UK-China Humanities Alliance International Forum Series
"World Maps and World Cultures"

SOAS-Tsinghua Online Symposium:
Virtual Spaces and New Horizons: Humanities in the Digital Age

22-23 April 2025

UK-CHINA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE · UKCHA

SOAS
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02

DAYS

06

PANELS

08

CHAIRS AND
DISCUSSANTS

28

PRESENTERS

TUESDAY, 22 APRIL 2025

● **(BST) 8:45 AM – 9:00 AM**

● **(BEIJING) 3:45 PM – 4:00 PM**

Welcome Remarks

Prof. Graeme Earl (Dean, College of Humanities, SOAS)

Prof. Haiping Yan (Dean, Tsinghua Institute for World Literatures and Cultures; Secretary General, China-UK Alliance for the Humanities in Higher Education)

● **(BST) 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM**

● **(BEIJING) 4:00 PM – 5:30 PM**

Panel 1: Digital Frontiers in Art: Curating, Participating, and Rethinking Art History

Chair: Dr Hao Liu (Tsinghua) Discussant: Dr Panpan Yang (SOAS)

Chenghan Gao (Chinese University of Hong Kong) – *From the Early Twentieth Century to the Digital Era: Painting Catalogues and Art History Research*

Hedren Sum (National University of Singapore) & Stephen Whiteman (Courtauld) – *Rethinking Experience in the Virtual: Art History and Experience*

Shuo Sue Hua (University of Hong Kong) – *Performative Fusion in Curating Chinese Ink Paintings: A Vignette from Hong Kong*

Yang Feng (Leeds) – *Participation in a Posthuman and Postdigital Age: Digital Participatory Art from 2019-Present*

● **(BST) 10:30 AM – 10:45 AM**

● **(BEIJING) 5:30 PM – 5:45 PM**

Break

- **(BST) 10:45 AM – 12:15 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 5:45 PM – 7:15 PM**

Panel 2: Technology, Language, and Knowledge in Transition

Chair& Discussant: Prof. Lutz Marten (SOAS)

Benjamin Tsou (City University of Hong Kong) – *The Automotive in the Social-Cognitive Landscapes of Shanghai and Hong Kong: A Big Data Based Comparison*

Yixiang Li (Chinese University of Hong Kong) – *From "Alphabetizing Characters" to "Ideographizing Machines": Inventing the Chinese Keyboard in the Computer Age*

Eduardo Accorroni (University of Macerata) – *Alien Intelligences and Ancient Cultures: AI in Chinese Language Education*

Yan Jiang (SOAS) – *Extending the Scope of Semantics and Pragmatics for Analyzing Post-Truth*

- **(BST) 12:15 PM – 1:00 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 7:15 PM – 8:00 PM**

Online Café Lounge

- **(BST) 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 8:00 PM – 9:30 PM**

Panel 3: Digital Poetics in Contemporary China

Chair: Prof. Haina Jin (Communication University of China)

Paula Teodorescu (University of Bucharest) – *Lipstick Literature: Feminine Leadership and Digital Innovation in Shaping Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Poetry*

Nick Stember (University of Cambridge) – *Journey for the Rest of Us: Minjian Satire of Controversial News Events and Online Fantasy Fiction in Ma Boyong's Great White Venus is a Little Bit Annoyed*

Xuemeng Zhang (SOAS) – *Revisiting the Untranslatability of Poetry Between Human and Machine Translation*

Yinlong Qian (Duke) – *Becoming Xiangzi and the Transmediality of Wen*

WEDNESDAY, 23 APRIL 2025

- **(BST)8:30 AM – 10:15 AM**
- **(BEIJING)3:30 PM – 5:15 PM**

Panel 4: Affect, Identity, and Creativity in the Digital Age

Chair: Prof. Li Zhang (Tsinghua) Discussant: Dr Xiaoning Lu (SOAS)

Fengxiao Chen (Peking University) – *The Resonance of the Screen: Taylor Swift's Concert Films and Cultural Connection in the Digital Age*

Shuyue Liu (Nottingham) & Zongxian Yang (City University of Hong Kong) – *Screening Asian American Affects in Beef: A Cultural-AI Approach*

Junru Mo (Communication University of China) – *Affective Dynamics in Celebrity-Oriented Fan Translation Groups in China: A Study of Hiddles' Translation Army of China*

Shruti Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University) – *Gender, Labour, and Digital Creativity in China and India*

Zixi Zuo (UCL) – *(Im)mobility and Affective Aesthetics: Exploring Chinese Youth Mediated Intimacies*

- **(BST) 10:15 AM – 10:30 AM**
- **(BEIJING)5:15 PM – 5:30 PM**

Break

- **(BST) 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM**
- **(BEIJING)5:30 PM – 7:00 PM**

Panel 5: AI, Translation, and the Aesthetics of Linguistic Plurality

Chair: Prof. Wen-Chin Ouyang (SOAS)

Joseph Hankinson (Oxford) – *Artificial Intelligence and the Aesthetics of Language Difference*

Karen Cresci & Luciana Beroiz (Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata) – *AI-Mediated Creative Poetry Translation: Translating Nancy Naomi Carlson's Piano in the Dark*

Maria Eugenia Rigane (University of Belgrano) – *Marico Carmona's Poetry: Exploring Translation and the Representation of Rioplatense Spanish Through ChatGPT and Claude*

Deepshikha Behera (EFLU Hyderabad) – *AI, Translation, and Plurality: Reflections and Refutations*

- **(BST) 12:00 PM – 12:30 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 7:00 PM – 7:30 PM**

Online Café Lounge

- **(BST) 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM**

Panel 6: Gaming, Narratives, and AI

Chair: Dr Xiangjing Chen (Tsinghua)

Ali Alavi (SOAS) – *Cyber Realms and Cultural Narratives: Iran's Digital Gaming Evolution Since the 1990s*

Marie Rodet (SOAS) – *Gamifying Difficult Histories: Exploring Descent-Based Slavery Through the Co-Production of an Educational Game in Mali*

Douglas Eyman & Hongmei Sun (George Mason University) – *Communal Reading in Video Game Streaming: Black Myth: Wukong as an Intercultural Literary Phenomenon*

Jordan Zhixi Wang (University of Alberta) – *Faith Seeking Prompting: Transforming Theological Education in the Generative AI Era*

- **(BST) 2:00 PM – 2:15 PM**
- **(BEIJING) 9:00 PM – 9:15 PM**

Concluding Session

Dr Xiaoning Lu (SOAS)

Prof. Haina Jin (Communication University of China)

ABSTRACTS

PANEL 1:

Digital Frontiers in Art: Curating, Participating, and Rethinking Art History

From the Early Twentieth Century to the Digital Era: Painting Catalogues and Art History Research

Chenghan Gao (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Painting catalogue (*hualu* 畫錄) has been a useful tool for premodern Chinese collectors to meticulously record works that they had viewed or collected. This practice also aids collectors in managing their collections, promotes the owner's reputation, and plays a crucial role in corpus development for research. The paper examines the critical period of compiling painting catalogues in China from the 1900s to the 1930s, considering both new reproduction technologies and new cultural implications. One of the cases is *Xuzhai minghua lu* 虛齋名畫錄 , published by Pang Yuanji 龐元濟 (1864–1949) in 1909. This catalogue was an encyclopedic collection of textual records that employed the woodblock printing technique to manifest Pang's connection with premodern literati tastes. On the contrary, *Shenzhou guoguang ji* 神州國光集 (published under this name in Shanghai starting in 1908) represents a new type of catalogue using photographic printing techniques. The parallel use of traditional and modern printing techniques in catalogue compilation in the early twentieth-century elevated Chinese scholars' ability to access traditional Chinese painting, increased the methods of distributing their collections, and enriched their visual experience.

In the early twentieth century, pioneers of Chinese art history, such as Yu Shaosong 余紹宋 (1883–1949), recognized the research potentials of painting catalogues and excavated some methods to systematizing them. Nowadays, thanks to these pioneers' contributions, these catalogues have become significant references for the authentication and tracing of works' provenances. This paper further explores how to reorganize and utilize the metadata recorded in these catalogues in the modern digital era—constructing a comprehensive database by integrating datasets, such as era, creators, mounting conditions, history of circulation, images, and even sale prices. This database will benefit researchers in conducting statistical analysis, visualizing the spectrum of the 20th-century Chinese art world, and tracing the trajectories of Chinese cultural relics worldwide.

Rethinking Experience in the Virtual: Art History and Experience

Hedren Sum (National University of Singapore) & **Stephen Whiteman** (Courtauld)

This paper examines how immersive digital technologies can transform our engagement with historical art and cultural landscapes, with an emphasis on the Chinese concept of *jing*（景）. In traditional aesthetics, jing exceeds a mere "scene" or "view," embodying an interplay of physical space, emotional resonance, and sensory perception. The Virtual Mountain Estate (VME) project adopts this lens to reimagine the Qing imperial retreat of *Bishu Shanzhuang*（避暑山莊）, around 1713, as a 3D-modeled environment accessible via extended reality (XR) platforms.

At the heart of VME is the framework of "X-Sheds," or "experience-sheds." Building on the "viewshed" concept—which describes everything visible from a given vantage point—X-Sheds focus on modelling culturally-situated subjective experience defined by specific spatial, temporal, and cultural parameters, rather than generic notions of "experience." VME uses X-Sheds to capture the Kangxi emperor's mediated encounters, as depicted in his annotated poems, woodblock prints, and archival records detailing the estate's architecture and surroundings.

This processual modelling approach moves beyond static replication, integrating diverse research, from close readings of poetry and visual analyses of woodblock imagery to archival studies of interiors and comparisons with contemporaneous landscapes and sites. By weaving in ephemeral elements such as seasonal lighting, soundscapes, atmospheric effects, and vantage points, VME aims to convey the poetic and emotional essence of each scene (*jing*). In doing so, it underscores the challenges of reconciling realistic reconstruction with imaginative interpretation, revealing how digital environments inherently blend scholarship with creative invention. By foregrounding *jing* and implementing the X-Sheds approach, VME offers an interactive experience that not only immerses audiences in the past, but also raises critical questions about authenticity, subjectivity, and cultural specificity in virtual reconstructions. Ultimately, this paper reflects on the potential of 3D modelling and XR, guided by culturally attuned frameworks, to foster new forms of art-historical inquiry. VME deepens our appreciation of cultural landscapes as multisensory worlds shaped by text, place, and subjective perception. It demonstrates how processual modelling can revitalise historical sites for contemporary audiences, merging aesthetic theory, archival evidence, and digital innovation to yield more nuanced interpretations of cultural heritage.

03

"Performative Fusion" in Curating Chinese Ink Paintings: A Vignette from Hong Kong

Shuo Sue Hua (University of Hong Kong)

This study focuses on the understanding, practice, and interpretation of art curatorial discourses and practices through case studies from exhibitions of Chinese ink art in Hong Kong over the past two decades. The field of inquiry about Chinese ink paintings has been expanded to include multilayered perspectives that extend beyond national and regional borders, as well as medium-based boundaries and preconditions. Key themes within exhibition-making will be discussed, including the roles of curators and artists as educators, translators, and mediators. Critical concerns, such as the need for more provenance studies and collection history research, will also be addressed.

This paper aims to explores how "foreign" painterly, sculptural, and curatorial concepts, historically associated with "Western" traditions, have been integrated and fused into the hybrid mode of producing digital art exhibitions in Hong Kong. I hope to consciously differentiate between the "Western" concept and the East Asian artistic medium and its aesthetics in various forms of interpretation, and vice versa, to understand and highlight the ongoing processes and circumstances that shape and transform the multi-faceted trans-temporal and trans-temporal perspectives in the Asian art history discourse.

04

Participation in a Posthuman and Postdigital Age: Digital Participatory Art from 2019-Present

Yang Feng (Leeds)

The 1990s saw the parallel development of interactive art and relational aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud, 1998). Despite both valuing the proactivity of participants, there has been a divide in how these movements are understood in art historical theory, which has persisted to the present today, resulting in a gap in knowledge surrounding the participation aspect of digitally-mediated art practices. This gap is amplified in the current context, as we have entered a 'postdigital' age (Cramer Florian, 2015; Petar Jandrić and Sarah Hayes, 2023) where participation becomes more prevalent and dynamic, in tandem with rapidly developing and ubiquitous digital technologies.

This paper addresses digital participatory art, as an art-historical grouping, to examine the changing nature of participation in terms of *how*, *where*, and *who* participates in a post-digital and posthuman context. Specifically, this paper focuses on contemporary art (from 2019-present), seeking to identify

emerging traits in recent digital participatory practices. By including nonhumans as participants, it suggests an expansive notion of participation, whilst also identifying that participation is becoming automated due to the rise of biodigital technologies. Moreover, as digital art practices intertwine with scientific research, this paper raises questions about who a participant and how participatory strategies is contribute to interdisciplinary projects involving multiple stakeholders. By examining these trends based on particular art practices such as Blast Theory's *Cat Royale* (2023), this paper explores new social formations where participation is automated, ubiquitous and is constituted by humans and non-humans with the facilitation of digital technologies.

PANEL 2:

Technology, Language, and Knowledge in Transition

01

The Automotive in the Social-Cognitive Landscapes of Shanghai and Hong Kong - A Big Data Based Comparison

Benjamin Tsou (City University of Hong Kong)

China has undergone epochal transformations since the beginning of the new millennium in domains such as science and space technology, transportation [including bullet trains and electric vehicles] and military capability. How do these developments interact with the cultural narratives and the social-cognitive landscapes within Chinese societies is worthy of pursuit but has not attracted sufficient attention.

In this presentation, we shall focus on some tangible artifacts related primarily to the automotive with the help of a massive Pan-Chinese synchronous media database LIVAC [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LIVAC_Synchronous_Corpus] to examine how the related terms vary between the two major Chinese cities and across a critical time span of 10 years (1996-2006), when China went through a phase of rapid development. Our examination will include neologisms of indigenous and foreign origins and their developmental paths. We shall show how Shanghai's emergent position of leadership in the automotive industry and related consumer activities have significantly impacted on the realization of social-cognitive modelling in Shanghai and Hong Kong, including role reversal. Fruitful comparison with other artifacts will be also made to trace and assess the impact of some of the recent developments.

From "Alphabetizing Characters" to "Ideogaphizing Mazhines:" Inventing Chinese Keyboard in the Age of Computer

Yixiang Li (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

In the second half of the twentieth century Chinese writing had to overcome the most fundamental barrier to build its digital literacy: typewriting with keyboard. This paper examines the reforms of Chinese orthography to fit ideograms onto the Latin-based QWERTY keyboard, focusing on the historical tension between the preservation of Chinese characters and the pursuit of information modernity. By tracing the concept of "character root" (*zigen*) through examples—Ding U Doo's and Zheng Yili's character indexing systems, through Hsieh Ching-Chun's "character root" computer keyboard, to Chu Bong-Foo's Cangjie input method and "Chinese-writing computer" (*zhongwen diannao*)—this paper demonstrates how the pursuit of information modernity by Chinese intellectuals was shaped by a set of linguistic premises rooted in alphabetic writing and its 'normal' relationship with technology. In critiquing this historical trajectory, I introduce the term "global alphabetism," specifically emphasizing its techno-linguistic dimension in the digital age. The global expansion of the QWERTY keyboard as the standard tool for digital input solidifies these biases, such as rendering "owning a standard alphabet" an indispensable element of a language to be typable. However, although the character root was developed against such intellectual context, it eventually opened a new possibility for Chu Bong-Foo to re-invent computer for Chinese writing. This paper also emphasizes a paradigmatic shift by highlighting Chu's experimental programming: from the process of alphabetizing Chinese characters to fit Western technological standards, to ideographizing the computer—training it to recognize characters not merely as data *per se*, but as cultural artifacts with distinct significance. Inspired but unlike existing scholarship by Thomas Mullaney and Uluğ Kuzuoğlu who primarily emphasize China's information modernity in terms of efficiency, this paper offers a new perspective from cultural identity to rethink the intersection of language and technology.

Alien Intelligences and Ancient Cultures: AI in Chinese Language Education

Eduardo Accorroni (University of Macerata)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly revolutionizing many fields, including the teaching of the Chinese language and culture. As biologist E.O. Wilson pointed out, we live in an era dominated by "Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology." This pivotal moment has the potential to

transform education and other fields profoundly. Indeed, as some analysts note, the last time humanity invested so heavily in a single technology was during the Apollo missions, underscoring the historical significance of this technological advancement.

This raises a critical question: how can AI be effectively integrated into education while preserving the humanity inherent in teaching? In a context where, as essayist Tom Nichols observes, there is a risk that AI could undermine human expertise, technology might hinder rather than enhance the educational process.

The teaching of the Chinese language and culture offers a compelling case study for AI's application. AI has the potential to revolutionize Chinese instruction by providing advanced tools that enhance both linguistic and cultural learning. Through personalized learning pathways, digital tutors can dynamically adapt to the specific needs of individual students, analyze errors, improve tonal pronunciation with real-time feedback, and propose tailored exercises. Moreover, AI can facilitate immediate access to authentic materials and insights about Chinese culture and history.

However, the widespread adoption of algorithms, automatic translators, and digital tutors raises important ethical questions: what are the implications of using AI in a field deeply rooted in the transmission of cultural values? Can AI truly replicate a teacher's ability to interpret and convey cultural nuances? Furthermore, given that the cognitive origins of AI differ significantly from human cognition, we must also consider the possibility of an "alien-cultural" intelligence interacting with humanity in ways that remain elusive.

This reflection focuses on the tension between AI's potential and its limitations in education. How can we ensure that these technologies complement, rather than jeopardize, the teacher's central role? It is imperative to explore educational strategies that, while leveraging AI's capabilities, preserve the teacher's critical and interpretive functions, ensuring a humanistic dimension in education. When properly integrated, AI could open new horizons for language teaching. Nevertheless, a critical evaluation of the risks associated with its indiscriminate use remains essential.

04

Extending the Scope of Semantics and Pragmatics for Analyzing Post-Truth

Yan Jiang (SOAS)

Since 2018, some key notions in truth-conditional semantics and inferential pragmatics have gained much wider currency in people's daily lives, all having to do with the looming threat of post-truth. Fighting post-truth requires us to re-examine the concepts of truth and falsity, truth-conditions, entailments, and truth-making. It also makes us realize the hidden normative expectation of truth-assertion in verbal communication, which has been increasingly marginalized in face of the upsurge in advertising, propaganda, and rampant bull-shitting. Semantics has been inadvertently pressed on with the task of providing more secular analysis and strategies in anatomising misinformation and fake news, rather than indulging itself in its traditional armchair philosophizing. Its sister discipline, pragmatics, has also

to provide useful ways to expose bull-shitting. Here the notions of explicatures, implicatures, presuppositions and relevance can play important roles.

Following the ideas outlined above, we look at some recent post-truth hotspots in China and show how a theory of truth and relevance can provide what is exactly needed by the internet public world-wide in surviving post-truth.

PANEL 3:

Digital Poetics in Contemporary China

01

Lipstick Literature: Feminine Leadership and Digital Innovation in Shaping Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Poetry

Paula Teodorescu (University of Bucharest)

Lipstick Literature (口红文学), established in 2019 and spearhead by post-1990s poet Wang Xiaoning 王小拧 , represents a dynamic intersection of digital innovation, feminine leadership, and literary transformation in contemporary China. As a platform led by a young female poet, it challenges the historically male-dominated literary avant-garde by fostering a space where emerging voices and established figures coexist. The project actively promotes experimental poetry from younger generations while encouraging influential avant-garde male poets like Shen Haobo (Lower Body Poetry) and Yang Li (*Feifei* Poetry, Xiangpi Literature) to continue to challenge themselves.

This platform operates primarily on Weixin, leveraging its broad reach and interactivity to create a virtual literary community that thrives on inclusivity and creativity. *Lipstick Literature* not only amplifies the work of emerging poets from younger generations but also explores a new understanding of Chinese avant-garde poetry, particularly colloquial poetry with its distinctive physical explorations, often touching on feminine and sexual themes, though not exclusively. Through an analysis of its digital strategies, aesthetic innovations, and its role in reshaping the identity of the Chinese avant-garde, this study positions *Lipstick Literature* as a groundbreaking case in how virtual spaces can transform cultural landscapes. Ultimately, it highlights the platform's contribution to advancing feminine narratives and promoting new aesthetics within a rapidly evolving, digitalized literary world.

Journey for the Rest of Us: Minjian satire of controversial news events and online fantasy fiction in Ma Boyong's *Great White Venus is a Little Bit Annoyed*

Nick Stember (University of Cambridge)

Perhaps best known as an author of historical fiction with a string of bestselling successes (and hit television adaptations) to his name, Ma Boyong 马伯庸 (b. 1980) is one of China's most successful authors of popular fiction writing today. His most recent novel, however, while still managing to top the best-seller charts for the past year, represents something a departure for the author. Titled Great White Venus is a Little Bit Annoyed (太白金星有点烦), it retells the story of the Journey to the West from the perspective of the Daoist immortal Tai Bai Jinxing ('Great White Venus'), also known as Li Changgeng (lit. 'Old Man Li'). In this paper, I consider the allegorical implications of the central conceit of the novel, in which heaven is divided more or less equally between two powers: the Daoists, led by Laozi, and the Buddhists, led by the Maitreya Buddha. Each heads up a labyrinthine org chart of deities, bodhisattvas, and other sundry immortals who are charged with overseeing the passage of mortals from the human realm — either up, into heaven, or down, into hell. Ma uses this relatively simple framework as more than just a backdrop for his narrative, however, delivering a cutting minjian (grassroots) satire of recent controversial news events in the online public sphere. Most notably, these include the furor over the 'Xuzhou chained woman' (a case in which a mentally disturbed woman who had given birth to eight children was revealed by netizens to have been abducted and imprisoned by her ostensible 'husband') and the 280 cases of college admissions impersonation that were uncovered after a two-year investigation in Shandong in 2020 (the specific details of which, however, have yet to be made public). In so doing, I contend, Ma further provides a more subtle criticism of the escapism of online fantasy fiction, which – while not without satirical intent, particularly in the earliest examples of the genre from the 2000s – seems to be increasingly unconcerned with the real world, focusing instead on romantic pairings and palace intrigues.

Revisiting the Untranslatability of Poetry Between the Human and Machine Translation

Xuemeng Zhang (SOAS)

Untranslatability has always been the spectre haunting poetry translation. Translatability/untranslatability in poetry does not constitute an absolute dichotomy with clear boundaries, but a struggle between anxieties arising from the inevitable differences in language and the pragmatic approaches taken to resolve them.

What cannot be ignored when discussing poetry translation is the rapid development of machine translation since the 1980s. Machine translation permeates all areas of our lives to the extent that it is almost impossible to examine literary studies and the translation industry without it. Therefore, how the untranslatability of poetry unfolds and performs under the different approaches of human translators and machine translation is the focus of this paper. This phenomenon has not been studied much by scholars in the context of Chinese and English translation.

I explore the issue of poetry's untranslatability and investigate the distinct characteristics of poetry translation as performed by human translators versus machine translation, focusing specifically on translations between Chinese and English. Methodologically, this study adopts specific designs such as focus group interview, poetic inquiry, and online translation workshop. On the basis of a focus group, I examine the human translators' recognition and strategies towards the untranslatability of poetry. After collecting the untranslatable words provided by the interviewees, I compose these words into a contemporary Chinese poem to perform the data through poetic inquiry. Subsequently, I conduct a divergent workshop for interviewees to co-translate this Chinese poem into English. Through close reading, I compare the human co-translated poem with machine-translated versions in terms of personal pronouns, creative decision-making process, and expression of subjectivity. Finally, I situate this issue in literature education and translation studies, exploring the pedagogical implications this research may inspire.

04

Becoming-Xiangzi and Transmediality of Wen

Yinlong Qian (Duke)

This paper elaborates on a transmedial genealogy that links Lao She's fiction *Camel Xiangzi*, Wang Xiaoshuai's film *Beijing Bicycle*, and Guo Xianghao's digital game *A Floating Life in Beijing*. Employing Ian Bogost's theory of unit operations, I argue that what connects the three works is a unit-operation I term *becoming-Xiangzi*: a specific mode of narrative configuration and meaning-making originating from Lao She's novel, where the subject traverses a city as a form of labor for survival. I examine the incarnations of *becoming-Xiangzi* in three media and demonstrate how each produces distinct aesthetic effects, yet all point to a mode of underclass urban experience that persists and evolves from pre-socialist to postsocialist Beijing. Taking *becoming-Xiangzi* as a case study, this paper further proposes a new paradigm for understanding the Chinese concept of wen in the digital age as the dynamic, inclusive movement of *becoming-wen*: a process that continuously self-differentiates across shifting temporal and spatial contexts and finds manifold manifestations in diverse forms.

PANEL 4:

Affect, Identity, and Creativity in the Digital Age

01

The Resonance of the Screen: Taylor Swift's Concert Films and Cultural Connection in the Digital Age

Fengxiao Chen (Peking University)

This paper examines the cultural and social significance of concert films screened in cinemas, using Taylor Swift's concert film as a key example to explore their role as a bridge between virtual and physical spaces in the digital era. Leveraging the technological capabilities of digital media, concert films transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, delivering immersive cultural experiences to diverse audiences. Unlike traditional cinema or live performances, this hybrid form fosters a participatory and communal atmosphere within the shared theater space, merging virtual engagement with physical presence to construct temporary cultural communities. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of socially produced space, the study analyzes how cinemas become hybrid venues blending virtual performance with real-world interaction. This fluidity dismantles traditional geographic and social barriers, democratizing cultural access and facilitating transnational dialogues. Concert films such as Taylor Swift's enable audiences to experience global cultural exchanges, fostering emotional connections across linguistic and cultural divides. Furthermore, the paper explores the ritualistic qualities of concert films, where spectators actively engage in celebratory expressions like singing and clapping, transforming passive viewing into participatory experiences. This ritualization imbues concert films with immediacy and community, reinforcing collective memory and cultural identity through shared emotional resonance. Utilizing Stuart Hall's media theory, the paper argues that these shared viewing experiences stabilize cultural meanings and transform cinemas into spaces of cultural exchange and emotional connection. By blending virtual immersion with the social dynamics of shared spaces, concert films such as Taylor Swift's exemplify media's ability to create hybrid cultural experiences that bridge individual and collective, local and global, virtual and real. The study concludes by positioning concert films as pivotal in understanding the intersections of virtuality, community, and cultural production, demonstrating their potential to foster transnational connectivity and cultural interaction in a highly digitized world.

Screening Asian American Affects in *Beef*: A Cultural-AI Approach

Shuyue Liu (Nottingham) & **Zongxian Yang** (City University of Hong Kong)

As more Asian American producers enter the film-television industry to dismantle stereotypes about their ethnic community, scholarship has begun to recognise the importance of the visual representation of and by Asian Americans through manual review. However, they seldom employ digital humanistic and quantitative approaches and fail to fully explore the affective dimensions of Asian American experience.

This research harnesses the affective turn in cultural theory and the evolving capabilities of Large Language Models (LLMs), employing ChatGPT for sentiment analysis of Netflix's *Beef* (2023). With a predominantly Asian cast and crew, *Beef* unfolds from a road rage accident and follows the consequent feud between the protagonists. This research pioneers a culture-AI-based methodology within Asian American studies, aiming to delineate the role of affective portrayal in conveying Asian American experiences and to assess the effectiveness of LLMs in detecting emotions. To serve this purpose, ChatGPT is utilised to detect, quantify, and visualize three primary emotions— anger, anxiety, and empathy— from the actors' lines. The sentiment scores and affective line charts generated by ChatGPT further inform our qualitative review of key scenes and dialogues featured by affective upheavals. We argue that the protagonists' anger and anxiety are racialised, gendered, and class-stratified, and they can only be healed when they shade into the feeling of empathy.

This research holds methodological, interpretive, and practical significance. Firstly, it enriches our understanding of adopting AI-assisted and data-driven approaches in cultural studies by streamlining sentiment analysis using LLMs. The pipeline is made publicly available on GitHub for further affective studies. Secondly, it reveals affects both as individual phenomena and as collective cultural experiences that are racialised, gendered, and class-stratified within the Asian American context. From a practical standpoint, by mapping the transition from anger and anxiety to empathy as a healing mechanism, this study offers actionable insights for promoting the well-being of ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, by revealing the authentic emotional landscape of Asian Americans, this study contributes to dismantling problematic minority portrayals, particularly for a population that represents one of the fastest-growing segments of people in the United States and around the globe.

Affective Dynamics in Celebrity-Oriented Fan Translation Groups in China: A Study of Hiddles' Translation Army of China

Junru Mo (Communication University of China)

The past decades have witnessed the fast growth of fan translation within the global mediascape. Paralleling its rising visibility in both popular culture and academic work, the development of fan translation in China has since the 2010s found a notable shift towards specialisation, characterized by an increasing number of relatively small-sized groups that are only dedicated to a fixed affective object, such as a celebrity, a music band, or a particular topic. This shift in focus calls for a need to investigate the unique affective dynamics emergent in this kind of fan translation, compared to the early, more general practices (anime scanlation or drama/film subtitling) repeatedly discussed in the existing research. Furthermore, previous studies touching upon the affectivity of fan translation have often prioritized its discursive formation, while the material formation is left largely underexplored.

This study aims to bridge this gap with a focus on celebrity-oriented fan translation groups on the Chinese internet and a more materialist approach to affect. Drawing on the notion of "affective arrangements" (Slaby 2019), this study conceptualizes fan translation groups as material-discursive ensembles comprising of persons, discourses, behaviours, and other materials that "coalesce into a coordinated formation of mutual *affecting and being-affected*" (ibid. 109; italics in original). Utilizing a case analysis of Hiddles' Translation Army of China (a fan translation group composed of Chinese fans of the British actor Tom Hiddleston), this study explores the ways in which affect is prompted, modulated, and specifically formatted in this celebrity-oriented group and how its affective dynamics differ from those in more general fan translation groups on the Chinese internet. This may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity within fan translation culture and a more comprehensive perspective on the study of affect in Translation Studies.

Gender, Labour, and Digital Creativity in China and India

Shruti Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

The intersection of gender, labor, and digital creativity in China and India presents a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities, influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors unique to these regions. In both China and India, the digital divide remains a significant hurdle, with women and marginalized gender groups often facing limited access to digital tools and resources. Despite rapid technological advancements, rural areas and lower-income communities, where women are disproportionately represented, continue to struggle with connectivity issues and lack of digital literacy. Moreover, societal norms and patriarchal structures in both countries often restrict women's mobility and participation in digital spaces.

Online harassment and gender-based violence are pervasive in China and India, creating a hostile environment that discourages women and non-binary individuals from fully engaging in digital creativity. The lack of robust legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect against online abuse further exacerbates this issue. In the labor market, women in China and India face significant barriers, including wage gaps, limited career advancement opportunities, and the double burden of professional and domestic responsibilities. The gig economy, while offering some flexibility, often leads to precarious employment without social security benefits, disproportionately affecting women.

Despite these challenges, the digital age offers transformative opportunities for gender equality and creative expression in China and India. Digital platforms can democratize access to information and resources, enabling women to learn new skills, start businesses, and reach global audiences. For instance, e-commerce platforms have empowered women entrepreneurs in both countries, allowing them to bypass traditional barriers to market entry.

Social media and online communities provide spaces for support, collaboration, and activism. In China, platforms like WeChat and Weibo have become powerful tools for gender rights advocacy, while in India, campaigns like #MeToo have gained momentum through digital networks, highlighting the potential of digital spaces for social change.

Digital creativity also allows for the exploration and celebration of diverse identities and experiences. In both countries, women and non-binary creators are using digital platforms to share their stories, perspectives, and cultures, enriching the digital landscape with a variety of voices. This has led to the rise of digital content creators, influencers, and artists who challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

In conclusion, while China and India face significant challenges related to gender, labor, and digital creativity, the digital age offers unprecedented opportunities for empowerment and innovation.

Addressing the barriers to access and participation is crucial in ensuring that the digital realm becomes a space where everyone can thrive, innovate, and contribute meaningfully. Through concerted efforts to promote digital literacy, protect against online harassment, and support women's participation in the digital economy, both countries can harness the full potential of digital creativity for gender equality.

(Im)mobility and Affective Aesthetics: Exploring Chinese Youth Mediated Intimacies

Zixi Zuo (UCL)

In early 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic withheld the rosy dreams of neoliberal mobility, therefore stretched the imagination of how intimacies could be maintained and sustained during a period of enforced immobility. Shaka McGlotten (2013) critiques earlier research on mediated intimacy, specifically and empirically, involved 'technologic panics' on the potential weakening of social bonds and relationships (i.e. Illouz, 2019; Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2003). McGlotten (2013) argues that virtual intimacies are often dismissed as 'failed intimacies', disrupting idealed narrative of a 'good life' that closely tied to heteronormative familial relationships and consumerist aspirations.

Adopting a feminist posthuman analytic lens, this article moves beyond the embedded humanist views of intimacy that rely on dichotomies of private/public, reality/virtuality, online/offline. It examines young people's everyday use of social media to maintain relationality through analysing two case studies, Wu Yin and Ju Zi – two young women studying in a university in Wuhan. In the context of rapidly diminishing public spaces and reduced daily encounters, their media practices revolved around online delivery, portability and smartphone accessibility, and the convergence of locative-based services, camera, multimedia capabilities, and pedometer on smartphones. These media practices unfolded within in a polymedia environment that governed by complex algorithmic architectures and affordability that intervene the production of 'normative' identities and intimacies (Madianou, 2016; Chambers, 2017; Wallis, 2024; Ringrose et al., 2024).

Exploring the techno-social dimensions of intimacies, this research conceptualises intimacies as 'affective aesthetics' – a framework that captures the persistence of persistence of (hetero)normative conjugal relationship while addressing how young people's engage with, monitor of, and emotionally navigate mediated intimacies. This framework elucidates the dynamic interplay of visibility, desirability, and social validation, alongside the affective flows of congestion, extension and archiving enabled by digital mediation. The findings reveal that young people's practice of intimacies, instead of hinder affective experience, it fosters an aesthetically and somatically diverse attachment. This article contributes to a broader socio-technological redefinition of intimacies that are intra-acted with both human and more-than-human objects, offering a nuanced understanding of intimacy in this particular space-time-mattering of digital age.

PANEL 5:

AI, Translation, and the Aesthetics of Linguistic Plurality

01

Artificial Intelligence and the Aesthetics of Language Difference

Joseph Hankinson (Oxford)

The success of Large Language Models requires us to decide upon the question of what language is with a new and historically specific set of categories: vectors, contextual word embeddings, dependency parsing, number, data sets and resource richness, and so on. This paper discusses the related topics of language ontologies and language difference in light of these categories. It builds on pre-AI accounts of language and meaning that nonetheless use strikingly similar terms and ideas (I. A. Richards on vectors and contextual embedding; Alain Badiou on transitivity), in order to develop an understanding of language difference which in turn sharpens our idea of what poetic language is and what happens when it is translated. Language difference, in this account, makes possible a correlation of recent advances in decolonial linguistics with a provisional theory of poetic language and translation. It permits the reorientation of discussion about new languages, aesthetics, and forms of expression in light of the ontological implications of AI and LLMs. As such, this paper attempts to move beyond a humanist critique of AI, instead favouring a questioning of what it makes possible and impossible in discourse about language, creative expression, and translation.

02

AI-Mediated Creative Poetry Translation: Translating Nancy Naomi Carlson's Piano in the Dark

Karen Lorraine Cresci & Luciana Beroiz (Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata)

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies have created both new challenges and innovative opportunities in the field of translation studies. To analyze some of these issues, we will focus on the literary translation of poetry by the American writer Nancy Naomi Carlson, winner of the Oxford-Weidenfeld Prize 2022, whose collection of poems Piano in the Dark (2023) we are translating collaboratively into (Rioplatense) Spanish. Through creative interaction practices with the Large Language Models (LLMs) ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude, we will explore the translation capabilities of these tools based on our corpus of poetic texts. Bearing in mind ethical and ideological considerations, we seek to examine the possibilities that emerge and the limitations posed by using generative AI

technology in the creative translation of Carlson's poetry, with a particular focus on decoloniality and gender-related issues. LLM models offer translation options and insights into the poems, which may be useful for the translator. However, some of their outputs reveal biases and stereotypes. This study seeks to identify effective strategies for guiding these models to contribute to the literary translation process. Our research is part of the collaborative project "AI, Decoloniality and Creative Poetry Translation," directed by Prof. Matthew Reynolds and hosted by the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Research Centre.

03

Marico Carmona's Poetry: Exploring Translation and the Representation of Rioplatense Spanish Through ChatGPT and Claude

Maria Eugenia Rigane (University of Belgrano)

In the domain of translation studies, generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have introduced both challenges and opportunities. In my study, I aim to address some of these issues by analyzing translations of poems by Argentine poet Marico Carmona from (Rioplatense) Spanish into English. My experiments focus on the use of the Large Language Models (LLMs) ChatGPT and Claude to explore the potential of these tools for the process of creative literary translation. Both models offer insightful contextual comments, which open possibilities for collaborative work with the translator and foster their critical thinking. In some cases, the inability of these technologies to translate verses accurately, or their mistranslations, raises significant ideological questions. In addition to evaluating the linguistic alternatives provided by each of these AI tools, I will focus on the appropriateness of translation options for performative poetry, considering rhyme, diction and structure. My research is part of the collaborative project "AI, Decoloniality and Creative Poetry Translation", directed by Prof. Matthew Reynolds and hosted by the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation Research Centre.

04

AI, Translation, and Plurality: Reflections and Refutations

Deepshikha Behera (EFLU Hyderabad)

Drawing from the experiments conducted for the AIDCPT (AI, Decoloniality and Creative Poetry Translation) project, this paper focuses on the impact of text generative AI and LLMs in studying low resource languages within a decolonial context and understands the impact that intervention of text generative AI has had on different contexts of language use, with special focus on translation, and knowledge production of low resource languages. It is apparent that the intervention of AI has produced new ways of using linguistic skills for oral language-cultures that do not have a significant presence in the lettered world. My experiments so far have captured the manner in which careful prompt engineering and ongoing dialogue with the machine help in working with low-resource languages and

complex situations of language difference and contestation. This paper delineates the strategies adopted to translate poems emerging from the Miya poetry movement in contemporary Assam, educate the LLM in context, questioning its assumptions about language, and uploading materials such as an alphabet script, audio-visual tools to make it learn the importance of the latent heterogeneity within plurilingual language-worlds. With the intervention of AI, the human experience of translation, which shapes and is further shaped in the process of establishing a relationship with another, and the modalities of language experience becomes complex. Acts of 'doing' language, through writing, reading, talking, listening are intervened by the arching presence of AI that can participate in acts which were earlier contingent upon human experience.

This paper aims at mediating into the networks of AI as sites of learning and knowledge production, and that of cultural exchange which is facilitated in the shared socialites of language use in everyday speech as well as creative writing. With AI and LLMs intervening into this site, questions regarding the production, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge become inevitable. While the contribution of AI and LLMs in research and academic practices is undeniably important, this paper intends to rethink the manner in which these models acquire existing knowledge and generate responses, thus engaging with the technicalities of prompt engineering and AI training along with concerns of ethics and representation.

PANEL 6:

Gaming, Narratives, and AI

01

Cyber Realms and Cultural Narratives: Iran's Digital Gaming Evolution Since the 1990s

Ali Alavi (SOAS)

This study examines the evolution of digital game studies and industries in Iran within the cyber domain, spanning from the late 1990s to the present. It traces the developmental trajectory of Iran's digital gaming sector, emphasising its role as a cultural and technological response to Western hegemonic narratives and orientalist representations in video games. By investigating Iran's strategic engagement with cyberspace and its efforts to produce counter-narratives, this research highlights how the nation has carved a distinct identity within the global gaming landscape. Furthermore, it explores the integration of language, translation strategies, and cultural-historical narratives in the localization of video games, demonstrating how these elements contribute to redefining digitalised popular culture and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. The findings underline the interplay between digital gaming, cultural production, and national identity in the context of Iran's broader socio-political and technological initiatives.

02

Gamifying Difficult Histories: Exploring Descent-Based Slavery through the Co-Production of an Educational Game in Mali

Marie Rodet (SOAS)

New technologies are often blamed for the disappearance of the intergenerational oral modes of knowledge transmission in Africa. Creating digital media on the history of resistance to slavery and turning them into a game is a key opportunity to reflect further on how games may be used widely and efficiently to convey difficult and still traumatic histories. New technologies actually have the potential to complement fading oral history transmission, offering new ways to engage, share, and understand collective heritage histories for the longer term.

In 2022 with the support of the AHRC and in partnership with JIWE Studios (Kenya), we began working on the educational game 'USAWA', which is intended to use the power of gamification to influence and modify thoughts and behaviours regarding slavery in Africa. The project was based on knowledge production by marginalised communities through visual participatory research with mobile phones. Here, the participatory visual research and gamification have been used to explore new ways of publicising neglected histories of resistance to slavery, with a commitment to both social justice and an 'ethics of care'. The paper ultimately explores what this new kind of digital co-production do to writing difficult histories in postcolonial Africa.

03

Communal Reading in Videogame Streaming: Black Myth Wukong as Intercultural Literary Phenomenon

Douglas Eyman (George Mason University) & Hongmei Sun (George Mason University)

This presentation examines the intermedia and communal reading of video games, focusing on the case of Black Myth: Wukong, based on the Chinese literary classic, Journey to the West. Scholars of literature and in game studies (Berger and McDougal, Domsch, Jones, McMenomy) have argued that the practice of playing the game draws the player to the text; they engage in a form of reading through the gameplay, and they also engage in a significant amount of reading texts embedded in the game. Such reading can become a communal activity when players stream their gameplay for others to observe and to some extent participate in. In the case of Black Myth: Wukong, observers who are familiar with the literary source material provide additional insights to streaming players who are unfamiliar with Journey to the West, using text chat that occurs alongside the gameplay to communicate with the player. We can see both text-to-game and game-to-text forms of reading at play. The presentation will begin with an overview of theories of reading that account for reading as a communal practice, then address the idea of reading video games drawing on a range of scholars from literary study and game studies.

We then describe videogame streaming before focusing on the primary case study of the intercultural literary adaptation of Black Myth: Wukong. We see this analysis as an example of applying humanities research in a way that bridges the classical and the contemporary, as well as the physical and digital through the act of reading.

04

Faith Seeking Prompting: Transforming Theological Education in the Generative AI Era

Jordan Zhixi Wang (University of Alberta)

Theological education faces a critical transformation—what I refer to as "our Gutenberg moment." The rise of generative AI (GenAI) urges theological institutions to adopt proactive measures to integrate these technologies into their pedagogical frameworks. This proposal outlines a model for theological education that treats GenAI as both a learning and teaching copilot. It examines the potential of AI-powered edtech tools and chatbots to reshape theological education by creating critical inquiry and intellectual innovation. The integration of frontier GenAI models with educational theories like Universal Design for Learning allows theological educators to increase student engagement and improve learning outcomes. This approach enables educators to design environments where students evaluate AI-generated material critically, achieve intellectual growth, and deepen their understanding of faith. Case studies provide examples of collaborations between educators and students that enhance the connection between faith and technology.

This paper addresses the ethical challenges and risks posed by GenAI, including hallucinations, biases, and mediocrity. It evaluates the limitations of these technologies and proposes strategies to ensure discernment within theological contexts. By offering actionable methods to embrace GenAI's potential, theological institutions should be able to preserve their educational mission while expanding technological possibilities.

The proposal positions GenAI as a collaborative tool to transform theological education. It defines the relationship between faith and technology in new ways, initiates critical dialogue, and uncovers pathways that connect tradition, innovation, and religious exploration in the digital era.

Ali Alavi

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Deepshikha Behera

has previously taught at the Centre for Comparative Literature at University of Hyderabad, India, as a guest faculty. She is a Project Member for the "AI, Decoloniality and Creative Poetry Translation" project at the University of Oxford. She has been working as a Research Associate for an Institute of Eminence project on "Migration and Borderlands" at the Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad. Alongside, she is an executive committee member of the Oral History Association of India. She has submitted her PhD dissertation titled, "Understanding the Ethics of Untranslatability": Translating Miya Poetry into English" at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Her research interests are translation, untranslatability, AI and language, critical interdisciplinarity, affective geographies, migration, cultural translation, and linguistic ethnography. She has presented her work at several international and national forums including the ACLA, NEMLA and CLAI among others.

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Douglas Eyman

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Yang Feng

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Joseph Hankinson

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Yixiang Li

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Maria Eugenia Rigane

is a teacher of English, graduated from the National University of Mar del Plata. She holds a Master's degree in English from the University of Belgrano, where she teaches American and English Literature of the 20th C. She is now part of the research group 'New Literary Worlds: The Influence of Technology and Spatiality in 21st-Century Fictional Narrative' at the School of Languages and Foreign Studies of the University of Belgrano.

Marie Rodet

is Reader in the History of Africa at SOAS. Her research interests lie in modern African history, gender History, history of slavery, public history, Gamification and digital humanities. In her academic work on the social history of West Africa, Dr Rodet has focused on recovering and reinterpreting the experiences of often-neglected historical actors in the nineteenth and twentieth century. To enhance the impact of her research and democratise access to historical knowledge, she has prioritised publishing her academic findings in various media forms. Diversifying her research outputs to reach a broader audience has become a central focus of my most recent projects. This shift in her career toward digital humanities and public history has led her to co-produce and collaborate on mobile apps, websites, films, graphic novels, animated films and mobile games.

Shruti Singh

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MA (Harvard University), PhD (University of California, Berkeley), has rigorously cultivated linguistic databases for research in (1) digital humanities, including sociolinguistics, and (2) Natural Language Processing (NLP) including mapping between Chinese and English technical language via comparable Chinese - English patents. He is a member of the Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer of Belgium and Emeritus Professor at City University of Hong Kong. He is also the Founding President of the Asian Federation of Natural Language Processing. His extensive publications are focused on quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis, including the award- winning *Language Atlas of China*, and on NLP.

Jordan Zhixi Wang

is a historian of World Christianity. He received his PhD in Religious Studies from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, focusing on twentieth-century Christianity in China. He co-founded AI-demia, an academic consultancy startup. He recently completed an MA in History at the University of Alberta, Canada, and is currently a sessional instructor at the same institution. His research interests focus on public theology, biblical reception, and Communist-Christian encounters in Chinese history, as well as the application of Generative AI for theological education and research.

Stephen Whiteman

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