were engineers—including site engineers and project managers—representing the largest occupational group in this study. This indicates a significant representation from the construction industry. Following this, sales positions—including sales executives and agents—accounted for 24% of participants, suggesting their active engagement in client communication and negotiation in real estate sectors.

Interestingly, administrative roles such as document controllers and office assistants made up 12% of the group, showing their supportive function in project operations. Foremen, who are essential on-site supervisors, comprised 8%, equal to the portion of architects (8%), who play a crucial role in project design and planning.

Their English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. All participants were selected based on their direct involvement in English communication in the workplace. Prior consent to participate in the study was obtained via email and telephone. Data collection was conducted using an open-ended structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using manual thematic analysis based on the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

### **Research Tools**

An open-ended questionnaire was administered via Google Form to the participants between March and April 2025. It was designed to explore the challenges of using English in the workplace and the participants' needs for improvement in English communication. The questionnaire comprised three parts.

The first part aimed to collect demographic information, including participants' work experience, level of English proficiency, gender, age, job position, and personal contact details (e-mail address and phone number).

The second part consisted of four open-ended questions intended to identify:

1. Situations in which English is used in the workplace
2. Challenges in using English communication
3. Needs for improving communication skills in English
4. Needs for English language knowledge

(The items in this section were adapted from Nomnian [2014])

The third part comprised an open-ended question that allowed participants to provide additional information regarding their specific training needs in English communication.

#### **1) Validity Check**

The open-ended questionnaire was reviewed by three Thai EFL lecturers to check validity in the form of Items Objective Congruence Index (Tantawan & Prachaya, 2018) to ensure its content validity and alignment with the research objectives. The evaluation was based on content clarity, construction, and relevance to the target context. Comments and suggestions were used to revise and improve the construction of the open-ended items before the pilot stage.

#### **2) Piloting**

The revised open-ended questionnaire was piloted with 30 employees working in the real estate and construction sectors in Phuket province. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on two criteria: 1.) currently employed in real estate or construction companies in Phuket, and 2.) having English proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 according to the CEFR framework. All participants were not included in the main study. The questionnaires were administered via printed copies distributed in person, while an online version (Google Form) was also made available for participants who could not be reached directly. The pilot result was analyzed for the reliability of the questionnaire using the Cronbach's alpha and the questionnaire was checked for any ambiguities.

### **Data Collection**

An open-ended questionnaire aimed 1.) to examine the challenges encountered by real estate and construction employees in using English communication in the workplace and 2.) to

identify the needs for improving real estate and construction employees' English communication skills. The open-ended questionnaire was administered to 100 real estate and construction employees in Phuket from March to April 2025 via Google Form.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using manual thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This method was chosen to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within qualitative data derived from participants' written responses. It aimed to find common patterns across a data set. The real estate and construction employees' views on the challenges they encountered while using English communication in workplace and the needs of English communication improvement were classified into themes (Macaro, 2005).

### **Results**

The analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses yielded four major themes: (1) situations when English communication is used in the workplace, (2) challenges and problems in using English communication at work, (3) needs for improving English communication skills, and (4) needs for specific English knowledge. These themes reflect the English communication demands, obstacles, and training priorities among employees in the Phuket area's construction and real estate sectors.

#### **1) Situations When English Communication is Used in the Workplace**

Respondents reported using English most frequently in interactions with customers and during general communication tasks. The three most frequently cited themes include communicating with clients and owners, basic English for daily routines, and team meetings. This highlights the practical and operational nature of English usage, primarily focused on interpersonal communication.

The respondents' opinions were categorized into 3 themes as follows:

##### ***Communicating With Clients and Owners***

Respondent 1: "I need to communicate with technical staff and foreign clients and owners."

Respondent 2: "I use English to explain job details, report work progress, present solutions to problems, and handing over houses to clients."

Respondent 3: "When contact with clients and owners."

##### ***Basic English for Daily Routines***

Respondent 4: "General greeting with colleagues and clients such as Hello, Nice to meet you."

Respondent 5: "I use English as a daily basis since most of my colleagues are foreigners."



***Team Meetings***

Respondent 6 “Coordinate bidding, meetings, and construction process.”

Respondent 7 “When I have meetings with foreign team members, I have to communicate in English.”

**2) Challenges and Problems in Using English Communication at Work**

The study identified most recurrent problems that inhibit effective English use. These are: limited vocabulary, difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents, and low speaking confidence. These challenges suggest that while English may be routinely used, it is not always used with confidence or accuracy.

The three themes were emerged from the respondents as follows:

***Limited Vocabulary***

Respondent 1: “I don’t know some vocabulary and how to pronounce some words and phrases. Sometimes I pronounce it wrong resulting in misunderstandings in communication, especially with foreign clients or during phone conversations.”

Respondent 2: “I have limited vocabulary and phrases.”

Respondent 3: “I cannot remember vocabulary and I don’t know how to construct the sentence.”

***Unfamiliar Accents***

Respondent 4: “I have a problem in listening some kinds of accents that I’m not familiar with.”

Respondent 5: “English is not my cup of tea and I don’t understand some accents so I avoid communicating with foreigners. However, when I have to communicate with, I often use AI application.”

***Low Speaking Confidence***

Respondent 6: “I cannot use English with confidence. I feel insecure when speaking English.”

Respondent 7: “I’m afraid to speak English because I have limited knowledge of it.”

Respondent 8: “I’m not confident speaking English because I’m afraid.”

**3) Needs for Improving English Communication Skills**

In terms of areas for development, listening and speaking were the most frequently mentioned skills, with both cited by 73 respondents. These were followed by real estate and

construction terminology (46 mentions), reading skills (38), writing (37), and grammar (33). This indicates a pressing need for training that enhances both receptive and productive communication skills, especially in English communication.

**Figure 3**

*A Number of Mentions of Needs for Improving English Communication Skills*

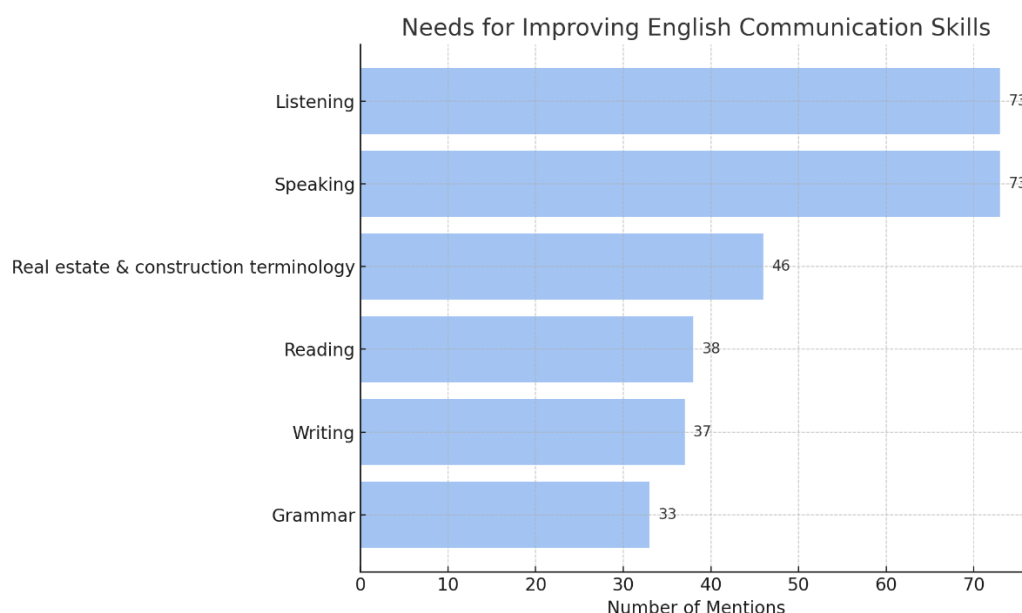


Figure 3 illustrates the participants' prioritized needs for improving English communication skills, clearly showing that listening and speaking are the most demanded areas, each receiving 73 mentions. These two skills are particularly vital for professionals working in engineering and sales, which were the top position categories among respondents. These roles frequently require verbal interaction with foreign clients, contractors, and stakeholders in Phuket area.

Followed by, real estate and construction terminology was mentioned 46 times. This indicates that general English proficiency is not sufficient for these industries; they require specific vocabulary to effectively communicate technical details, regulations, and specifications. This is particularly relevant to engineers, architects, and foremen, who must frequently discuss technical issues in English, especially when dealing with international clients or companies.

Although reading and writing were not as highly cited, their significance should not be neglected. In workplace contexts, the ability to read manuals, technical documents, and contracts and write reports, emails, and bill of quantities (BoQ) remains essential. Still, grammar was viewed as the lowest priority among the employees. However, it is a foundational skill that supports all language functions and English comprehension.

#### **4) Needs for Specific English Knowledge**

When asked to specify the types of English knowledge most relevant to their jobs, respondents identified real estate and construction terminology as the top priority. This was followed by communication skills, and basic English for daily routine.

These are the areas of English knowledge that most respondents would like to improve:

### ***Real Estate and Construction Terminology***

Respondent 1: “Vocabulary used on construction sites.”

Respondent 2: “English for Real estate and Construction.”

Respondent 3: “Vocabulary that is used in Marketing and Sales.”

### ***Communication Skills***

Respondent 5: “Listening and speaking skills.”

Respondent 6: “Conversation and communication.”

Respondent 7: “English for communication.”

### ***Basic English for Daily Routine***

Respondent 4: “General communication vocabulary such as greetings, confirmations, and simple instructions are necessary for smooth communication.”

## **Discussion**

This study reveals needs for English communication among adult employees in the real estate and construction sectors. Many respondents expressed that they frequently use English in practical settings such as client communication, basic English for daily routine, and coordinating meetings with foreign colleagues. Supporting this, a large-scale study conducted in Hong Kong found that professionals working in construction and real estate used English extensively—especially those in higher positions. They relied on English for reading and writing business documents, participating in formal meetings, and coordinating with foreign partners. The more senior the professional, the more frequent and essential English use became in their daily work (Evans & Green, 2006).

Despite these frequent interactions, several participants reported low confidence in their ability to use English effectively, particularly in listening and speaking. Such responses suggest that the learners’ anxiety and difficulty with listening comprehension and pronunciation. Several respondents mentioned struggles with unfamiliar accents or mispronouncing words, leading to miscommunication. For these adult learners, supplementary tools such as pronunciation or conversation audio or mobile AI application could help foster autonomy and confidence outside classroom settings. These findings align with Horwitz et al. (1986) assertion that foreign language anxiety can significantly hinder learners’ willingness to participate and their perceived self-efficacy. The participants’ lack of confidence, especially in speaking and listening tasks, indicates a need for supportive, low-stress learning environments that foster gradual exposure and positive reinforcement.

Importantly, respondents also highlighted a need for terminology of real estate and construction, marketing, and sales—key functional domains in their daily tasks. These findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all curriculum would likely fall short of meeting the

functional language demands of diverse roles within the real estate and construction sectors. Likely, Saldivar and Fernandez (2024) demonstrated that adaptive learning strategies in English language teaching significantly improve learner engagement and performance. Their concept analysis found that adaptive learning enhances communication skills by delivering customized content that matches learners' needs, interests, and professional goals. This directly aligns with the demand for English training that includes specialized vocabulary and English communication for career.

To address these needs effectively, the integration of adaptive learning technologies should be considered. Adaptive learning refers to instructional systems that tailor content delivery based on individual learner data, such as proficiency levels, job functions, and usage patterns (Walkington, 2013). In the context of this study, such technologies can provide personalized vocabulary modules—for example, technical terms for site engineers, client interaction phrases for sales agents, and legal terminology for project managers.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates the English communication challenges and needs of employees in English communication improvement in Phuket's real estate and construction companies. The findings illustrate three major insights: first, the challenges while using English communication include limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, and low confidence when speaking. Second, the needs in English communication skill improvement refer to specific areas that employees wish to enhance, such as speaking fluency and listening accuracy. Third, the needs of English knowledge relate to specific vocabulary and expressions used in real estate and construction contexts. These issues reflect the complexity of language use in high leverage work environments that require constant interaction with international clients, project partners, and foreign teams.

Participants in this study were mostly male and holding technical positions. Many expressed low confidences in English use despite frequent exposure, pointing to the importance of not only language instruction but also learning environments. As many of them serve as the frontline communicators in high-stakes scenarios such as construction planning, property sales, and legal negotiations, the ability to use precise language is essential.

To support this, workplace language training initiatives should be actively promoted and supported by both the private sector and local education providers. Institutions such as vocational training centers, non-formal education departments, and industry associations can act as key contributors in making language learning more accessible and responsive to the high demands of the post-COVID era. Moreover, it is essential to provide regular updates on industry-specific English vocabulary and communication practices. This can be done through self-online learning platforms or formal training sessions organized by real estate and construction associations. Such initiatives will enhance the industry's capacity to compete on an international scale, particularly in provinces where tourism and foreign investment play a dominant economic role.

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## **Melodies of Memory: Exploring Culture and Tradition Through Local Folksongs**

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### **Abstract**

This study is a descriptive ethno-literary research on the study of folksongs transmitted orally through generations. Ethnographic methods of data collection and Russian formalism informed the structural and textual analysis of these folksongs. The study aims to analyze the various types of existing folksongs of Ligao City, which were initially recited or sung in Bicol and performed by key informants. Specifically, it attempts to examine form and content; to deduce themes, beliefs, traits, values, cultural practices, and traditions; and to determine which folkways are still practiced, on the verge of extinction, or discarded. Findings reveal that Bicol folksongs have a relatively strong sense of form. However, this sense of creating patterns of sound exhibits an inherent and keen sense for sound rather than a conscious creation of end sounds or rhythmic patterns. Most often, the result is a loose rhyme structure and a unique rhythmic pattern that does not conform to traditional metered poetry, or if it does, only very rarely. Folksongs are also rich in images from the use of figures of speech like metaphor, apostrophe, and the like. Utilizing comparisons also leads to symbols and images from an observant use of sights and sounds from everyday life. These folksongs reveal both literary and cultural artifacts—from the use of poetic devices in both their form and content, as well as Bikol beliefs, values, and traits. Some are still strongly adhered to, but with a few, slowly slipping away with the passage of time.

*Keywords:* cultural, indigenous, folklore, literature, traditions

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## Introduction

Memories are not held by things but carried by people. This is a powerful truth in folklore when, in the olden days, people communicated their thoughts, expressed their feelings, and shared their experiences through oral or verbal means to make sense of the world around them.

Folklore pertains to customs, beliefs, stories, sayings, and the like handed down from generation to generation. Anthropologists defined folklore as literature while scholars of literature considered it as culture (Ben-Amos, 1971).

Folklore as literature refers to traditional beliefs and stories originally preserved through the act of storytelling and subsequently recorded in writing. Folk literature can be in the form of documented stories, poems, songs, and other artful forms of knowledge passed down from generation to generation (Thompson, 2024).

As culture, folklore serves as a storehouse of the folk's manifold experiences. It is everything they learned out of their significant personal encounters and daily occurrences in their seemingly mundane life.

One of the many categories of folklore is verbal art or verbal lore. Verbal lore consists of any kind of folklore involving sung traditions, or spoken words, whether set to music, organized in chronological, story form, or simply labeling an activity or expressing a belief in a word or phrase (Thompson, 2024). This type can be in any of the common forms of legends, myths, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, and folk songs.

As a verbal lore, folksongs originate among the people of a country or area, passed by oral tradition from one singer or generation to the next, often existing in several versions, and marked generally by simple, modal melody and stanzaic, narrative verse. (Dictionary.com, 2012). Folksongs serve as the record of humanity's thoughts and feelings since the dawn of time. From this perspective, Bikol folksongs like *Sarung Banggi*, *Kulasising Berde* (*Green Parrot*) and *Salampating Guminaro* (*Tamed Dove*) are repositories of literary and cultural artifacts that reflect the desires, needs, and even aspirations of early Bicolanos.

So, what literary artifacts can be uncovered from Bikol folksongs? Firstly, the task is to determine our ancestors' creative use of language through their songs by identifying the figures of speech used as well as other poetic devices such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter, including imagery and symbols.

Were they skillful in using repetition of sounds particularly at the end of a verse? Can we note the occurrence of a pattern of sound in regular intervals? In other words, are rhyme and rhythm typical features of these folksongs? Additionally, to enrich their songs, did they use figures in their surroundings to obliquely refer to someone or something. And in reading or singing their songs, are there pictures that appeal to the senses of hearing, seeing and touch among others? How adept were they in using symbols and imagery?

Secondly, often a folksong tells a story—no matter how short or how flimsy. This corpus study, therefore, will also examine what people of yore in Ligao City considered were important enough to think, talk and feel about in their songs. What was the subject and themes of their narratives?

Thirdly, it is generally recognized that literature reflects the way of life of a people. How did they worship God or their gods? Why must a woman hide her face behind a fan? Did they find time for leisure? How was work assigned to family members? The corpus of the folksongs in study should be rich with cultural artifacts that describe the beliefs, the values, traits, and practices of our Bicolano ancestors.

This ethno-literary research, therefore, justifies a literary analysis approach that is informed by the mechanics of both form and content of each poem. Furthermore, it attempts to examine the cultural and traditional features embedded in local folksongs to draw out significant themes, values, and practices transmitted across generations.

The corpus of the analysis is the Bikol folksongs indigenous to, or in the case of some, loosely associated with the people of Ligao City, Albay, Philippines. Classified among the growing cities of Albay Province, Ligao shares its history with the towns of Polangui and Oas as a sitio of Cavasi, before it became an independent municipality in the year 1666. Three hundred thirty-five years later, on March 24, 2001, Ligao was converted into a component city by virtue of Republic Act No. 9008. To the South of this city is the Municipality of Guinobatan; to the East, the City of Tabaco; to the North is the Municipality of Oas; and to the West the Municipality of Pio Duran and Panganiran Bay. The City's remarkable topography offers varied landscape, from vast agricultural lands and a few fascinating beaches to a dynamic business and commercial hub at the heart of the city, revealing the urban-rural character of the locale that makes it an ideal venue to study the dynamic properties of folklore, which do not, in its totality, belong to an ancient, bygone era; but constantly grow and evolve as man and his environment does (Imran, 2021).

To realize the objectives of this study, the researcher has looked into the folksongs in terms of their poetic devices to reveal form and content, identified recurring motifs which formulate the themes of the poems; drew out beliefs, traits, values, cultural practices, and traditions in said folksongs; and find out if said folkways are: a) still practiced, b) at the verge of extinction, c) no longer in existence, and revealed from said folklore texts which influences are relatively modern or contemporary and which are basically old and traditional.

While it is true that there are various literature that probes into folksongs and their structural and textual analysis, they differ in focus or emphasis. For instance, Alan Lomax in his *The Folk Song Style and Culture* (1968) provides a framework for analyzing song structure, thematic content, and their connection to cultural practices. The book gives a detailed discussion on how folksongs reflect cultural patterns. It provides valuable insights into analyzing the thematic content of folksongs. *Narratology and Folk Narrative* by the folklorist Alessandro Falassi (2008) investigates the narrative structure of folksongs. He analyzes how narrative elements like character development, plot structure, and point of view contribute to the meaning and function of folksongs within a cultural context. While Falassi looks into the narrative elements to make meaning, the current study analyzes the folksongs in terms of narrative and poetic elements. Folklorist Roger D. Abrahams in his book *Performance, Text, and Audience* (2016) focuses on the importance of performance context in analyzing folksongs. He argues that textual analysis alone is insufficient, and that understanding the performance context, audience interaction, and social function of folksongs is crucial to a complete understanding of their meaning. The book offers a deeper and more specific approach in analyzing folksongs. Sociologist Timothy D. Evans in *Folk Music and Modern Society* (2017) examines the role of folksongs in contemporary society. He utilizes textual analysis alongside social and historical context to explore how folksongs evolve and adapt to reflect changing social realities. This

work highlights the dynamic nature of folksong tradition. Finnegan (1977), in *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* asserts that meaning in oral poetry arises not only from textual structure but also from its cultural and situational use. Her approach is essential in examining folksongs, as it integrates the analysis of poetic devices, thematic content, and cultural context within a single interpretive model that respects both artistry and communal tradition. This literature is very akin to the current undertaking as its approach allows for an integrated reading of poetic structure, thematic content, and cultural context within the region's living oral tradition.

Moreover, Imran et al. (2014) have undertaken a Research Project entitled “Barangay Arimbay Verbal Lore: An Anthology of Myths, Legends, Folktales, Anecdotes, Indigenous Healing Practices, Folk Songs, Poetry, Riddles and Proverbs.” The research project yielded a large collection of various types of indigenous Arimbay verbal lore, textual analysis of the genres, and instructional materials for the K-12 program. A cultural profile of the community was made in terms of beliefs, traits, values, customary practices, and traditions, yet they differ from the current study in the locale and local cultural nuances. In addition, the current undertaking builds upon the existing body of research by offering a focused analysis of Ligao City's folksongs, uncovering local cultural traces, identifying the interplay of traditional and modern influences, and potentially revealing new motifs or themes specific to the region.

Without doubt, the study of folksong or oral poetry as a literary form—particularly of the old folks of the City of Ligao—is long overdue, but hopefully, not too late, for it is a fact that folksong is a vanishing literary and cultural tradition, which even more stresses the need to sustain its preservation and transmission. Romualdo emphasizes this truth and avers that “there's nothing more culturally devastating than having traditions slowly fade from practice into the dark corners of memory. Music, especially its forms deeply rooted in specific events and experiences, belongs to those traditions” (Romualdo, 2018). Our collective memory as Bicolanos is endangered by the rapid spread of technology as well as dominant languages, both driven by globalization. This is explicitly expressed in The Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. While globalization and social transformation promote renewed dialogue among communities, they also pose significant risks to intangible cultural heritage, which may deteriorate or disappear—particularly when there are insufficient resources for its safeguarding (UNESCO, 2003). In passing down oral literature from one generation to the next lies the heart of culture and memory. Hence, this study is an effort to raise awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of folksongs through an analysis of its literary form and content, and as a repository of cultural traditions and artifacts, particularly of the early inhabitants of what is now the City of Ligao.

### **Methodology**

*Melodies of Memory: Exploring Culture and Tradition Through Local Folksongs* is a descriptive ethno-literary research that fuses ethnography and literature in the study of a body of folklore material transmitted orally through generations, known as Verbal Lore. It involves the collection, validation, recording/documentation, and translation of existing folksongs of Ligao City from various clustered barangays that encompass four ecosystems—coastal, upland, urban, and lowland. The study aims to analyze the various types of existing folksongs of Ligao City. In the conduct of data collection, formal consent was obtained from the Local Government Unit (LGU) Mayor and barangay captains to ensure that it aligns with local regulations and community interests. The approval obtained led the researcher to conduct the collection of data. Hence, ethical guidelines such as consent from the key informants for the

conduct of data gathering were observed. During this stage of the study, the folksongs were initially recited or sung in the Bicol dialect and performed by a number of key informants who were at least 50 years old, could sing, and provide information on how and from whom they learned the song. The researcher employed methods of immersion, participant-observation, and unstructured interviews to collect the data needed for the study. A total of eight (8) folk songs were collected from the many key informants. These folksongs were later written down and translated into English. Moreover, to ensure the veracity and validity of the translation from the vernacular into English, a set of jurors representing varied sectors in the field of education such as Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and the like, and who were proficient in the vernacular and in the English language, were chosen to ensure that meanings of the folksongs were not altered during the translation phase. Their suggestions were also considered in the revision of the folklore material. Specifically, the study focuses on the structural (form) and textual (content) analysis of the existing folksongs of Ligao City. To examine thoroughly the form and content of these early forms of literature and be able to draw out significant themes, beliefs, traits, values, cultural practices, and traditions discernible from the texts, specific methodologies have to be applied in order to glean desired results. The study uses a formalistic perspective in the analysis of the folksongs. It is said that indigenous poetry is a league of its own. Its literary merits can be best understood and appreciated by using a perspective that is unique to its nature as well. Given this context, among the literary theories, Formalism sits well as an analytical framework for indigenous poetry. Formalism is one of the earliest forms of criticism, dating as far back as Aristotle. It gained ascendancy in the early 1900s when the Russians elevated it to the realm of literary criticism. Briefly, formalism is an objective approach to literary criticism. It isolates the literary piece from the extrinsic environment, such as history, politics, religion, among others, and judges the work strictly on its intrinsic merits: language and structure, or form and style (Formalism, 2021). The study, therefore, justifies a literary analysis approach that is informed by the mechanics of the form and content of each folk song, which allows expression or suggestion of cultural insights through the text and structure of the poem to understand how they contribute to the text's meaning and effect, even without the use of outside context. The rhyme, rhythm and meter, figures of speech, imagery and symbol, subject matter, and theme of the folksongs were identified and analyzed to create a clear picture of the distinguishing characteristics of Bicolano folk songs. The study analyzed the structure of these Bicolano folk songs in terms of these poetic devices. Poetic devices such as figures of speech, rhythmic repetition, symbols, and imagery unveil subject matter, themes, and cultural meanings such as beliefs, values, and traditional practices necessary to the culture from which the folksongs belong. The textual analysis of the songs enabled the study to reveal the culture and traditions of the Bicolano people.

## **Results and Discussion**

This is a corpus analysis of Bicol folksongs indigenous to or in the case of some, loosely associated with the peoples of Ligao City. The perspective is that folksongs, in their written form, is a literary genre—that is, poetry. This, therefore, justifies a literary analysis approach that is informed by the mechanics of the form and the content of each song.

Bicol folksongs reveal a relatively strong sense of rhyme, rhythm, and meter. However, this sense of creating patterns of sound is highly expected due to an inherent and keen sense for sound rather than a studied or conscious creation of end sounds or rhythmic patterns. Most often, the result is a loose rhyme structure and a unique rhythmic pattern that does not conform

with traditional metered poetry, or if it does, only very rarely. Tables 1 and 2 reveal these findings on the poetic devices of the existing folksongs analyzed.

**Table 1**

*Structural and Textual Analysis: Poetic Devices*

Folksongs	Rhyme Scheme	Rhythm	Meter
1. Kulasising Berde ( <i>Green Parrot</i> )	irregular/ sustained/ deliberate	strong, loose	loose iambic meter, sound pattern creates a playfully harmonious mood
2. Salampating Guminaro ( <i>Tamed Dove</i> )	irregular end rhyme	strong	Irregular
3. Sarong Banggi ( <i>One Night</i> )	loose, irregular, free verse	does not have poetic rhythm	no meter
4. Dandansoy ( <i>Person's Name</i> )	irregular end rhyme	loose	regular
5. Kaka ( <i>Elder Sibling</i> )	end rhyme, regular	strong sense of rhythm, irregular, loose rhythm	irregular
6. Si Haring Solomon ( <i>King Solomon</i> )	loose, there is a pattern of rhymes or rhyme structure that creates a certain repetition that attracts and engages our sense of sound	loose, irregular	irregular
7. O, Maliwanag na Buwan ( <i>Oh, Bright Moon</i> )	irregular end rhyme	varying syllables, irregular, loose	irregular
8. Lawiswis Kawayan ( <i>Whispering Bamboo</i> )	close to an end rhyme scheme but not a perfect pattern, loose	loose	loose

Bicol folksongs are rich in images largely from the use of figures of speech such as metaphor, the extended metaphor, apostrophe, allusions to name some. Utilizing comparisons also lead to symbols and images that stems from an observant use of sights and sounds from everyday life. The folksong *Kulasising Berde*, for instance, exemplifies these features in the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza. *Kulasising Berde* is obviously not about a green parrot or kulasisi but the bird is used as a direct comparison or a metaphor for a flirtatious woman or a girl—kulasisi being a kind of bird that is almost a universal symbol for flirty women in Philippine culture. The words “nagtogdon”

(perched) “naghuning malumbay” (melancholic call) and “makawiliwili” (endearing) are attributes of the bird that are meant to describe coquettish/coy women who put themselves on display and make themselves desirable with their gentle words or gestures. Additionally, these words create imagery that appeal to sight—“nagtogdon” (perched); and sound—“naghuning malumbay (melancholic call) and kawiliwili” (endearing) which further enriches the poem.

The song started with the green parrot as a metaphor for a young woman and halfway through shifts to directly addressing the woman but there is a residual feeling generated in the use of the green parrot as a symbolism. It is an effective device hiding the narrator’s feelings about the situation—that is, probably one of a jilted lover who hides his hostility over a lost love or as symbolisms go can be a piqued father who hides his disappointment over a daughter’s mistake in marrying practically a stranger from another place.

Lilia F. Realubit, in her *Bicol Literature in the Philippines*, affirms that Bicolanos have a writing tradition with roots in its ancient folkways. She further asserts that “Bicol region is home to ancient oral traditions, including folk charm verses that exploit alliterative rhyme, imagery, and metaphor—evidence of a long-standing instinctive relationship with poetic craft.”

This suggests that our Bicolano ancestors possessed an innate sense of rhyme and rhythm. More than that, they skillfully used poetic devices—such as figures of speech, symbols, and imagery—to enrich and elevate their compositions.

**Table 2**

*Structural and Textual Analysis: Poetic Devices*

Folksongs	Figures of Speech	Imagery and Symbol
1. Kulasising Berde ( <i>Green Parrot</i> )	metaphor, apostrophe	symbol: bird suggests mood or attitude of flirty woman  imagery: sight, sound
2. Salampating Guminaro ( <i>Tamed Dove</i> )	extended metaphor	symbol: dove – loved one  imagery: sight, movement
3. Sarong Banggi ( <i>One Night</i> )	simile, metaphor	symbol: moon - woman  dark night – lonely existence  magayon, maliwanag - woman as a source of joy  imagery: sight, hearing, movement
4. Dandansoy ( <i>Person’s Name</i> )	apostrophe	symbol: woman – gender role of women as nurturers  imagery: movement, sight
5. Kaka ( <i>Elder Sibling</i> )	allusion	symbol: frog - female genital  imagery: visual, motion/ movement



6. Si Haring Solomon ( <i>King Solomon</i> )	allusion	symbols: turtle – female genital  Haring Solomon – male genital  banana – male genital  king – male superiority  imagery: visual, sound
7. O, Maliwanag na Buwan ( <i>Oh, Bright Moon</i> )	apostrophe	symbol: moon - fiancé  moon - witness to the girl  verbalizing her love for him  imagery: sound, sight
8. Lawiswis Kawayan ( <i>Whispering Bamboo</i> )	metaphor, personification	symbol: bamboo - symbol for rural life  bamboo - backdrop for the love story of the young lovers  bamboo - innocent flirtations of the young lovers  bamboo - simple, uncomplicated life of people in the rural area during the time of yore  imagery: visual, sound, movement

The subject-matter, motifs, and themes discerned in most of the folksongs are about love and love-related topics such as the joys of romantic love, the pain of losing a beloved or love lost, and sacrifice for the sake of a beloved. This choice of subject matter and theme bridges the huge gap between an interest in the heavenly and spiritual—that is, parental and romantic love to the earthly and bawdy celebration of sex. Table 3 shows the subject-matter, motifs, and themes apparent in the folksongs.

**Table 3***Structural and Textual Analysis: Subject-Matter/ Motifs/ Themes*

Folksongs	Subject Matter/ Motifs/ Themes
1. Kulasising Berde ( <i>Green Parrot</i> )	paternal love, romantic love
2. Salampating Guminaro ( <i>Tamed Dove</i> )	love lost
3. Sarong Banggi ( <i>One Night</i> )	love song, celebration of romantic love as a bittersweet emotion
4. Dandansoy ( <i>Person's Name</i> )	The need of a woman for assurance that she is loved.
5. Kaka ( <i>Elder Sibling</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- humorously indecent although indirectly</li> <li>- Obviously a male folk song which reveals a healthy although taboo interest in the male libido and the female anatomy.</li> </ul>
6. Si Haring Solomon ( <i>King Solomon</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comical</li> <li>- humorous</li> <li>- sexually comical song</li> <li>- objectionable to people who does not have the courage to mention the male and female genitals</li> <li>- taboo/forbidden/sex related topic</li> </ul>
7. O, Maliwanag na Buwan ( <i>Oh, Bright Moon</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- loss and despair</li> <li>- man's love and affection for his girl</li> </ul>
8. Lawiswis Kawayan ( <i>Whispering Bamboo</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- love song</li> <li>- celebrating the joys of romantic love</li> <li>- simplicity of young love</li> </ul>

Several literary sources support the preceding findings on love and related themes. Realubit (1994), in her analysis of Bicol folk literature, affirms that “themes of affection, familial love, and emotional expression are strong in songs and oral traditions.” Moreover, the themes drawn from the text reflects the culture of Bicolanos. In addition, Dr. Lily Rose Tope (2025) in her lecture “*Literature Is Culture*” at the 57th ACELT International Conference, pointed out that literature is culture; it reveals the history, values, and beliefs of their origin. She further explained that literature provides an insight into the culture of the author or storyteller. Thus, the Bicolanos’ affectionate, caring, and hospitable nature are deeply embedded in the region’s cultural values and are reflected in their everyday interactions, oral traditions, and communal life. Montales (2021) also explains how Bicolanos’ sense of identity is associated with their

affectionate relationships with family, tradition, and local culture. This implies that their affectionate and caring nature are mirrored in their oral tradition such as folk songs.

In addition, the analysis reveals that love is a universal feeling, as found in the songs, and our ancestors have given us a glimpse into the Bicolanos' psyche in love—from the spiritual to the mundane through their oral tradition.

There were nine (9) beliefs that were discernible in the folksongs. Table 4 shows these beliefs which were further classified into the following types:

**Table 4**

*Structural and Textual Analysis: Beliefs*

	TYPES OF BELIEFS	NO.	RANK
1	Gender Stereotyping / Sexism	5	1
2	Objectification of women	3	2
3	Patriotism	1	3
4	Respect for Elders	1	
5	Simplicity of Living	1	
6	Religiosity	1	
7	Courtship	1	
8	(Close) Family Ties	1	
9	Survival	1	

Beliefs are assumptions about how life should be lived. From these beliefs, values, or standards of what are the right and correct way of doing things are formed. Consequently, our values evolve into certain practices and traits.

Traces of specific beliefs, values, traits, and practices can be mined from this form of indigenous literature which are helpful in understanding the psyche of the people of Ligao City. Some are still strongly adhered to, but with a few slowly slipping away with the passage of time.

Table 5 reveals the ten (10) positive and two (2) negative traits that are discernible from the folksongs.

**Table 5***Structural and Textual Analysis: Traits*

TRAITS		
No.	Positive Traits	Negative Traits
1	Persevering Resolute, Determined, Tenacious, Insistent, Aggressive Patient	Sexist Prejudiced, Biased, Dominant
2	Generous Kind, Helpful	Passive tolerant, fatalistic, timid
3	Manly Virile	
4	Loving Romantic, Affectionate, Caring Amorous, Nurturing	
5	Respectful Courteous, Polite, Obedient	
6	Family Oriented family ties, love of native land	
7	Faithful Sincere, Serious, Trusting	
8	Simple Living Preference for the rural scenery	
9	Sense of Humor Witty, ingenious, creative, skillful	
10	Self-sacrificing Patient	

The following values, classified into types on Table 6, were uncovered based on the beliefs and traits deduced from the folksongs. A total of seven (7) types of values were drawn out of the eight (8) folksongs collected from the city of Ligao.

**Table 6***Structural and Textual Analysis: Values (Content)*

RANK	VALUES
1	Love and romance
2	Perseverance Determination, Tenacity, Patience, Persistence, Willpower
3	Sense of Humor bawdy, humorously indecent, ingenuity
4	Contentment in Simplicity of living Simplicity, Love of nature, Preference to be with nature
4	Close Family Ties Love for one's family and Love of one's native land
4	Generosity Kindness, Community Cohesiveness/Cohesive Communal Relations
4	Respect Respect for parents, elders, and following traditions, Courtesy, Obedience, Good manners, and right conduct (what is right and correct)

*Love and romance* is the topmost value as it occurred in almost all of the folksongs analyzed. Second in rank is *patience and perseverance*. Third in rank is *Sense of Humor*. Other values that tie in the fourth rank are: *Contentment in simplicity of living*, *Close family ties*, *Generosity and Respect*.

Table 7 unveiled nine (9) cultural practices and traditions from a number of folk songs collected. These were further classified into the following types:

**Table 7***Structural and Textual Analysis: Cultural Practices and Traditions (Content)*

	TYPES OF CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITION
1	Courtship & Marriage
2	Festivals, Celebrations
3	Family Ties
4	Gender Relations
5	Perseverance
6	Respect for Elders
7	Simplicity of Living
8	Voyeurism
9	Domestic

The songs are rich sources of cultural artifacts from beliefs, values, traits, and practices. The family and the community, or the tribe and most importantly, the church, shape beliefs that create standards of behavior, characteristics and ultimately traditions or ways of how to do things. Hence, specific cultural practices and traditions are considered below:

A significant cultural practice of yore that is reflected in the song is the “*ponsyon*” or “social gatherings”. *Weddings, baptisms, and fiestas* are an occasion for renewing ties that bind among family, relatives, neighbors, and the community as well. These major *celebrations* chiefly focused on the sharing of food or partaking of a banquet.

Other cultural practices uncovered include *Family Ties*, *Gender Relations*, *Respect for Elders*, *Perseverance*, *Simplicity of Living*, *Voyeurism*, and *Domestic Duties/ Practices*.

To sum up, beliefs are assumptions about how life should be lived. From these beliefs, values, or standards of what are the right and correct way of doing things are formed. Consequently, our values evolve into certain practices and traits. While a few have been seldom practiced or have been lost and forgotten as shown on Table 9, many others are kept alive and is handed down to the next generation, as shown in the following old and traditional influences on Table 8. In its generation transmission lies the heart of culture and memory.

**Table 8**

*Structural and Textual Analysis: Influences Which Are Old and Traditional*

Old/ Traditional/ Continuing Cultural Practices and Traditions
1. Fiestas and other celebrations
2. Festivals
3. Love for music
4. Simplicity of life
5. Hard work and sacrifice for the sake of a beloved
6. Deep faith in God
7. Weddings
8. Wine drinking during fiestas and other celebrations
9. Respect for elders especially the parents of the woman a man wishes to pursue
10. Gender Relations / Sexism
11. Sharing selflessly what one has with others no matter how little it is
12. Sense of humor to manage or to buffer stress
13. Planting root crops, rice, and vegetables in farms, and fishing to earn a living

**Table 9**

*Seldom Practiced/ Lost and Forgotten Cultural Practices and Traditions*

Seldom Practiced or Discarded Cultural Practices and Traditions
1. Visiting every night showering a woman and her family with gifts or “panliligaw”, and “harana” to tame an unwilling object of love and to earn the affection of the woman and her family is a courtship practice that is slowly, if not already, lost to present day westernized lifestyle.
2. “Paninilbihan” or doing menial jobs to please both the woman and her parents is no longer practiced nowadays. The value of investing time on a romantic relationship is no longer the convention at present.
3. Major celebrations chiefly focused on the sharing of food and reunion among family, relatives, neighbors, and the community is also slowly fading away due to adoption of westernized lifestyle.

It is interesting to note that despite the fast technological advancement and innovation, only a handful of modernism can be unearthed from the folk songs. Table 10 reveals these modern or contemporary influences:

**Table 10***Structural and Textual Analysis: Influences Which Are Modern or Contemporary*

MODERN/ CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES
Presence of house implement or tool (axe)
Presence of cleansing and emulsifying agent (soap) for sanitation and hygiene
Existence of infrastructure: Country road (a usually unpaved rural road off the main highway) (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

## Conclusions

From the foregoing findings, the following Conclusions and Recommendations are given:

1. Our Bicolano ancestors are born poets not only because they have an inborn grasp for poetic rhyme and rhythm, but additionally, because they can work with poetic tools such as figures of speech, symbols, and imagery to enrich their poetry.
2. The corpus analyzed reveal a focus on love. Love is a universal feeling, and our ancestors have given us a glimpse into the Bicolanos in love—from the spiritual to the mundane.
3. Folksongs are rich sources of cultural artifacts from beliefs, values, traits, and practices. The family and the community, or the tribe and most importantly, the church, shape beliefs that create standards of behavior, characteristics and ultimately traditions or ways of doing things. There is no doubt that folksongs help us to a close encounter with the way of life of our ancestors. They serve as a strong context on how we can understand the Bicolano soul—that is, our current belief and value systems as well as our strengths and weaknesses as a people.
4. The collection of only eight folksongs from a large city with numerous barangays suggests both the rarity and fragility of oral traditions in contemporary times. While these songs provide valuable insight into the cultural and literary heritage of Ligao City, the limited number also indicates that much of the traditional repertoire may have been lost, forgotten, or overshadowed by modern influences. This highlights the urgency of documentation and preservation efforts to safeguard the remaining verbal lore for future generations.

## Recommendations

1. More studies should be conducted on Bicol folksongs, particularly critical analyses on the rhyme structure and the rhythmic pattern and meter, and their content integrating elements of other literary theories such as New Historicism or Cultural Studies to contextualize the folksongs within their historical, social, and political setting.
2. A comprehensive study on the subject matter of folksongs is needed to serve as a broader context for interpreting the Bicolano persona.
3. The family, church, school, and government are the social institutions that shape our way of life. Studies of folk songs should reveal how these social institutions shaped our belief systems, our values as well as traits and practices. It is listening to distant voices from the past to help us understand the present.
4. Future studies should expand documentation efforts to more barangays across different ecosystems (upland, lowland, coastal, and urban), by collaborating with local elders, cultural bearers, and community organizations to recover songs that may no longer be widely sung but still remembered, to capture a wider range of folksongs.

5. Conduct comparative research with neighboring towns or provinces to situate Ligao's folksongs within the broader Bicol and Filipino folk tradition.

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## **Evaluation of the Contribution of Indigenous Art Forms in Nigerian Broadcast Media on Climate Change Awareness and Mitigation Behaviour**

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### **Abstract**

Climate change poses significant challenges to environmental sustainability in Nigeria, threatening livelihoods and economic stability. While government and non-governmental organisations have initiated mitigation efforts, conventional strategies often fail to resonate culturally with grassroots communities. Anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and Cultural Theory, the study evaluates the contribution of indigenous art forms utilised in the Nigerian broadcast media as tools for communicating climate change realities. A mixed-method approach combining content analysis and in-depth interview was adopted as research design to evaluate selected radio and television programmes from stations that incorporate indigenous artistic expressions related to environmental themes. A purposive sample of 20 programmes aired between 2020 and 2024 was analysed to identify patterns in message framing, symbolic representations, and calls to action. In-depth interviews with six broadcasters, climate advocates and cultural environmental communicators were also carried out to provide context, intent, design, and perceived impact of such content. Findings reveal that indigenous art forms adapted to modern broadcast formats not only simplify complex climate information but engage audiences emotionally and symbolically, fostering greater connection to environmental issues than conventional scientific messaging. The study also found that indigenous art forms bridge knowledge gaps, fosters environmental consciousness, and encourages sustainable livelihood practices. Furthermore, these artistic expressions often serve as communal archives of ecological wisdom, warning systems, and advocacy tools rooted in local cosmologies and sustainability ethics. The study concludes that integration of indigenous artistic expressions into climate communication efforts enhances awareness, education, local relevance, cultural ownership, behavioural change and participation in climate action.

*Keywords:* climate change communication, broadcast media, indigenous art forms, environmental awareness, mitigation behaviour

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## Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges, with its impacts disproportionately felt across the world, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Rising temperatures, desertification, flooding, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and biodiversity loss continue to threaten food security, human health, and livelihoods across Nigerian communities. Despite scientific evidence and international policy frameworks, effective climate action in Nigeria remains constrained by low public awareness, poor access to environmental information, and limited behavioural change at the grassroots level (Dahlstrom & Scheufele, 2018). As such, communication strategies capable of bridging the knowledge–action gap have become critical in promoting climate change awareness and mitigation. Consequently, most policy efforts to communicate climate change have sought to bring about cognitive engagement with the public through the provision of scientific information and rational arguments (Burke et al., 2018).

Inability of conventional science communication to fully address how people perceive and react to climate change information has often resulted in misconceptions and trivializations of the issue. In the broadest sense, the delivery of abstract science-based information not only fails to inspire people, it also lacks the dimension of storytelling required to make information both accessible and engaging (Roosen et al., 2018). The presentation of climate discourse in technical or detached terms, risks alienating audiences who require messages that connect with their everyday realities. In this regard, the Nigerian broadcast media emerges as a vital channel for climate change and environmental communication. Radio and television, with their affordability and extensive reach, provide platforms through which climate change awareness can be translated into culturally meaningful narratives for both urban and rural audiences.

Notwithstanding, the effectiveness of broadcast media in driving climate change awareness is not determined solely by message frequency or clarity, but also by the cultural relevance and resonance of the content delivered. Communication detached from people's lived experiences and cultural context often fails to influence attitudes or trigger behavioural change. This underscores the value of indigenous art forms in broadcast media such as music, folktales, drama, proverbs, dance, and oral poetry as strategic tools for climate advocacy. Deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, these forms serve as instruments of knowledge sharing and communal mobilisation (Saawuan et al., 2023). Their familiarity and emotional appeal make them powerful in shaping social values. When integrated into media programming, they localise global climate discourse and translate scientific messages into relatable narratives that motivate community action. These forms are familiar, emotionally engaging, and culturally grounded, making them powerful in shaping social norms and values. Their creative integration into climate-themed broadcasts underscores the participatory communication model, which emphasises dialogue, cultural sensitivity, and bottom-up engagement rather than one-way expert-driven dissemination of information (Chinweobo-Onuoha et al., 2020). This approach positions indigenous art forms as mediators between modern scientific knowledge and traditional cultural wisdom.

Despite the potentials of indigenous arts forms in creating vivid, personally relevant, and affective images of climate change in the minds of audience, questions remain about their effective contributions to climate change awareness and mitigation behaviour. While anecdotal evidence suggests that culturally resonant media content enhances audience understanding, there is limited empirical evidence on its actual influence on climate change knowledge, attitudes, and practices across different Nigerian populations (Sheshi & Yisa, 2024). There are

also concerns about the tension between modernisation of media content and the preservation of indigenous communication traditions. As Nigerian broadcast media becomes increasingly commercialised and globalised, indigenous art forms risk being sidelined in favour of Westernised formats perceived as more “modern.” This could potentially alter and undermine the cultural relevance of climate change communication. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to evaluate the contribution of indigenous art forms in Nigerian broadcast media to climate change awareness and mitigation behaviour.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although broadcast media in Nigeria has the potential to reach vast and diverse audiences, conventional approaches to environmental programming often fail to resonate with grassroots communities. Messages that rely heavily on scientific jargon or foreign communication models tend to alienate rural and semi-literate populations, limiting their effectiveness in mobilising collective action against climate risks. This gap highlights the urgent need for culturally relevant communication strategies that can bridge the divide between global climate discourse and local realities. Indigenous art forms such as folk music, drama, storytelling, and proverbs have historically functioned as powerful channels for knowledge transmission and social mobilisation in Nigerian societies. However, despite their potential, the actual contribution of indigenous art forms to climate change awareness and mitigation behaviours in Nigeria remains underexplored. Existing studies have focused largely on the role of broadcast media in environmental communication in general, with limited empirical attention to how indigenous artistic expressions specifically shape public perception and action. This trend risks diluting the cultural relevance of climate change communication and environmental advocacy, and undermining its effectiveness in driving behavioural change in Nigeria. This study therefore addresses a critical gap by examining the role of indigenous art forms in Nigerian broadcast media and their impact on climate change awareness and mitigation behaviour.

### **Research Questions**

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate the contribution of indigenous art forms in Nigerian broadcast media to climate change awareness and mitigation behaviour. Consequently, the following research questions are put forward to guide the study:

1. To what extent are indigenous art forms such as music, drama, storytelling, and proverbs integrated into climate change programming in Nigerian broadcast media?
2. How effective are indigenous art forms in enhancing audience awareness and understanding of climate change issues in Nigeria?
3. In what ways does indigenous art-based broadcast content influence audience attitudes and behavioural responses toward climate change mitigation?
4. How do indigenous art forms resonate culturally with Nigerian audiences, and their perceptions of climate change?

### **Indigenous Art Forms and Broadcast Media Climate Communication in Nigeria**

Broadcast media, particularly radio and television remain among the most influential platforms for shaping public attitudes toward social issues in Nigeria and across Africa. Their ability to integrate diverse art forms such as music, drama, storytelling, talk shows, and jingles makes them effective vehicles for climate change communication (Adekaa et al., 2024). Unlike purely scientific reports that may alienate the public, broadcast art forms simplify complex climate concepts into culturally relatable narratives, enhancing comprehension and engagement. Art-

infused broadcasts play a critical role in framing climate change as both an urgent global crisis and a local lived reality that requires behavioural response (Ademolu, 2023; Li & Su, 2018; Sanusi & Ojewumi, 2024; Seelig, 2019).

Drama and storytelling are central to broadcast art forms used in climate communication because they provide audiences with opportunities to emotionally connect with climate issues. Radio or television serial dramas depicting families affected by flooding, drought, or deforestation enable audiences to empathize with characters while simultaneously learning adaptation strategies (Sanusi & Ojewumi, 2024). Such formats also employ narrative persuasion, where storylines lower resistance to information by embedding it in entertainment. This method has been shown to foster not just awareness but also favourable attitudes toward climate-friendly behaviours, as listeners and viewers model their responses after admired characters in the narratives (Ademolu, 2023).

Music and proverbs integrated into broadcast campaigns function as mnemonic and cultural devices that reinforce climate messages (Wodak, 2018). Indigenous songs infused with local instruments and languages can heighten emotional resonance and memorability, making messages about tree planting, waste management, or water conservation easier to recall. Proverbs, on the other hand, condense wisdom into short, culturally authoritative statements that audiences accept as truth. By packaging climate information in culturally recognizable forms, music and proverbs not only enhance retention but also legitimize climate communication, creating positive attitudes toward mitigation measures (Xie, 2024).

Broadcast art forms influence audience attitudes primarily by shaping awareness levels and risk perception. Programmes that creatively dramatise the consequences of climate inaction, such as depicting food shortages due to erratic rainfall, help audiences link climate issues to their immediate wellbeing (Fosudo, 2024). As risk perception increases, so too does willingness to adopt preventive and adaptive behaviours. However, scholars note that awareness alone is insufficient; for attitudes to translate into behavioural change, messages must also enhance self-efficacy by showing audiences that they have the capacity to act and that their collective action matters. Despite their effectiveness, broadcast art forms face challenges in influencing attitudes uniformly. Variations in literacy, cultural identity, media access, and socio-economic status affect how different audience groups interpret climate messages. This implies that rural listeners may resonate strongly with proverbs and folk songs, while urban youth may respond better to hip-hop-infused jingles or social-media-linked broadcast campaigns (Jingala & Chaudhry, 2024).

### **Broadcast Media Art Forms and Audience Attitudes Toward Climate Change Mitigation**

Audience studies repeatedly show that culturally proximate formats shape climate attitudes through three pathways: credibility (trusted voices and idioms), identification (seeing oneself in characters), and norming (proverbs and songs that signal what “people like us” do). When messages sound like home language choice, cadence, humour, they feel less like instruction and more like shared wisdom, increasing perceived relevance and fairness and, in turn, openness to mitigation advice (Rawlyk & Willness, 2025). Narratives and proverbs do more than persuade; they provide mental scripts for future action. Radio dramas that show neighbours inspecting drainage, mothers re-timing cooking to off-peak power, or farmers adjusting planting calendars turn abstract exhortations into doable steps. Call-in segments and SMS/WhatsApp integrations let listeners rehearse decisions aloud, receive social

reinforcement, and refine plans, classic conditions for strengthening intention (specificity, self-efficacy, social support).

Behaviour change consolidates when broadcast content reduces friction. Clear cues (“this Saturday, bring two seedlings to the community square”), local exemplars (“Aisha’s women’s group switched to improved stoves”), and visible feedback (“before/after” flood photos) help listeners cross the intention–action gap (Bennett, 2025). Music’s mnemonic power sustains routines, short refrains attached to water-saving or waste-sorting behaviours become household prompts. When stations coordinate with local authorities or NGOs to provide access (seedlings, bins, micro-credit), uptake rises because the cost of action falls. Impact varies with literacy, income, gender norms, and media access. Women and youth may engage more with music and drama but have less control over household resources; pastoral or riverine communities need region-specific cues; displaced or peri-urban listeners may prioritise immediate survival over long-term mitigation (Pop-Jordanova, 2025). Moreover, misinformation circulating on social or interpersonal networks can dilute broadcast effects. Effective campaigns therefore layer indigenous formats with myth-busting segments, peer testimonials, and bridge content that anticipate counter-arguments.

The cultural resonance of indigenous art forms in Nigerian broadcast media lies in their ability to embed climate change communication within familiar traditions of collective expression and meaning-making. This resonance strengthens the credibility of messages and fosters identification, as audiences perceive the communication as rooted in their own heritage rather than imposed externally. Evidence suggests that when climate information is packaged in culturally sensitive ways, it enhances not only comprehension but also trust, making audiences more receptive to adopting mitigation behaviours (Ugwuoke et al., 2025). Thus, cultural resonance acts as a bridge between scientific discourse and grassroots understanding, allowing climate change to be framed as a local, lived concern rather than a distant global phenomenon.

The strongest audience outcomes emerge when indigenous art forms are embedded in iterative, participatory cycles: community co-creation to surface lived constraints; serial storytelling to normalize behaviour; musical refrains to maintain salience; and periodic community broadcasts from markets, town halls, or festivals to refresh norms publicly (Miller et al., 2017). Evaluation designs that track both attitudinal shifts (risk perception, self-efficacy) and behavioural indicators (participation counts, sales or distribution of adaptation tools, observed environmental practices) help stations learn which cultural levers matter most, and for whom, so future content can be targeted, equitable, and scalable (Huxley, 2025).

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the premise of Agenda-Setting Theory and Cultural Theory, which provide complementary perspectives for evaluating how indigenous art forms in Nigerian broadcast media influence climate change awareness and mitigation behaviour.

**Agenda-Setting Theory:** Agenda-setting theory is a media effect theory that explains how the media influences the public's perception of issue importance by focusing attention on certain topics and their attributes. Introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, the theory, posits that the media may not always tell people what to think, but it significantly influences what people think about by giving salience to certain issues through repeated emphasis and framing (McCombs et al., 2018). In the context of this study, the theory underscores the power of Nigerian broadcast media to elevate climate change as a public



concern by embedding it in culturally resonant art forms such as music, drama, storytelling, and proverbs. When these indigenous art forms are strategically used in programming, they draw public attention to environmental issues and make them part of everyday conversation. Thus, agenda-setting explains how the consistent use of culturally grounded broadcast content can shape audience priorities, stimulate dialogue, and encourage collective action on climate change mitigation.

**Cultural Theory:** Cultural theory examines how culture influences and shapes individuals and societies. Developed by Stuart Hall (1980), cultural theory posits that human behaviour is deeply rooted in the collective cultural values and historical experiences of a society, arguing that cultural values, beliefs, and practices influence behaviour and attitudes within a society. According to Liu et al. (2023), cultural theory posits that different societies may exhibit distinct cultural practices based on their unique traditions, social structures, and interactions. The theory also holds that media messages are interpreted through cultural frameworks with symbols, rituals, and myths playing a crucial role in shaping people's behaviours and identification with issues. The theory argues that communication cannot be divorced from culture, as audiences interpret and internalise media messages through their cultural frameworks (Scammell & Bielsa, 2022). Indigenous art forms, deeply rooted in Nigerian traditions, provide symbolic codes that audiences easily understand and identify with. Thus, the use of proverbs to highlight the consequences of deforestation or drama skits to illustrate flooding aligns the climate change challenge and environmental issues with pre-existing cultural narratives, thereby making abstract climate science tangible and relatable.

Cultural Theory complements Agenda-Setting Theory by examining how media messages interact with cultural norms, traditions, and symbolic practices to influence meaning-making. It provides a lens to understand how traditional forms of expression resonate with diverse Nigerian audiences and foster attitudinal and behavioural change toward climate adaptation and mitigation. Agenda-Setting explains the role of broadcast media in prioritizing climate change as a critical social issue, Cultural Theory demonstrates how indigenous art forms ensure that such issues are communicated in ways that are culturally meaningful and socially engaging. The theoretical framework provides a robust foundation for this study by highlighting the importance of culturally embedded communication strategies in bridging the knowledge-action gap, ensuring that climate change messages do not only reach audiences but also inspire awareness, resonance, and behavioural transformation.

## Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating qualitative content analysis to examine selected broadcast programmes to identify the integration of indigenous art forms in communicating climate-related issues, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including broadcasters, climate advocates, and cultural communicators, to explore the intent, design, and perceived impact of the use of indigenous art in climate communication. Using purposive sampling, ten radio and ten television programmes aired between 2020 and 2024 that integrated indigenous art forms such as music, drama, storytelling, and proverbs were analysed to identify patterns in message framing, symbolic representation, and calls to action. In addition, twelve broadcasters, environmental advocates, and cultural communicators (two from each of the six geopolitical zones) were interviewed to explore the intent, design, challenges, and perceived audience impact of such content. Data were analysed thematically using Nvivo, with findings triangulated across both content and interviews to enhance validity. Ethical considerations were observed through informed consent, confidentiality, and transparent data

coding. While the study provides valuable insights into the role of culturally grounded communication in fostering climate awareness and mitigation behaviour, its scope is limited to selected programmes and practitioner perspectives, excluding direct audience reception.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data collected for this study is presented in this section thematically starting with data from content analysis in line with the study objectives and illustrative excerpts from programme content; and followed by themes from the interview transcripts. The themes are organised based on recurring patterns observed across the programmes, supported by illustrative excerpts and triangulated with insights from the in-depth interviews with broadcasters, climate advocates, and cultural communicators.

#### **Integration of Indigenous Art Forms in Broadcast Programming**

The content analysis showed that radio and television stations frequently used folk music, proverbs, and dramatised skits to simplify complex climate change concepts and abstract global systems such as carbon emissions, atmospheric gas concentrations, and global temperature difficult for indigenous people in Nigeria especially non-literates to understand into observable local phenomena like fluctuating rainfall, droughts, flooding and deforestation. Out of the 20 programmes reviewed, 13 incorporated songs in local languages to reinforce environmental messages, while 11 relied on proverbs and idioms to contextualise climate-related advice. The findings signify that indigenous art forms do more than communicate messages, they serve as archives of ecological knowledge and advocacy tools rooted in local cosmologies that use ancestral wisdom in framing climate change as a familiar, cyclical challenge rather than an abstract scientific concept.

Interview data aligns with findings from the content analysis by revealing that broadcasters intentionally integrate indigenous art forms to enhance engagement and cultural connection. One radio producer from Kaduna noted that “when we use proverbs or traditional songs, the listeners lean in more closely, because they hear their own culture speaking back to them.” Environmental advocates stressed that indigenous elements help simplify technical climate jargon, while cultural communicators explained that folktales and songs provide continuity between ancestral wisdom and modern challenges. A television director highlighted that “our drama segments are not complete without a folk song; it is what roots the story in the people’s lived reality.”

#### **Message Framing and Symbolic Representation**

The data revealed that both radio and television programmes relied heavily on indigenous art forms to symbolically represent the consequences of environmental neglect as well as the benefits of adopting sustainable practices. Rather than presenting climate change as an abstract scientific issue, these programmes translated it into cultural narratives familiar to audiences. Television skits frequently dramatised scenes of community meetings where elders used storytelling to warn younger generations about the dangers of desertification, flooding, and crop failure. In one Hausa-language drama, an elder reminded the youth that “a tree does not stand alone in the forest; its strength is in the company of others,” a proverb symbolically linking environmental preservation to community solidarity. Songs also played a central role in reframing environmental issues, often embedding climate-related messages within folk melodies or popular indigenous rhythms; and emphasises collective responsibility by

portraying the environment as a shared heritage that must be safeguarded for future generations. For example, a Tiv-language jingle used in a climate-awareness campaign repeated the refrain “the land that feeds us is the land we must protect,” tying environmental stewardship to food security and survival. The findings further show that 75% of the programmes analysed, explicitly framed climate change as a communal issue rather than an individual one, indicating a clear shift in how indigenous art facilitated meaning-making. This symbolic framing helped to reposition climate discourse from being seen as a distant or technical challenge to one that is embedded within everyday life and cultural practices.

Data from the interview supports findings from the content analysis with vivid depictions. Respondents emphasised that indigenous art forms often symbolise the moral and cultural dimensions of climate change. An advocate from the South-East explained that “we don’t just talk about soil erosion as science, we show it through stories of a greedy hunter whose forest disappears.” Broadcasters noted that framing climate issues symbolically rather than technically made the messages more memorable. A cultural communicator added that “when we say ‘the earth is like a mother who feeds us,’ people understand care and responsibility immediately.” Such framing shifted climate change from a distant, technical problem to a relatable moral and cultural issue.

### **Calls to Action and Behavioural Orientation**

Another strong theme emerging from the data is the deliberate use of indigenous art forms to stimulate behavioural change through clear calls to action. Out of the twenty programmes reviewed, twelve contained explicit appeals urging audiences to adopt specific mitigation practices through responsible livelihood practices in agriculture, livestock, vegetation, mining, fishing, forestry, foraging and bartering such as planting trees, reducing bush burning, managing waste responsibly and embracing sustainable farming methods. These messages were not presented as external impositions but were embedded in the cultural and moral language of the community. For example, two Tiv-language folk songs integrated into climate change radio advocacy programmes warned against excessive reliance on chemicals and urged farmers to “keep the soil alive” by abandoning slash-and-burn techniques, while a Yoruba radio drama depicted the tragic loss of farmland due to flooding as a direct result of ignoring traditional farming wisdom. Such calls were reinforced by the symbolic weight of indigenous proverbs and folktales, which made the recommended behaviours, appear as natural extensions of existing cultural values rather than foreign prescriptions.

These behavioural appeals were often designed to maximise recall and resonance by relying on repetition, rhythm, and emotional connection. For instance, several jingles employed catchy refrains and traditional drumming patterns that made climate-friendly messages easier to memorise and share in everyday conversations. In an Igbo-language television skit, the closing scene showed children planting trees while chanting a proverb that compared nurturing saplings to raising future generations, symbolically binding environmental protection to cultural continuity. This creative integration of art-based communication not only increased the memorability of the calls to action but also strengthened their persuasive appeal. By embedding climate advocacy within the familiar structures of indigenous music, drama, and proverbs, the programmes demonstrated the potential of culturally grounded communication to move audiences beyond awareness toward tangible behavioural shifts.

Perspectives of the interview participants align with the content analysis data as the interviewees highlighted how indigenous art-based programming consistently incorporated

calls to action. Out of the twelve interviewees, nine confirmed that programmes they worked on used songs, jingles, or proverbs to push behavioural change. A broadcaster from Benue explained, “We end every drama with a proverb that tells farmers what to do, and the most efficient environmental sustaining methods to adopt in order to conserve the forests and secure the future.” Advocates observed that rhythm and repetition in songs made calls to action stick. One cultural communicator stressed that “when the song says ‘plant today for tomorrow,’ people remember it even in the market.” This combination of culture and directive messaging was seen as key to driving real behavioural orientation.

### **Culturally Resonate Indigenous Art Forms and Perceptions of Climate Change**

The role of cultural familiarity in shaping how Nigerian audiences connect with climate change messages delivered through indigenous art forms in broadcasting emerged as another important theme in this study. Respondents consistently emphasised that when climate information was communicated through recognisable cultural mediums such as folk songs, proverbs, and storytelling, it was not only easier to understand but also carried greater legitimacy. Unlike scientific terms such as carbon emissions or greenhouse gases, which many rural audiences described as abstract or confusing, traditional expressions framed environmental issues in moral, spiritual, and social terms that resonated with everyday realities. For instance, a popular Igbo proverb used in a radio programme “a man who cuts down the iroko tree cuts down his children’s shade” was frequently cited by listeners as more persuasive than technical explanations about deforestation. Such culturally embedded narratives anchored climate change discourse in local knowledge systems, making it feel less like an external imposition and more like an extension of existing wisdom.

The content analysis further revealed that the integration of traditional folktales and dramatisations into broadcast media enabled audiences to perceive climate change not as a distant, global phenomenon, but as a pressing local concern. For example, stories of rivers drying up after being disrespected by careless villagers through deforestation and chemical farming practices served as symbolic warnings that mirrored contemporary issues of drought and water scarcity in Nigeria. This framing bridged the gap between ancestral ecological teachings and modern scientific insights, reinforcing the notion that environmental stewardship is both a cultural duty and a survival strategy. Interviewees explained that such messages evoked strong emotional responses, especially when delivered through music and drama rooted in local traditions, thereby reinforcing communal responsibility toward nature. In this way, cultural familiarity functioned as a bridge, transforming complex climate discourse into accessible, morally charged communication that resonated with audiences and motivated reflection on sustainable practices.

Data from the interview supports the findings as all interviewees unanimously agreed that cultural resonance determines how audiences perceive climate change content. A cultural advocate from the Niger Delta observed that “when we sing in our dialect, people trust the message more than when we speak English.” Broadcasters confirmed that local art forms created a sense of ownership, while one environmental campaigner stated that “proverbs carry wisdom; when we say ‘if you dry the river, you dry your children’s future,’ everyone takes it seriously.” Cultural communicators further noted that resonance was not only about language but also about emotional connection. As one put it, “The message enters their hearts because it comes in the tune they grew up with.”

## Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of indigenous art forms in enhancing climate communication within Nigerian broadcast media. Consistent with Cultural Theory, the study shows that folk songs, proverbs, storytelling, and dramatization function as cultural codes that bridge abstract scientific discourse with lived realities. This aligns with Saawuan et al. (2023), who highlighted indigenous communication as an effective means of embedding complex issues within familiar cultural frameworks. By reframing climate change in moral and symbolic terms, broadcasters succeeded in making messages resonate with local audiences. Agenda-Setting Theory is also validated here, as broadcast media effectively prioritized climate change by embedding it in culturally familiar narratives that compelled audiences to pay attention and internalize environmental issues.

Message framing and symbolic representation were revealed as powerful mechanisms for climate change communication. Rather than relying on technical jargon, indigenous art reframed issues like deforestation, flooding, and desertification through moral metaphors and collective values. This finding resonates with Roosen et al. (2018), who observed that science-heavy messages often fail to inspire behavioural change when stripped of narrative depth. In Nigerian broadcasts, symbolic expressions such as “the earth is like a mother who feeds us” transformed environmental care into a moral obligation, thereby reinforcing cultural responsibility. This demonstrates that indigenous art not only complements but strengthens conventional environmental education by offering audiences culturally grounded interpretive lenses.

The role of calls to action further revealed the pragmatic potential of art-based communication. Through repetition, rhythm, and culturally familiar refrains, climate change messages were made memorable and actionable. Examples like Tiv and Yoruba folk songs encouraging farmers to “keep the soil alive” show how art can directly guide behaviour. This supports Burke et al. (2018), who argue that communication which connects with people’s lived experiences is more likely to trigger behavioural change. Within the agenda-setting framework, this demonstrates how broadcast media can go beyond raising awareness to shaping concrete livelihood practices by embedding directives in culturally persuasive forms.

Cultural resonance emerged as perhaps the most decisive factor shaping perceptions of climate change. Both the content analysis and interview data affirm that Nigerian audiences trust and internalize messages better when they are rooted in indigenous traditions. This echoes Chinweobo-Onuoha et al. (2020), who emphasised that participatory, culturally sensitive communication is more effective than top-down dissemination. By integrating proverbs such as “a man who cuts down the iroko tree cuts down his children’s shade,” climate discourse was legitimised as ancestral wisdom, creating continuity between tradition and modern environmental advocacy. This confirms that culturally familiar messaging not only enhances comprehension but also fosters emotional and moral identification with climate stewardship.

The findings also reveal that indigenous art-based broadcasts foster communal identification and solidarity in responding to climate threats. Literature on cultural imperialism critiques globalised, top-down communication for erasing local voices; however, this study suggests the opposite, that local broadcast media, by privileging indigenous art, can resist homogenisation and assert cultural agency in framing climate issues. The study’s findings signify that by positioning climate change as a collective moral responsibility, the programmes reaffirmed the role of culture in strengthening communal resilience. This contribution is particularly important

in Nigeria, where literacy barriers and cultural diversity often challenge the effectiveness of standard scientific communication.

### **Conclusion**

The study has demonstrated that indigenous art forms embedded within Nigerian broadcast media play a vital role in localising global climate discourse and making it culturally meaningful. Through indigenous music, proverbs, drama, and storytelling, broadcasters in Nigeria effectively translate technical scientific information into familiar narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. These cultural tools not only simplified climate concepts but also enhanced audience engagement, fostered communal responsibility, and encouraged behavioural change toward sustainable practices. The findings show that indigenous art-based broadcasts do more than raise awareness, they shape perceptions, influence priorities, and legitimise climate advocacy within local cultural frameworks. The study thus concludes that harnessing indigenous art in media programming strengthens the cultural ownership of climate communication, bridges the gap between global knowledge and local realities, and contributes to fostering sustainable livelihood practices.

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## Perception of Nature: From A New Theoretical Perspective

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### Abstract

This study reexamines the art-historical question of how nature is perceived and represented, focusing on El Greco (1541–1614) and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). While El Greco deliberately distorted form to visualize spiritual reality, whereas Cézanne deconstructed form to reveal the very structure of perception. What unites them is a shared perceptual inquiry that transcends the classical conception of nature in terms of perspective and seeks a reintegration of spirit and nature. Furthermore, this paper examines the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Yamaga Sokō to explore the divergences and convergences between Western and Eastern cosmologies of nature. By articulating an alternative genealogy of the understanding of nature distinct from the classical tradition born in the Renaissance, the study aims to illuminate the perception of nature from a global theoretical perspective. It also emphasizes the influence of science, technology, and Eastern art—particularly the work of Hokusai—on the emergence of this “new lineage of perception.” Moreover, this study connects this to Yamaga Sokō's critique of the Zhu Xi-inspired vertical causal understanding of nature, discussing it in relation to his notion of a “horizontal relational world,” which conceives existence as a simultaneous, multi-layered network of interrelations. Finally, the study concludes that Cézanne's perceptual space resonates with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the world, which cannot be reduced to a single principle but rather constitutes an interweaving of multiple relationalities—a “weave of existence.”

*Keywords:* perception of nature, El Greco, Paul Cézanne, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Yamaga Sokō, East-West cosmology, phenomenology of art

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## Introduction

The works of El Greco (1541–1614) are distinguished by the elongated proportions, the idiosyncratic use of light, and spiritual intensity. As art historians have long observed, his oeuvre is often associated with Mannerism for its deliberate transformation of Renaissance norms such as composition and perspectival depth of perspective. Yet beyond religious subject matter, El Greco's paintings often assign to nature a significance equal to or even greater than divine order. This emphasis on nature, within the deeply Catholic milieu of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and Spain, crucially shaped the reception of his art.

The innovation in El Greco's works, however, remained largely misunderstood in his time, and El Greco was consigned to oblivion for nearly three centuries after his death. In the late nineteenth century, his "distorted vision of nature" was rediscovered by Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), whose reinterpretation of perception through form profoundly influenced the Impressionists, the Cubists, and ultimately the course of twentieth-century art. The structural thinking and pursuit of spirituality evident in Cézanne's and Picasso's works can be read as both the inheritance and transformation of El Greco's formative principles.

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the intellectual genealogy of natural perception extending from El Greco to Cézanne. By bridging the collapse of the perspectival conception of nature through perspective in Western art with the correlative cosmology of heaven and earth in Eastern thought, the study aims to reveal an alternative genealogy of natural cognition and propose a new theoretical framework for understanding the perception of nature.

### El Greco and Cézanne: The Disintegration of Natural Representation

One of the central innovations of Renaissance art was the theorization of linear perspective. Developed in the early fifteenth century by Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti, this technique provided a rational means of reproducing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, establishing the foundation of modern pictorial representation.

#### Figure 1

*The Mona Lisa / Leonardo da Vinci*



Its quintessential example is Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, where the background landscape—mountains and rivers—forms a softly receding space through the integration of aerial and linear perspective, achieving a harmonious unity between figure and nature. Perspective thus functioned not merely as a geometric technique, but as an aesthetic principle mediating the relation between humanity and the natural world.

Nicolas Poussin, by contrast, employed perspective as the axis of rational order. In works such as *The Shepherds of Arcadia*, he combined geometric structure with symbolic equilibrium. Both the humanist naturalism of the Renaissance and the rational order of Classicism therefore developed under a common problem: how to grasp the world as a unified totality.

## Figure 2

*The Shepherds of Arcadia / Nicolas Poussin*



By the late nineteenth century, however, this classical order was subjected to radical re-examination by Paul Cézanne. Rejecting the dominance of a single, fixed viewpoint, Cézanne sought to visualize on the canvas the generative process of perception itself through the superimposition of multiple viewpoints and temporal variations. In works such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, mountains and buildings are reduced to geometric forms, while layers of color modulation and brushstroke construct a dynamic, pulsating space. This was neither the harmonious balance of Leonardo nor the rational order of Poussin, but an attempt to reconstruct perception through the act of painting.

**Figure 3***View of Toledo / El Greco*

*Note.* Deviation from perspective → prioritizing symbolism over realism  
 Structured along a vertical axis (Earth → City → Heaven)  
 Emphasis on the city's "floating presence" through color contrasts  
 The city depicted as a spiritual/religious center

A comparable structure can be discerned in El Greco's work. His elongated figures and spatial distortions were not mere technical eccentricities, but means of rendering visible the inner world of spirit. In *View of Toledo*, for instance, the city and the landscape unfold under unstable light; the equilibrium of perspective collapses, and the viewer's gaze is drawn toward a transcendent dimension. The painting reveals not a reproduction of the external world, but a manifestation of the generative encounter between perception and spirit.

Art historian Estelle Alma Maré characterizes El Greco's paintings as mental constructs—visual compositions that mark a shift from the imitation of reality to the construction of reality itself. Three features define his pictorial practice: (1) anti-naturalism, (2) compositional abstraction, and (3) visualization of the spiritual dimension. In this sense, El Greco fused religious spirituality with formal order through a deliberate non-naturalistic syntax.

**Figure 4***Mont Sainte-Victoire / Paul Cézanne*

*Note.* Relativization of perspective → balance between plane and volume  
 Reduction of nature to spheres, cones, and cylinders  
 Horizontal and structural stability  
 Order achieved through the layering of observation and the modern scientific spirit

Despite the temporal and geographic distance separating them, El Greco and Cézanne share a profound conceptual continuity: both transcended naturalistic representation by distorting or dismantling form in order to reconstruct perception. Cézanne reduced nature to its geometric fundamentals—cylinders, spheres, and cones—and painted not appearances but the structure of perception itself. El Greco, in turn, employed form as an instrument of spiritual expression, rendering interior vision through non-naturalistic composition.

Thus, El Greco's "distortion" and Cézanne's "disintegration" both signify the transcendence of the classical conception of nature. Their practices generated a new perceptual turn—one that reintegrated reason and sensation, spirit and nature. Each, in his own era, brought about the dissolution of painting as mere mimesis and transformed perception itself into the creative subject. Through their respective deconstruction of form and integration of spirituality, they overcame the classical naturalism of the Renaissance and inaugurated an epistemological moment in which art no longer imitates reality, but creates it through perception. In their work, nature ceases to be an object of representation and emerges instead as the very field of perceptual becoming.

### **Collage: The Reconstruction of Science and Perception**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a wave of Grecomania<sup>1</sup> swept across Europe, rekindling interest in the formal principles and spirituality of El Greco. Critics such as Théodore de Wyzewa and Marcel Monté, contemporaries of Paul Cézanne, acclaimed El Greco's expressive distortions and spiritual intensity, positioning his art as a precursor to modern inquiries into perception. This revival marked a crucial shift in late nineteenth-century aesthetics—from the representation of nature to the generation of perceptual experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Grecomania is an admiration and revival of ancient Greek art and culture.



Cézanne's reconfiguration of nature as composed of "the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone" exemplified this transformation. By simplifying the visible world into geometric elements, he reconstructed visual experience itself. His *Mont Sainte-Victoire* series, resonating with El Greco's elongation and abstraction of form, may be interpreted as almost a reincarnation of "the disintegration of form and the integration of spirit." Cézanne's canvases do not reproduce a unified object from a single vantage point; instead, they assemble visual fragments, performing what may be called a reconstruction of perception. This multi-perspective approach was deeply entwined with the broader "scientific age" of the nineteenth century—a period in which the very notion of nature was being redefined by technological progress.

The structural logic of Cézanne's pictorial thought thus anticipates what might be termed a collage-like perception. His surfaces are composed of overlapping temporal and spatial fragments; the viewer no longer perceives within the unity of a fixed vanishing point, but within an interwoven mesh of relations. This multi-perspective world vision found later expression in the Cubism of Picasso and Braque, and, more distantly, in the "multi-spatial representations" of cinema and digital imagery. A striking parallel can be found in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), released just one year before humanity's first lunar landing. Employing advanced cinematographic techniques, Kubrick dismantled conventional spatial perspective to visualize perceptual experience under conditions of weightlessness. Religious scholar Tetsuo Yamaori observed that "what struck me as strange in *2001* was the attenuation of the sense of perspective," suggesting that scientific technology itself could transform the structure of human perception.

### Figure 5

*Impression, Sunrise* / Oscar-Claude Monet

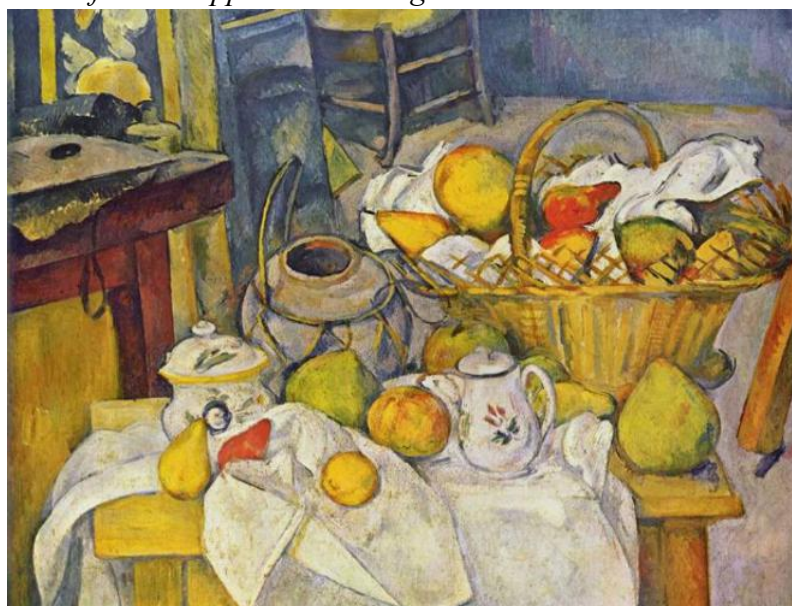


**Figure 6***Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash / Giacomo Balla*

Behind Cézanne's vision lies the rational spirit of Western modern science. Yet his inquiry was not confined to aesthetics; it was an attempt to integrate scientific insight into the reconstruction of artistic perception. While he observed nature with analytical precision, he transcended scientific rationality to depict perception as lived experience. In this sense, Cézanne's method enhanced the scientific attitude of the Impressionists—particularly Claude Monet's optical investigations—transforming perception itself into an artistic and philosophical practice.

In *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, mountains, houses, and trees are reduced to geometric structures—mountains as cones, houses as cubes. Yet these simplifications conceal a more profound intention. Through the layering of color and the subtle disjunction of brushstrokes, Cézanne integrated differing viewpoints and temporal flows into a single pictorial field, rendering the complexity of perceptual experience visible. The resulting structure resembles the assembly of machine components into a functional system: geometric elements combine to generate a new perceptual reality. This collage-like compositional principle was intimately related to the scientific and technological advances of the nineteenth century. With the advent of photography and optical instruments, the “objectivity of vision” came into question. Against the mechanical reproducibility of the image, Cézanne redefined vision as a bodily and spiritual experience. For him, nature was not an object to be observed, but a dynamic field of becoming constituted by the very act of observation. Painting was, in this sense, an apparatus for rendering the process of perceptual generation visible.



**Figure 7***Still-Life With Apples and Oranges / Cézanne*

Cézanne's perceptual experiments profoundly influenced the Futurists, who sought to sever the continuity of time and space, synthesizing motion and energy to affirm the mechanical civilization of the modern era. Yet Cézanne differed from them in his emphasis on harmony and order within nature. Conscious of the rise of technology, he nonetheless sought to capture in painting what photography could not: temporal fluidity, the density of sensation, the overlapping multiplicity of viewpoints. Through these strategies, he visualized the inherent complexity of human perception.

This multi-perspective vision forms the very core of Cézanne's collage-like conception and bridges the way to Cubism. His painting must thus be understood not merely as a dissection of form, but as a reconstruction of cognition—an integration of scientific and spiritual perception. Cézanne's work represents both the origin of the modernist "deconstruction of form" and a philosophical practice in which science and art, reason and sensibility, are united within a new visual episteme logy of perception.

### **Cézanne and Hokusai**

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), though often associated with Impressionism, reexamined the problems of form, structure, and space in painting. His assertion that "nature should be understood in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone" encapsulates his ambition to uncover the underlying order of the visible world. While reducing natural forms to geometric essentials, he sought to render the layered and unified structure of perception through color and light, reconstructing the world's internal logic on the pictorial plane. Beneath this constructive vision lies a dialogue—implicit yet profound—with Japanese art, particularly the work of Katsushika Hokusai.

In late nineteenth-century France, the phenomenon known as Japonisme rapidly transformed the artistic imagination. Beyond mere exoticism, the influx of Japanese prints provided European artists with new models for rethinking visual structure and pictorial logic. Among these influences, Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku Sanjūrokkei*) exerted a decisive impact. Hokusai did not treat nature as an object of realistic depiction; rather, he

formalized it as a spiritual and symbolic structure, presenting the universal order of nature in visual form. This principle of formalization profoundly resonated with Cézanne's lifelong engagement with Mont Sainte-Victoire.

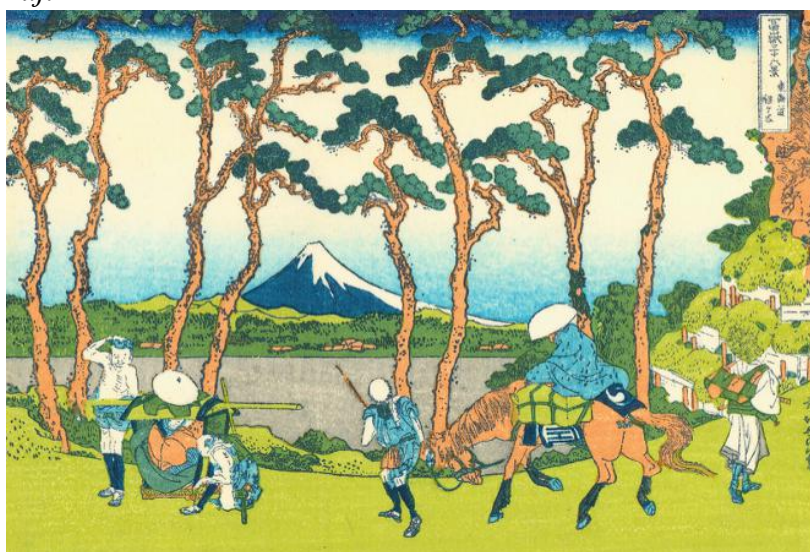
For Hokusai, Mount Fuji was not simply part of the natural landscape but the spiritual axis of Japanese culture. In *Thirty-Six Views*, Fuji dominates the pictorial field as an absolute and transcendent presence, depicted alongside human activity and meteorological phenomena. It is not a background motif but the structural principle of the composition—the spiritual axis that organizes the visible world. Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire occupies a parallel position. The mountain, which overlooked his native Aix-en-Provence, was both a familiar sight and a locus of transcendence. Over three decades, he painted more than thirty variations of this motif under differing conditions of time, light, and atmosphere. For Cézanne, the mountain was not a landscape subject but an idealized object of pictorial thought, mirroring Hokusai's treatment of Fuji as a symbol of the eternal.

In *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, Hokusai depicts the same motif under diverse conditions of season, weather, time, and orientation, thereby revealing the infinite mutability of a single subject. Fuji remains constant, yet its appearance shifts with the observer's perspective and the world's circumstances. This structure of repetition and variation corresponds to Cézanne's serial depictions of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Both artists shared a perceptual practice that sought the universal through change—not a fixed representation of form, but a meditation on transformation as the condition of permanence.

In Hokusai's compositions, spatial depth is not constructed through linear perspective but through the layering of color planes and the juxtaposition of forms. This planar and decorative spatiality profoundly influenced Cézanne's reorganization of Western pictorial space. Cézanne conceived mountains, trees, and houses as superimposed color planes, deriving depth not from perspective lines but from chromatic relations.

### Figure 8

*Hodogaya on the Tōkaidō (Tōkaidō Hodogaya), From the Series Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*



**Figure 9**

*Sainte-Victoire is Part of the Series Montagne Sainte-Victoire, One of Over 80 Oil Paintings*



In Mont Sainte-Victoire, natural elements such as the mountain, trees, and houses are simplified into geometric forms: the mountain as a cone, houses as cubes, and so forth. However, Cézanne does not merely reduce shapes; he employs color and superimposes multiple perspectives of the landscape to convey depth and complexity. This approach reflects Cézanne's intention that, much like the assembly of mechanical parts produces complex functions, the combination of geometric elements generates reality of perception.

Cézanne's spatial construction thus extends Hokusai's principle of planar composition, translating it into a new perceptual order that integrates form and process—the Western reconstruction of perception informed by an Eastern sense of structure. Hokusai simplified natural forms and elevated them to symbolic clarity through the use of sharply delineated contours. Mount Fuji, often rendered as a perfectly balanced triangle, functions as a symbol of eternity and stability. Cézanne, too, reduced nature to geometric fundamentals, claiming that all visible phenomena could be understood through the sphere, cone, and cylinder. Both artists sought, through simplification of form, to penetrate the essence of nature's internal order. 5 Hokusai's formal reduction and Cézanne's geometric reduction reveal a shared structural will: to approach the universal through the formal mediation of nature. The intersection of Hokusai's spiritual vision of nature and Cézanne's perceptual reconstruction thus represents a pivotal moment in the cross-cultural history of modern art. In this encounter, Eastern and Western conceptions of form and perception converged, each transforming the other. Through Hokusai, Cézanne glimpsed an alternative to Renaissance perspectivism—a vision of nature as a dynamic, relational field rather than a fixed visual order. Their dialogue across centuries and continents opened a new horizon for modern aesthetics: a perception that seeks not to reproduce appearances but to participate in the generative rhythm of nature itself.

The intersection of Eastern and Western perceptual systems finds a resonant counterpart in the theory of Missoku<sup>2</sup> (“esoteric breathing”) developed by the Japanese musician Mikio Nakamura. His concept represents an attempt to extend the genealogy of perception into the dimension of bodily rhythm. Nakamura’s Missoku is not merely a performance technique; it embodies a holistic mode of perception in which sound, body, and environment respond to one another in inseparable unity. It reflects a fundamental principle of Japanese aesthetics—the equilibrium between inner stillness and outer movement, between the microscopic and the macroscopic.

This duality, mediating between the individual and the whole, between the inner and the external world, expresses a distinctly Japanese sensibility. It also underlies the compositional rhythm and spatial conception found in Ukiyo-e prints. In his analysis of Ukiyo-e, Nakamura employs the visual concepts of “zoom-in” and “zoom-out.” The zoom-in perspective focuses introspectively on the psychological subtleties and quotidian details of human life, while the zoom-out perspective expands outward to encompass urban landscapes and broader social contexts. This oscillatory structure, contracting and expanding like respiration, constitutes a specifically Japanese visual rhythm—a rhythmic mode of perception that unites inner consciousness with the external world. Such a structure profoundly resonates with the reconstruction of perception, integrating internal rhythm with external movement and transforming perception itself into an act of breathing.

### Perceiving Nature and the Eastern Cosmology

This chapter reinterprets Paul Cézanne’s conception of nature and spatial composition through the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, particularly his essay, “*Le doute de Cézanne*” (“Cézanne’s Doubt”). Cézanne’s painting is not a visual reproduction but an event of perception—a site where body and world co-generate each other. The generative principle of this relation points toward a universal mode of perceiving nature, one that transcends the boundaries of East and West.

Grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, this study aligns Cézanne’s “respiration between world and body” with the heaven–earth cosmology of the Japanese Confucian thinker, Yamaga Sokō,<sup>3</sup> who conceived of heaven and earth as mutually generative. Additionally, the relational theory of contemporary physicist Carlo Rovelli, outlines the interrelations among nature, body, and world as a cosmic network of generativity. At the intersection of Western phenomenology and Eastern cosmology, this framework redefines the “perception of nature” as a process of continuous relational becoming.

In “*Cézanne’s Doubt*,” Merleau-Ponty interprets Cézanne’s art as a “tissu du visible”—a “fabric of the visible.” For Cézanne, seeing is not a passive reception of sensory data but an active event in which body and world co-produce form. Painting, therefore, is not the subjective imitation of an external world but the process through which the world manifests itself through the medium of the body. Space is not a static container but a dynamic, woven field—an interlacing of time, movement, and visibility. The gaze is never fixed; it moves, integrates fragments, and continuously generates order. Perception, in this view, is the interweaving of

<sup>2</sup> Missoku (密息) The concept of “*Missoku*” (“esoteric breathing”) developed by Akikazu Nakamura is grounded in the understanding of the essence of breath and life acquired through the practice of the shakuhachi. He regards breath as the fundamental force that connects the mind and body, sound and the universe, and defines “*Missoku*” as “the art of breathing beyond sound.”

<sup>3</sup> Yamaga Sokō (山鹿素行 1622–1685)



the visible and the invisible, the ongoing genesis in which world and body are mutually enfolded.

The spiritual influence of El Greco on Cézanne also relates deeply to this sense of generative space. El Greco's elongations and luminous vibrations suggest a world in perpetual transformation, where visible form opens onto the flux of being. Cézanne inherited this spirit, dissolving the boundaries between nature and self, between the seer and the seen. What Merleau-Ponty calls the "*tissu de l'être*"—the "fabric of being"—is precisely what Cézanne's brushstrokes render visible: a world woven through the movements of perception.

In early modern Japan, the philosopher Sokō critically reinterpreted Neo-Confucian cosmology. Against the dualistic hierarchy of Zhu Xi's thought, which positioned Heaven (*ten*) as transcendent principle (*li*) and Earth (*chi*) as its passive substrate, Yamaga proposed a dynamic model of mutual generation. For him, Heaven was not an abstract metaphysical order but an active force realized through human ethical action; Earth, conversely, was not a subordinate realm but an active medium through which the principle of Heaven manifests and deepens. Order and meaning thus emerge not as pre-given forms, but from the very process of mutual permeation between Heaven and Earth.

Yamaga's cosmology, therefore, conceives the universe as a woven field of relations in which part and whole, nature and humanity, transcendence and immanence interpenetrate. Heaven and Earth are not static opposites but continuously self-generating correspondences, forming a cyclical network in which ethical, natural, and social orders are co-constituted. Remarkably, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Yamaga's cosmology—though separated by culture and epoch—share a fundamental intuition: the world is not a fixed substance but a relational field of becoming.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of "the intertwining of body and world" corresponds to Yamaga's concept of "the interpenetration of Heaven and Earth." Both conceive existence not as dualistic hierarchy but as reciprocal generation. The world is not a pre-given order but a living fabric woven by bodily movement, natural cycles, and human action. This relational cosmology underlies contemporary thought as well. Cézanne's chain of brushstrokes, Merleau-Ponty's weaving of the visible, and Yamaga's theory of Heaven and Earth all converge in a cosmic network structure—an ontology of nature as the ongoing process of relational generation.

Conclusion — Nature as Relation, Perception as Becoming

## Conclusion

El Greco discerned within religious symbolism the spiritual vitality of nature, manifesting the divine breath in the interplay between matter and light. In his work, nature is not a sign pointing toward transcendence but a spiritual resonance that vibrates to the very core of humanity. Paul Cézanne, inheriting this spirituality, reconstructed nature within the field where sensation and perception intersect. His brushstrokes do not imitate external phenomena; they reveal that seeing, itself is a generative act through which nature continually comes into being.

The "nature" Cézanne painted is thus not an external object to be represented on canvas but a living field where body and world breathe together. Likewise, in Yamaga Sokō's philosophy, Heaven and Earth constitute a relational domain in which order emerges through the mutual interpenetration of transcendence and immanence. Both perspectives share a fundamental

epistemic stance: the world is not something already completed but something continually in the making.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty elevated this pictorial practice to a philosophical level by theorizing perception as the intertwining of body and world. The world is not a passive object external to the subject but a phenomenological structure that appears through bodily movement. In this process, visibility and invisibility, subject and object, continually regenerate their boundaries.

In parallel, Sokō interpreted the relation between Heaven and Earth as a dynamic, generative order akin to this phenomenological structure. Heaven and Earth are not oppositional poles but reciprocal mediations in a cyclical network of becoming. From this perspective, both Western phenomenology and Eastern cosmology converge on a shared insight: that the perception of nature is not the recognition of a fixed object but the understanding of a relational process. The heaven–earth network structure articulates an ontological principle of mutual generation—an attempt to integrate visual, ethical, and existential dimensions within a single fabric of being.

Nature, therefore, should not be understood as an external, autonomous entity but as an event that unfolds together with human consciousness. To perceive is to participate in the world’s own self-becoming. “Perceiving nature” is no longer a matter of mirroring the external world, but of breathing with it—of reweaving the texture of existence through acts of perception.

This perspective transcends the subject-centered framework of classical linear perspective and resonates with contemporary ecological thought and post humanist philosophy. Nature is not a fixed “background” but a continuously regenerated network of relations shaped through human perception and action. Perception, in this sense, is the act of weaving the world—of co-creating the living fabric of existence from within.

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