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## Contributors

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global, as a way to expand one's personal and social advantage: as a way to know and understand oneself and one's own global position.

**Xiaolong Zhang** is a PhD student in Communication Studies at Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University. His research is centred on intra-Asian Comparative Advertising and resulting transcultural flows.

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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

As humanity is approaching its third year under COVID-19, the virus's grim day-to-day toll is becoming increasingly clear. By the end of 2021, over 5 million people will have died from the disease and many are continuing to die on a daily basis. The world has not even yet begun to count the psychological fallout from the disease, as only glimpses of it have become visible so far: children left behind in their schooling, depression among teenagers unable to socialise; students prevented from having campus experiences; parents at the end of their tethers because of closed schools and kindergartens; family members unable to see each other for years on end. Among survivors, "fatigue" is the most common words to be heard.

Other words, unknown a few months ago, have become pedestrian, as we are all becoming (linguistic) epidemiologists: Delta and Omicron mutations, booster vaccinations, 2G, 3G, 3G++. The advantages and disadvantages of heterologous and homologous vaccinations, of mRNA vaccines vs adenovirus vector vaccines versus inactivated virus vaccines are broadly discussed. Additionally, rules and regulations change on a daily basis, and travel plans are more a guessing game than anything else. Under the reign of social media, discussions taking place oftentimes become heated and accusatory, rather than reflected and scientific. As the former spill out onto the streets, people are injured and killed. The virus is political.

IJCS's current issue pays a small tribute to this situation; in a larger expose, entitled "Screen Ontologies or Teaching the Virus a Lesson: A Few Things that Work in Online Education and a Few that Don't", the situation of accelerated online education is discussed. The article states that despite the fact that there were few alternatives to such online teaching, its necessity at the time should not suppress necessary criticism of distance education in general. In particular, the teaching situation via screens is discussed and older philosophical and social criticisms of television culture and reintroduced and updated in order to expose the limits of screen education in particular and screen cultures in general. Finally, new ways of distance education are sketched that would usher in a post-screen education model.

The second article, "Is There a Correspondence Between "Orientalism" and The Orient? – Said, Dyson and Sen" by Amitabha Gupta, revisits Edward Said's seminal Orientalism work and, from the vantage point of 40 years after, explains how especially the work of Sen is able to provide a more fruitful approach today by circumventing some of the by now problematic premises Said relied on

Naeim Sepehri's "Psychological Effects of the Architectural-Space: Decorated Mirror-tile Artwork-A Phenomenological Approach", discusses the usage of mirror shards in the interior decoration of palaces and mosques in Iran. He historicises this architectural feature and, with the help of recent psychological theories, demonstrates how such architectural approaches have become deeply engrained in the aesthetic of Iranian historical national narratives.

"Innovation in Cultural Heritage Preservation in Taiwan: Lessons for Indonesia?" by Riela Provi Drianda, Laila Zohrah and Adiwani Fahlan Aritenang contrasts and compares cultural heritage politics and their implementation in Taiwan and Indonesia respectively. While the two cultural communities follow divergent politics of heritage conservation, the authors illustrate that many of the challenges faced by cultural heritage preservation actions, such as rapid development, profit maximisation, lack of political will and funding, and a host of others, are

common to preservation efforts around the globe. Preservationists can learn from each other's experiences, and while local givens, such as weather conditions, might differ, all preservation efforts share a number of commonalities which can best be explored together.

Finally, Xiaolong Zhang's "Media Power: Cigarette Package Design in China" explores the conflicting messages cigarette package design is sending: On the one hand, as in many other countries, the cigarette pack is supposed to alert its users that smoking kills; on the other, it is supposed to attract users to exactly this habit. Zhang traces this conflict to the differing political and economic messages being sent by the authorities. For one, tax revenues from cigarettes are an important economic factor, as are jobs in the tobacco industry; for another, the long term costs of smokers' health-care costs have recently begun to be higher than tobacco's economic benefits. Up to here, the Chinese situation does not seem to be so much different from the rest of the world. But Zhang shows that in China there is a strong cultural element at play that is different from other countries, and that is the social component of smoking. Via focus groups, Zhang demonstrates that smoking is variably used to exhibit status, masculinity and relational sociability. It is these features that make anti-smoking campaigns even harder to run in China than elsewhere.

Enjoy reading the issue!

Holger Briel  
Editor-in-Chief

**Screen Ontologies or Teaching the Virus a Lesson: A Few Things that  
Work in Online Education and a Few that Don't**

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### **Abstract**

The recent global disruption in education due to the COVID-19 virus has led to a significant increase, if not an explosion, in education studies. Research into and application of digital pedagogical strategies in general and (vision-based) online teaching in particular have reached new heights. Many studies focus on the strengths of this new online education and, indeed, much of the data points to its success. However, other studies elicit slightly less positive data. The study at hand will take both of these scientific strands seriously and try to interpret them. This will be achieved in the first place through the analysis of a number of significant studies on online teaching and commenting on their methodologies and basic premises. Secondly, this will be achieved through a rendition of the author's own teaching experience under COVID-19 conditions. Then one of the sine-qua-nons of online education will be examined, namely the screen, a central device left unaddressed by most other research. Using an ontological interpretative approach, the study will demonstrate why at least some of the promises of online education simply cannot be kept. Lastly, the study will list ways in which a thoroughly reflected approach to online education can nevertheless play an important role in preparing students for a post-screen and post-postdigital world.

*Keywords:* distance education, media philosophy, online education, screen studies

Especially in times of COVID-19, uncertainties persist and continue to characterize the human condition. In particular, this virus has brought massive challenges to K-12 and Higher Education practices, including decreased mobility, deepened polarizations and less inclusion and diversity (Mok 2020; Aristovnik 2020; Jelińska, 2021). As of April 2020, more than 1.5 billion students in 195 countries were affected by COVID-19 prompted school closures (UNESCO 2020). In 2021, this figure has decreased somewhat, but there is still much fallout from continued kindergarten, school and university closures.

When it comes to distance education, over the last year and a half many educators and their students have had to navigate a steep learning curve. No matter where one looks on the globe, at least partial distance/online learning was used in most teaching endeavours, be they located in primary, secondary or tertiary pedagogical institutions. Much research has been conducted to analyse and, ideally, improve online teaching practices. This text will claim that the current situation is nevertheless unsatisfactory, as most of online-education research and literature solely focuses on usability issues without taking into account certain philosophical factors playing an important role in the design and access processes to online media for education. Case in point are screen-based media in which a screen is pivotal in all educational learning situations, but it has received little scholarly attention so far.

Screens are mostly taken for granted and considered to be an ahistorical, neutral piece of hardware. Especially the latter point is hardly the case and this paper will demonstrate that at an earlier time in media research, specifically in early television research, the screen did play an important role. It will take seriously its history and ontology and claim that many present-day screen studies have forgotten its history, to the detriment of its users and all well-intended educators.

The rationale for this text is to address this under-theorisation of the role the screen interface plays in on- and offline social world cognition. In a first step, it will sketch a short history of screen-based distance education and assess the role technology occupied in its development. It will then turn to recent studies on online education and assess the advantages and disadvantages such pedagogies can deliver. In a third step, it will revisit early critiques of television and establish a screen ontology which, it is claimed, will be advantageous in addressing the failures, challenges, and chances of online education. In a fourth step, it will analyse the content of courses the author has taught over the last two years at Higher Education institutions in mainland China and abroad. Evidence will show that for some topics, for example, mainly theoretical ones, screen-based online teaching can indeed benefit most students, as long as an effort is made by both teachers and students to critically analyse not only the content provided, but also the media used in doing so; as for other classes, mostly those of a more practical orientation, the claim can be made that, even given the best efforts by all stakeholders, the result will be an inferior educational outcome for students when compared to face-to-face classes. For the majority of classes, a hybrid system of teaching seems to work best, a fact confirmed by a significant number of studies. In addition, and this is perhaps the lesson of the virus, its own technological underpinnings need to be addressed *expressis verbis* for such a system to fully benefit learners.

### **The History of Distance Teaching**

Up until about 10 years ago, for most students, university life had not changed much for over 500 years and school life not for 2000 years or even longer: a professor or teacher stood in front of a class in a classroom and delivered a lecture or read from one of the then few precious

handwritten books and students took notes. The oldest evidence for schools goes back at least several thousands of years; Israeli archaeologists even claim to have found evidence of a school dating back 400,000 years (David 2017). Somewhat more recently, one may point to the Greek Λύκειον (Lykaion), founded by Aristotle in 334 BCE in Athens, or to Chengdu's 石室中学 (*Shìshì Zhōngxué*), founded during the Han Dynasty in 143 BCE, the oldest continuous school in the world. Other arenas of instruction are the Αγορά (Agora) of Athens and the Ωδείο Ηρώδου του Αττικού (Odeon Irodou tou Attikou), established in 161CE, again in Athens, then under Roman occupation, and which were public speaking/performance spaces. The oldest post-antiquity university, جامعة القرويين (Jāmi'at al-Qarawīyīn), was established in 859 in the Moroccan city of Fes and modelled on Greek precursors.

While still constituting the overwhelming majority of teaching practices, this time-honoured ex-cathedra physical classroom-based system has been quietly challenged for over two centuries in the guise of distance education. If one were so inclined, its temporal scope might even be extended further back in time. In this view, proto-distance learning can be claimed to have been in existence ever since the establishment of libraries, such as the Great Library of Alexandria (283 BCE), where one could read texts written far way in time and place.

Distance learning proper, if not online learning, began in 1728 with Caleb Philipps advertising in the *Boston Gazette* for students interested in short-hand expertise via mailed lessons. Sir Isaac Pitman set up his own distance learning business, again with short hand teaching practices in mind, in the late 1830s in London. Such postal distance learning received a boost in 1840 with the introduction of uniform postage rates across England, expanding the scope of the operation across the country. In 1858, the University of London became the first university to offer distance learning degrees, with Oxford's Wolsey Hall, the first distance learning college, founded in 1894. In the US, the first correspondence school, the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, was founded in 1873. In 1892, William Rainey Harper established correspondence courses at the University of Chicago with Wisconsin, Columbia, and many other universities following by the 1920s. These courses on offer often veered much from traditional university courses and successfully addressed themselves to housewives, miners and many other non-traditional students seeking mostly vocational training. Eventually, many of these schools and programmes would organise themselves into the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE). Open universities, such as the British one established in 1965, Canada's Athabasca University (1970), Spain's National University of Distance Education (1972) and Germany's FernUniversität Hagen (1974), would also follow a similar educational approach (cf. White 2009 for an Australian perspective). Today, the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India is the largest Open University in the world with around 4 million students enrolled. With the arrival of broadband and stable Internet connections, most of the Open Universities would avail themselves of Internet-based teaching and learning opportunities and move much of their materials online.

Electronic media were quick to take advantage of the need of these institutions to cross vast distances. Starting in 1922, experimental radio lessons were broadcast in different regions in the USA, with broadcast radio becoming a means for extending learning to people in isolated and spread-out places, many of them in the Midwest. By 1929, radio education became more organized and broadcasting licenses were acquired by many schools and universities (cf. Fabos 2004). This system would pay off quickly, so for instance during the 1937 Polio outbreak in Chicago, a situation, as Foss reminds us, with an uncanny resemblance to our time:

In 1937, a severe polio epidemic hit the U.S. At the time, this contagious virus had no cure, and it crippled or paralyzed some of those it infected. Across the country, playgrounds and pools closed, and children were banned from movie theaters and other public spaces. Chicago had a record 109 cases in August, prompting the Board of Health to postpone the start of school for three weeks.

This delay sparked the first large-scale “radio school” experiment through a highly innovative – though largely untested – program. Some 315,000 children in grades 3 through 8 continued their education at home, receiving lessons on the radio.

(Foss, 2020)

Especially in parts of Africa and across India, radio education remains an important pillar of distance education even today (cf. Jacob, 2020).

Quick to follow on the heels of radio education was television education. In 1954, the US National Educational Television (NET) started operating, subsequently to be replaced by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 1970 (cf. Lee, 2008). In the UK, BBC educational programming, named BBC Schools, started broadcasting in 1957, and was mainly geared towards children aged 5–16. In 2010 it morphed into “Class TV”, broadcast on the CBBC Channel. In Germany, the *Telekolleg* commenced broadcasting in 1967 in Bavaria, at first called “Studienprogramm”, and it would lead to GSEs and/or Fachhochschulreife (advanced technical college entrance qualification). In 2016, it was rebranded as *alphaLernen* (alphaLearning) and is now offered via the internet. Given the rapid technological progress in digital communication, it was only logical then that, already in 1982, the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute in La Jolla used computer conferencing to deliver a distance education program to business executives. In 1993 the University of Illinois would begin employing online learning. The first online course for credit was offered in 1984 by the University of Toronto and in 1994, the Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona, the first fully online university, was founded. By 2021, almost all universities offer at least some of their courses and degree programmes online. There continues to be a huge market potential for such online education, as Soumik Sarkar reminds us: “The worldwide market size of online learning is approximately \$187.87 billion in 2019, a 400% increase over what it was just six years ago”, a figure which is about to double again by 2025 (Sarkar, 2020).

The traditional university system has come under further (rightful) scrutiny via additional technological advances, mainly through the further development of online education. Hybrid classes, flipped classrooms and massive open online course (MOOCs) have become the buzzwords of recent pedagogies. In 1989 Phoenix University began offering online programmes and by 2010, its enrolment counted over 600,000. In 2006 Salman Khan began producing short instructional videos in San Francisco, first for his own personal usage and then fairly quickly for commercial purposes. He set up his Khan Academy online, which by 2013 had over 250,000,000 video downloads. Udemy Inc., founded in 2010 by Eren Bali, Gagan Biyani, and Oktay Caglar, is another large US MOOC provider, aiming its course at professional adults and students. As of February 2021, its platform has more than 40 million students, 155,000 courses and 70,000 instructors teaching courses in over 65 languages and there have been over 480 million course enrolments. Students and instructors come from 180+ countries and 2/3 of the students are located outside of the United States. Furthermore, Coursera and Udacity, both conceived at Stanford, have also had a major impact on tertiary education with their own MOOC offerings. In 2015, Minerva University was founded in San Francisco, claiming to be

the first ivy-league-style online university, with an acceptance rate of only 2%. It would seem that their success speaks for itself.

Benefits of online education have been mostly developed via connectivist pedagogy, stressing the self-paced, asynchronous studying processes (Learner Control Principle) (Zaremba, 2004; Zimmerman, 1998); allowing for a theoretically universal and diverse student base; the expansiveness of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) such as Blackboard, Moodle or Canvas; possible gains for minority students, women and differently abled students, overcoming the constraints from limited university infrastructure; flexibility and convenience; cost reduction; standardised quality; better learning success through Multimedia Learning Approach and greater access to instructors (cf. Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2010; Moore, 2012; Major, 2015; Roberts, 2017; Al-khatir, 2014; Stripling, n.d.).

Over the last few years, though, the appeal of online courses has waned somewhat due to a combination of reasons, such as high drop-out and failure rates, with student completion rates sometimes as low as 7% (Parr, 2013). Other reasons why online courses are problematic are technical. For example, in March 2020, following students' request, the University of the Philippines announced that it would stop online classes, as the majority of students did not have the technical environment to participate in them (San Juan, 2020). Other issues include legal questions, such as, who owns the visual material created – the teacher or the institution? A recent case from Canada highlights this issue. A student from Concordia University in Montreal wanted to contact the teacher of a class he was taking, only to find out that the instructor had died two years earlier while the university gave the impression that the teacher continued to give classes. (Elks, 2021).

It is also clear that many students and teachers dislike online classes. In a poll conducted in February 2021 at my home institution, more than 65% of all students stated that they preferred in-person courses. Whether students do better in online courses vs in-person ones is hotly debated; at least for high school students in Germany, research shows that for online classes, students do not do as well in terms of quantity and quality of material learned (Wößmann, 2020), leading to a learning loss of about 20% (Fokken, 2021). After the end of COVID, it is estimated that 15-20% of children need extra homework help (Fokken, 2021) According to Wößmann (2020), in Germany, learning time was cut by half in home-schooling; a similar study in the Netherlands suggests that only eight weeks of school closure elicited a learning deficit of 20% compared to face-to-face education. If one scales this results in a wage loss of about 3-4% across one's working lifetime

Further criticism of online education include lack of dedicated studying space in domestic spaces, unreliable technology; lack of proper training, guidance and self-discipline, discipline-dependent strictures, such as exist in medical school or practical training course such as filmmaking; additional time needed by teachers to organise, upload and grade course materials; and lack of cultural sensitivity training for teachers involved in teaching courses globally (cf. Kaplan, 2016; Anderson 2011; Evans, 2008).

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, new issues with online interactions have also arisen. Many people are beginning to suffer from a general COVID-19 fatigue, here not necessarily generated by the virus itself, but stemming from the measures continuing to be taken over and over again to reign it in. In the business and education world, much of this has to do with the most-used business tool coming to the fore during 2020: video calling. It became a must-have central piece of business, education and leisure communication. As time went on, though, with

billions of calls being made, some issues with it did appear as well. Thus, in April 2021, Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan, declared: “I’m about to cancel all my Zoom meetings.” (Murray, 2021), indicating that in-person meetings are far more effective than virtual ones and that most of his workers will return to in-person work by the fall. Even Eric Yuan, CEO of the most popular video call application, Zoom, admitted that he suffers from Zoom fatigue and no longer schedules back-to-back meetings (Yuan, 2021).

And indeed, a new illness, coined Zoom and Exhaustion Fatigue (ZEF), has been diagnosed with many individuals suffering from it. Much of it is related to what Baileson (2021) has coined “Nonverbal Overload”. Reasons for it are:

*Eye Gaze at a Close Distance:* People in an elevator tend to look away from the faces of others by looking down or otherwise averting their gaze in order to minimize eye contact with others.

*Cognitive Load:* On Zoom, one source of load relates to *sending* extra cues. Users are forced to consciously monitor nonverbal behavior and to send cues to others that are intentionally generated (cf. Clark, 2011).

*An All Day Mirror:* Studies have shown that the tendency to self-focus might prime women to experience depression.

*Reduced Mobility:* In essence users are stuck in a very small physical cone, and most of the time this equates to sitting down and staring straight ahead.

Problems do not stop here. Recent research by Fauville et al. (2021) reveals that Zoom Fatigue is also a gendered, an age, a personality related, and a racial issue. The study shows for instance that women are more susceptible to Zoom fatigue than men. These are serious issues and would require closer monitoring. Another point in this regard is the lack of external signals used in physical face-to-face communication. While the 1960s idea that 70-90% of our communication rests on non-verbal cues has largely been debunked (cf. Eunison, 2021, p. 256ff), there nonetheless exists information external to the screen which is lacking in online communication, as it significantly separates verbal from non-verbal interactions in its simulation and raises new concerns about non-equality. It is important to stress here, that these are relatively new phenomena and require the creation of new solutions, also in one of the areas of application, online education.

### **Recent Research on Online-Education**

While as we have seen, distance learning theories and approaches have been in existence for many decades, it was actually due to the development of the internet that distance education became a mass phenomenon and entered the mainstream. Over the last decade or so, many new theoretical assertions and approaches have been devised to account for this development. Thus, Gilly Salmon (2000, 2020) developed a five-stage model of e-learning and e-moderating that has proved to be a good starting point for online educative interactions. It includes 1) individual access and the ability of students to use the technology; 2) the creation of an online identity for online socialisation (cf. Kalyuga, 2000); 3) dissemination of information to students; 4) collaborative interaction; and 5) linking the online system with the outside world, all under the mentor- and facilitatorship. Another pivotal point seems to be the design of the learning environment, be it physical, blended or online (cf. Rau, 2019; Allen, 2007; Vaughan, 2010).

Misoch (2006, pp. 63–94) discusses various online communication models such as Social Presence Theory, Restriction Models, the Social Cues Filtered Out Approach, Media Richness Theory, Media Synchronicity Theory, the Theory of Electronic Nearness, and a generalized Digitalization Approach and comes to the conclusion that all of them have their specific merits. Finally, Aparicio (2016) and Kentnor (2015) provide a good overview of the history of e-learning and the creation of an e-learning systems framework, inclusive of the by now accepted principles of pre-training, contiguity, segmentation (cf. Spanjers, 2011 and 2012), signalling, and expertise.

These theories have since undergone some rigorous testing. Case in point is the so-called “seductive detail effect” which has become more pronounced with the rise of PowerPoint presentations (Harp, 1998; Magner, 2014). If Sweller and Chandler had already proven in 1994 that a mixture of images, text and narration helps students learn better, more recently, researchers have focused on what kinds of resources should be included in online course materials and which should not. The above mentioned seductive detail effect stipulates that students learn better from information that excludes rather than includes seductive but non-relevant material or details, as an overload of the working memory might occur due to attention distraction (Florax, 2010; Scheiter, 2014), schema interference or coherence disruption (Baddeley 1974; Sweller & Chandler, 1994; Park 2011, p. 6) At the same time, this effect is dependent on the individual learner; as long as “learners have enough resources free to use this non-redundant and interesting, but irrelevant learning material” (Park 2011, p. 9)

Ibrahim (2014) examined the effects of three educational approaches to online learning. These were *segmenting* learning material into smaller units, *signalling* to direct students’ attention to relevant information, and *weeding* to remove any non-essential content (SSW). Results of his study revealed that the SSW principle allowed students to outperform a non-SSW control group in knowledge transfer, structural knowledge acquisition and ease of learning. Design and teacher interaction in online learning environments is therefore of the utmost importance.

Similar to Sweller, Harskamp’s 2007 study demonstrated the importance of the multi-modality principle, that is, that engaging several senses of a learner in teaching heightens their learning ability. In particular, he corroborated the fact that the presentation of visual material in liaison with narration works better than visual material paired with text only (cf. Hattie, 2012 for similar results). In a related study, Pritchard (2009, p. 109) confirmed that “in online distance learning situations, dialogue is considered as an essential element of the process of learning.” The element of teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions is critical for any successful online teaching. The absence of any such interactions will in all likelihood be detrimental to online education, as evidenced by the already mentioned high dropout and failure rates in completely self-determined learning environments. This is also the experience of Ulrich Zierer, Chair Professor for Pedagogy at Augsburg University, and one of the most prolific pedagogues in Germany when he states: “Wenn Studierende völlig eigenständig lernen können, degeneriert Freiheit zu Beliebigkeit”. (If students are allowed to study completely independently, this freedom degenerates into arbitrariness (Zierer 2021, p. 35)

Another study by Johnson (2014) demonstrates this need for sociality and cooperation in learning as well. Unlike competitive and individualistic learning, cooperative learning based on social interdependence theory has proven to be the most viable model for knowledge acquisition, retention and application as it “increases students’ efforts to achieve, encourages positive relationships with classmates and faculty, and improves psychological health and well being [sic]”. This is true for online as well as offline teaching. McLaren et al. (2011) examined

the politeness principle (politeness in teaching increases students' learning) online and discovered that College students with low prior knowledge of the material performed better on subsequent problem-solving tests if they learned from the polite tutor rather than the direct tutor, whereas students with high prior knowledge showed the reverse trend, again an important cue for the design of online classes (cf. Kartal, 2010 for similar findings).

Furthermore, a study by Tabbers (2001) tested the influence of the presentation format on the effectiveness of multimedia instructions on the basis of the Cognitive Load Theory. He reported that the results “show that replacing text with audio is only effective when multimedia instructions are system-paced” and not self-paced, that is, when a social learning situation exists. In 2012, Joachim Reinwein replicated CLT's modality and moderator effects but also questioned some of its theoretical bases. Jorge Reyna (2016) takes a more student-centred approach when examining Flipped Classrooms (FCs) and states that while they have become very popular, students are not given proper support when transiting from a traditional to an online classroom. He also bemoans deficits in research on FCs, such as the lack of “a rigorous and consistent approach, effective theoretical frameworks, and evaluation structures.”

Rau and Schmidt (2019) examined blended classrooms and detected a differentiated picture for the variables of Physical Engagement, Cognitive Load, Embodied Encoding, Embodied Schemas and Conceptual Salience. They report: “We tested effects on students' learning of three concepts. Representations that induce helpful embodied schemas seem to enhance reproduction. Representations that allow for embodied encoding of haptic cues or makes concepts more salient seem to enhance transfer. [...] Given the high costs of integrating physical representations into blended technologies, these findings may help developers focus on those learning experiences that could most be enhanced by physical interactions.” Their research underlines the fact that haptic experiences prove to be highly beneficial for at least some specific knowledge transfer actions and that it will remain the task of a future technology to successfully transfer such experiences into the virtual realm.

The studies by Ho (2002) and Yuan (2010) confirm these findings. Both of them illustrate that certain types of activities can be conducted online, but not all elicit positive results. According to Yuan, one area where that is the case, is conceptual geometry. In her study she developed virtual manipulative, polyominoes kits for junior high school students in Taipei, with the results showing that the virtual group was better at using new symbols and at considering the influence of symmetry and rotation on the figures. Also, this groups' explorative manner superseded that of the non-virtual one. Another study by Chini (2012) involving physics learning confirmed that online learning is at least as good if not superior to offline learning. Barrett (2015) confirmed this for organic chemistry.

It is also important to remember that while some strategies work well offline, this does not necessarily translate to Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). Studies by Broadbent and Poon (2015) and Broadbent (2017) concluded for instance that Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies were used more often in online education than in blended classrooms, but that there were drawbacks as well: “The results show that online students utilised SRL strategies more often than blended learning students, with the exception of peer learning and help seeking. [...] [K]ey SRL predictors of academic performance were largely equivalent between online and blended learning students. Findings highlight the relative importance of using time management and elaboration strategies, while avoiding rehearsal strategies, in relation to academic subject grade for both study modes.” (Broadbent, 2017; cf. McGee, 2012). She

cautions therefore that one should not assume that online learning by itself promotes SRL strategies usage.

Overall, the picture these studies paint is a diverse one; it seems that there are certainly benefits to be reaped from online education compared to its offline equivalent, but that these benefits heavily depend on subject, set-up of VLSs and facilitator-learner and learner-learner interactions. The next section will confirm these results via the author's personal teaching experience.

### **Teaching in Times of COVID-19 – Case Study**

I have been involved in online/blended classes since the 1990s and have always striven to incorporate technology into my teaching. Additionally, I have been teaching classes in the humanities and not the natural sciences, and this of course limits the results of the general applicability of my teaching experience. Another limitation of my experience concerns the class compositions. I have been teaching students geographically based in the USA, in the UK, in the Philippines and in China, but also international cohort diverse undergraduates and postgraduates (cf. Williams 2004 for differences in cohorts and student generations). The results of classes taught are mixed, though. As the above cited studies made clear, the success of online education is at least partially dependent on who the learners are, whether they are new students or seasoned ones, for instance. As also became clear above, it is mostly mathematical and natural sciences that seem to profit from online teaching. As such, the remarks below are more anecdotal and since they are rooted in the humanities and social sciences, necessarily limited in scope; yet, I would claim, they reveal certain trends that are helpful to observe when devising ways to be successful in online teaching.

In the mid-2000s I taught a pure online MA class in Media Studies for a tertiary education institute in the Philippines. Having taught at the same institution in person before, I was aware of the level of students and their eagerness for exchanging information and a personalized teaching style. While students enjoyed the online class, their greatest regret was that there were no offline meetings possible, something they felt clearly hampered their progress and negatively affected their success. It was not that they did not enjoy their class, teaching evaluations spoke to that effect, but the person-to-person teaching they were used to was lacking, and no amount of online availability and care seemed to be able to make up for that.

By now, of course, VLEs have become vastly more sophisticated and training on them in particular and on online teaching and blended learning in general (e.g. the Hyflex method) has made most teachers better suited for availing themselves of the opportunities online teaching brings with it. However, strictures do remain and they continue to be related to interpersonal and disciplinary issues, just as they did before. From 2018-20, I have had the opportunity to teach several intensive courses offline and online to comparable mixed undergraduate cohorts of 2nd and 3rd year students at a University in Shanghai. Course subjects varied and included Filmmaking, Public Speaking, and International Marketing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, offline teaching worked best for all three subjects, as the student learning successes demonstrated. Overall, the quality of their work in the offline courses was of a considerably higher standard than in the online ones. Their comments in the evaluations also spoke to their appreciation of classroom interactions. When it came to the online classes, there was a stark divide. The International Marketing class worked best and students would gain grades almost as good as in the offline line counterpart.

Public Speaking was, quite frankly, a disaster online. In the offline classroom, it had been the most interactive of the three classes and an enjoyable experience for all; interactions between participants was at an all-time high as students were able to learn from each other and from direct and timely interventions by their teacher. The online class could not provide such an environment and all uploaded materials, visual cues and pre- and post-class mediations were unable to make up for the lack.

With filmmaking, it was a mixed bag. The class included students who were mostly non-majors in film and communication studies, and taught everything from the history of filmmaking to the shooting and post-editing of student films as their final project. Film quality in the offline class was much higher than that in the online one. One reason for this is that in the offline classroom, the final film was a group project, whereas online, it had to become an individual one as students were geographically scattered and could not properly collaborate. The nature of filmmaking is overwhelmingly based on group effort and it proved impossible to migrate and simulate such group processes online. Furthermore, some students were able to garner the support of family members and friends, thus moving the project towards a group one, but others were not, thus violating the fairness principle. Not all was lost, though. When looking at individual tasks, a specific pattern evolved. While the actual shooting of the film was probably the most difficult thing to do alone, students succeeded much better at other tasks, at times even more successfully so than in the offline class. Case in point was scriptwriting, a skill that can be learned and practiced by oneself, with a myriad of tutorials available online. The same was true for post-production at which some online students truly excelled.

This experience led me to theorise that the higher the level of interaction required in the classroom, the harder it will be to make online classes work. This is not to say that it cannot be done, just that the effort to do so will have to redoubled, a fact that has been called the course-and-a-half phenomenon (McGee, 2012), meaning that efforts by teachers and students need to work much harder to achieve similar results as offline teaching. And even then, it appears that a true equivalence cannot be achieved and that it would at least need additional real-time synchronous sessions to enable students to the fullest degree, for example, have informal after-class discussions and inter-personal dynamics in at times non-directional and non-intended ways. But other valuable support can indeed come from online sources, such as additional workshops and videos.

Evidence from businesses points in the same direction as the experiences made at universities and schools. Thus, Lothar Tremmel, VP and Head of QCSR (Quantitative Clinical Sciences and Reporting) at CSL Behring and a statistics and communication specialist, stated in a class-screened Zoom interview (23 October 2020) that global companies such as his are used to distance working, but even in this industry, in-person meetings are preferred by far, thereby following Jamie Dimon. In particular, he cited diminished communication data via e-meetings for this preference. He stated: “You can maintain relationships online, but it is much harder to build them”. At the same time, he acknowledged that at least some participants did like them, for instance people on the periphery of the company and those not in in-groups as it is a levelling mechanism. He also shared some of his ways of addressing these issues, such as adding virtual hang-out to the meeting, so that it’s not just work you are discussing; to make sure everybody keeps their camera on; interventions by moderators to ensure inclusivity; and to use Zoom gallery view to level the experience. Without doubt, all of these suggestions can be very helpful also in education setting, but, as discussed above, at least some of them come with their own issues, for instance the camera-on rule which might lead to zoom fatigue and the all-day mirror syndrome.

One last point should be made here, and this perhaps an obvious but nevertheless pivotal one. When engaged in online teaching via screen media, one needs to learn to love the camera. The limitations of the screen cannot be overcome, but they can be mitigated by camera skills communication specialists and film and TV actors learn during their training. This perhaps was also the one point in the public speaking class that could be better trained for online than offline. Only then will one be able to communicate effectively with others online.

Given all these strictures, challenges and chances for online teaching, one might be tempted to assume that it only requires further elaboration of methodologies to have successful online classes. This view is tempting, but somewhat misleading, as it does not take into consideration the very basis of online interactions. That basis is the screen and an understanding of its ontology is critical for understanding the specific challenges it sets for online (visual) communication.

### Screen Studies

The idea of setting a barrier between oneself and nature is as old as humanity itself, with cave dwellings and built environments in one way or another having been used for millennia, if not even millions of years for our ancestors, as excavations from the Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa seem to suggest (University of Toronto 2008). This kind of protection was cherished, but it did have its limits, as it prohibited one from safely surveying surrounding areas. Thus, the idea of built-up environments was born which could then include windows. Etymologically deriving from Old Norse *vindauga*, (*vindr* ‘wind’ + *auga* ‘eye’), they would bestow eyes upon a building, and allowing the eye of its inhabitants to interact with a windy outside while keeping the rest of the body safe. Another etymology proceeded via the Latin word *fenestra*, probably derived from the old Greek φαίνειν, “to show, to *bring to light*, and made it into Spanish and German. Over the centuries, humans began experimenting with visually permeable materials to cover these openings; in China, Korea and Japan, paper windows were widely used and by around 100 CE the Romans were the first to use glass for windows. In England, flattened animal horn had been used before glass replaced them in the early 17th century.

In the 1930s, another kind of device would figuratively transport the light from the outside, if not the wind, into people’s living spaces: the Television set. After early experiments in the late 1920, the first commercially made cathode-ray-tube-based television sets were sold in Germany, (1934), quickly followed by France (1936), Britain (1936), and the USA (1938). In time it would establish itself as the globally dominant mass medium. The principle of the window was thus transformed into a new device which opened a window to the world, stretching one’s purview far beyond one’s immediate surrounding. It allowed for data to flow in to enlighten its users while keeping at least the majority of them, superficially safe, roughly along the lines of George Gerbner’s cultivation theory. No matter what kind of mass media philosophy its makers followed, be it a more entertainment directed one, as would become dominant in the US, or a more informational one (with most of Europe here following the British lead), one constant would underlie them all: a screen inserted between the content and the viewer, literally “intro-ducing” the world and at the same time keeping it at bay. This doubling up of reality is nicely captured by Boym (2001, xiii), who when discussing nostalgia in cinema (and, by extension, TV), delineates how both double reality in a specific way: “A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or superimposition of two images – of home and aboard, past and present, and dream and everyday life. The moment when we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.” This is not only true for nostalgia, but for the whole televisual reception process. The conflation of TV image and reality, which belongs to any suspension of disbelief process and is required to successfully

“believe” the image, does justice to neither, not to reality nor to the TV image, and “burns the surface” to the detriment of the viewer. TV tears at the fabric of reality and imposes upon its audience an unsolvable cognitive dissonance.

Just like any new medium, television had detractors from the start. Many of them were the usual and expected suspects, namely those media institutions which television threatened. Accordingly, film, radio and newspaper companies were very vocal in airing their criticisms, variously referring to its diminished viewing quality (as opposed to cinemas), the inability to properly concentrate on the spoken word as a cue for imagination (as compared to radio) and the lesser argumentative rigour in information presentation (as compared to newspapers).

But there were further serious criticisms to be dealt with. These critiques originated from within the academe and voiced more fundamental criticism. When considering TV criticism, the overwhelming majority of literature centres on content broadcast. While this is of course very important (cf. for instance Cullen 2021 regarding the distortion of history via television drama), this is not the topic of discussion here. The angle adopted here is much more related to the fundamental criticism of the materiality of the screen involved and the reception situation this creates. This was something that was thematised early on. Thus writes Engell, “Early television theories drew quite far-reaching conclusions from the – at the time – tiny size of the screen: the television image penetrated everywhere more easily, it preferred ‘talking heads’ and set itself in the place of the real interlocutors, and it made the world smaller.” (Engell, 2021, p.4). In this kind of criticism, the distorting effect of television vis-à-vis reality is stressed; it is viewed more as a distorting mirror than a real-world reflection. Screens sizes have expanded considerably since then, but the promised (and always frustrated) fungibility of the world it alleged then and continues to do so today, has remained.

Another important criticism launched at television came from philosopher and sociologist Theodor W. Adorno. In 1954, he wrote:

The spectator feels on safe ground all the time. This longing for “feeling on safe ground”-reflecting an infantile need for protection, rather than his desire for a thrill-is catered. The element of excitement is preserved only with tongue cheek. Such changes fall in line with the potential change from freely competitive to a virtually “closed” society into which one wants to be admitted or from which one fears to be rejected.

(Adorno, 1954, p. 216)

Here Adorno comments on the safety the televisual window to the world promises, but cannot keep. While the viewer remains at home, the television only admits adverse news of the world in a tongue-in-cheek style, framing any disquieting news as equally inconsequential as other programmes such as sit-coms, adverts and cartoons. The closed society which discusses the explanations of the world seen on the screen at the water cooler does not reflect or question its own reception status and thus falls prey to TV’s reality distortion qua screen-induced reception circumstances.

Further criticism of the screen has been introduced by Paddy Scannell when he writes that switching on a TV is equivocal with a Heideggerian Being-in-the-World (Scannell, 2014), a sine-qua-non determining and limiting our actual (self-)understanding of the world. Scannell cogently demonstrates that there appears a fundamental misconception in that many viewers mistake the screen window as a 1:1 presentation of the world and do not recognise it as what it phenomenologically is: a carefully edited and tendentious re-presentation of reality, since it

can never reveal an actual presentation, despite its promises. As Abramson already stated in 1974, a television image never actually becomes manifest: it consists (or manifests itself) exclusively in being drawn or written without ever being complete and present (Abramson, 1974, pp. 48–50). At best, it can therefore be considered as an instance of “ghost-writing”. While Abramson was here referring to the actual formation of the PAL or NTSC television image, the same is also true for the digital image which prompts pixels to appear only in specific sequences.

But the television screen does not only simply simulate reality, its ontology requires it to try and usurp, and eventually, possibly supersede it. Here its users play a central part. Engell (2021, p. 15) states that television as a whole “behaves ontographically toward its surrounding world into which it enters and intervenes, including its anthropo-mediatic entanglement with its users”. It impinges on the reality of its reception situation and forcefully generates its own epistemic reality. Its insidiousness is such that it pretends to be only an option for understanding reality, and thus does not vie for a suspension of disbelief, as a cinema experience suggests to its participants within a clearly defined and limited time span. The suspension of disbelief screens desire and insist upon from their users are of an eternal kind, in competition with and attempting to displace reality. And herein the screen’s duplicitous danger lies.

The television screen remains the ur-screen of our interactivity with the world. Its functions may have since been transferred to other screens, such as those of our computers, mobile phones and the Situation Rooms of the world’s security industries. Its function, though, as a duplicitous device promising safe realities and always failing to deliver them, have remained. More than ever before, we are unconsciously reliant on their promise of affording us a glimpse through the looking glass and we have only recently become somewhat suspicious of them. If the black monolith from Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 *2001: A Space Odyssey* seems the benign, if mysterious, trigger for transitions in human development, Charlie Brooker’s *Black Mirror* TV series (2011–2019) takes the threats from an overreliance on such mirrored screen devices more seriously. And it is left to Daney (2000) to speak of the troubled relationship between the screen and reality: “The transparent continuum that clings to the real takes its form, the bandages that preserve for us the mummy of reality, its still living corpse, its eternal presentness: that which allows us to see and protects us from what is seen: the screen.” (Daney, 2002, as quoted in Ng (2014: p. 78))

As already pointed out, a big contributing factor to the power of the screen are its viewers and their relationship to the world they meet through the screen. This is sentiment has of course been in existence for many years already, as for instance Charles Baudelaire aptly noted in one of his poems, *Les Fenêtres*:

Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n’est pas d’objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu’une fenêtre éclairée d’une chandelle. Ce qu’on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre. Dans ce trou noir ou lumineux vit la vie, rêve la vie, souffre la vie.

(He who looks out at the world from an open window never sees as many things as he who looks at a closed window. There is nothing deeper, more mysterious, more fruitful, more shadowy, or more dazzling than a window lit by a candle. What we can see in

daylight is always less interesting than what happens behind a windowpane. Deep in that dark or luminous aperture, life lives, life dreams, life suffers.)

While the candle has given way to a backlit screen, the appealing and compelling mystery of what happens behind closed windows continues to fuel our love for them. In her magisterial work, *The Virtual Window* (2006), Anne Friedberg speaks of this “temporal flânerie” (6) that the screen affords us and demonstrates how the window as an architectural opening for light and ventilation ceded its priorities to the modern function of the window, namely, to frame a view. This, she claims, is still the case, despite the multiplicity and ubiquity of screens:

As the beholders of multiscreen “windows,” we now receive images-still and moving, large and small, artistic and commercial in spatially and temporally fractured frames. This new space of mediated vision is post-Cartesian, postperspectival, postcinematic, and posttelevisional, and *yet remains within the delimited bounds of a frame and seen on a screen.*

(Friedberg, 2006, p. 7, emphasis by author)

Much of Friedberg’s argumentation gainfully returns to Alberti’s 1435 metaphor for the painting (pictura) as an “open window” (aperta finestra) and his subsequent introduction of perspective within the frame of such a painting. Explains Friedberg (2006, p. 26): “The window serves as a symptomatic trope in these debates, because it has functioned both as a practical device (a material opening in the wall) and an epistemological metaphor (a figure for the framed view of the viewing subject)”.

It is this performance of “perspective” that, at least in part, explains the draw of the screen. Albrecht Dürer called it “durchsehen (seeing-through: “Item Perspectiva ist ein lateinisches Wort und bedeutet eine Durchsehung” (Item perspectiva is a Latin word meaning a seeing-through)”. The film theoretician Erwin Panofsky would pick up this phrase as the first sentence of his highly influential essay, “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’” (Perspective as “Symbolic Form”, 1927), and drawing a continuous line from Renaissance painting to film theory (cf. Friedberg 2006, pp. 39ff.) Here Dürer’s “Durchsehung” is the problem of course as it promises an increase in cognition, but only along the lines suggested by the screen. This is not to say that this point made is simply reverting to a view of a naïve passive audience sitting in front of an omnipotent screen. Ever since Jauss/Iser’s Reception Aesthetics and the beginning of audience research in the late 1960s, the relationship screen-audience has been redefined in significant ways. What I am suggesting, though, is that any teaching of content needs necessarily to reflect the transmission and reception mechanisms and situations applicable. Otherwise, the framing of any content will be left out to the detriment of any possible transmission and co-creation success. And this is true for both, the traditional lean-back medium of TV as well as the lean-to screens of computers and mobile phones.

In this regard, it is also imperative to remember that virtual images are a second order materiality, arising from the screen. It is their seductiveness and our desire to equate them with or replace and/or supersede a first materiality, as aptly described by Baudelaire’s lines, that make them at least challenging and, at worst, a danger. Unreflected, the dream factory produces only nightmares. This does have to do with Baudrillardian simulacra, phantasms living in their own world, but even more so with the virtuality of the world evoked through screen media which oscillates between these simulacra and the residue/re-presentation of the real in the virtual world and its claims to be the real. The virtual’s claim to (historically, at first masculine

and then feminine) virtue is then only a short, wishful step away, but etymologically rather removed (cf. Hollandbeck, 2020).

As an aside, in this context it is well worth recalling that the visual aspect of the move from analogue to digital is only one of many; another is the psycho-haptic one. Thus, Drawert (2013) claims that with the move from hand to computer-screen writing and its promise of an infinite screen, humans have lost a “nachprüfbaren Spurenverlauf” (verifiable process of leaving traces) and “das Literarische als Einschluss des Unverständlichen im Verständlichen” (the literary as inclusion of the incommensurable in the intelligible). And while writing itself does of course continue in the digital world, it is different kind of writing, a writing-towards and less a writing-inwards (cf. Briel, 2012) Be that as it may, its application in teaching processes remains a valuable asset

Ever since their inception 60 years ago or so, screen studies have been roughly divided into a school that sees the screen as a positive and liberating force in the development of humans and one that doesn't. In a large part, the former view was shaped and supported by scholars such as Marshall McLuhan who saw TV as a place of maximum involvement with the world, a “cold medium” that integrates its viewers into the picture, leading to the “global village (McLuhan 1964: 43; in a similar vein, cf. Nannicelli 2017, who examines TV as an art performance) and others who were afraid of its seductiveness above all (Adorno, Anders, etc.) The latter view would be mirrored by Lorenz Engell (2021, p.4), who sees TV as a “the prototype of a picture that ultimately functions a switch itself”, and manifests itself in and as an “anthropo-mediatic process” (Voss 2010, quoted in Engell, 2021.), as a way to shape individuals via the media consumed and interacted with. Engell's phrase for this process is “ontographic”, the power of TV to write one's own being though an “ontography of separation” and at the same time one of reciprocal inscription. (Engell 2021, p. 16).

Other prominent critics of the television screen include Stanley Cavell, the eminent Harvard philosopher of film who saw TV as a “current of simultaneous event reception” (Cavell 1982, p. 85) and maintained that it is wrong to claim that one is “watching TV”, as it is rather “witnessed and surveilled.” For him, this surveillance come at a heavy price though: “[T]he surveillance of the world by television creates a maximum lack of participation” isolating viewers from, rather than connecting them to the world. “The monitoring of television leads to the greatest possible distance between the uninvolved viewers and the world... Television shields us and disconnects us from the world.” (Cavell, 1982, p. 90).

Niklas Luhmann, sociologist and co-progenitor of Systems Theory, saw another problem with the system of TV. He claimed TV to be a “non-consensual reality”. Viewers justify before themselves what they see on TV as – at least initially - unreal and perhaps manipulated, but simultaneously also believe that others viewers believe it. (Luhmann 2000, p. 110; cf. Engell 2021, p. 33ff). This trick allows viewers to do both: to not believe in the image, claiming cognitive superiority over other less media-savvy viewers, and yet, qua being a member of a greater audience, accept it as one of the building blocks of a non-consensual reality to be discussed during water cooler conversations the world over.

In sum, none of the aforementioned question the at least partial usefulness of television, but they do have grave concerns about it at the same time. For a short time, in the early 2000s, it seemed that broadcast TV was dying a slow death at the hands of the Internet, together with the former's competitors, radio and newspapers. With the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Studios, AppleTV and Disney+, it has since proven its extraordinary

resilience, though, and extended its reach to any and all of the multiplying screens around us. But what has not changed, are the iterable simulatory processes it forces upon its viewers and the promise of the evocation of reality, arguably on an even grander scope than before, while, at the same time, the reflection of its creation processes continues to decrease. And that is the worrying part.

### **The Future**

Over the length of this paper, I have attempted to indicate some of the issues online/distance education is facing in the wake of COVID-19 upheaval in particular, but also due to an unprecedented technological paradigm shift over the last ten years or so in general. It became clear that screen studies, the erstwhile solitary domain of film studies departments, are now rapidly becoming a vital area of study in education and pedagogy as well, a fact that brings with it much needed expertise, but one that also delineates important challenges. Underlying it all is the ontological and ontographical lack screen interactions evidence, and one of the main tasks of an expanded screen study programme is to address how such a fundamental lack can be addressed. One of the first steps is to acknowledge to oneself and to one's students that this lack is a serious issue interfering with our relation to first-order realities, as their representations are always already technologically premediated and predetermined. While it is clear that, on a fundamental basis, this simulatory deficit will not and cannot disappear, redesigned graphic user interfaces and their study can make up for at least some of its insufficiencies. Case in point is the inclusion of senses other than, first and foremost, vision and sound, for instance, via the touchscreen. Theorized in the 1960s, first experimental versions were built in the 1970s and then applied in airplane cockpits and car dashboards in the 1980s. In 1987 the Casio pocket computer came out and in 1993 IBM's Simon, the first touchscreen phone, appeared. In 2007 the first mobile phone, LG's Prada was fitted with this technology and today it has become ubiquitous, oftentimes making mice redundant. The direct, dispersed haptic experience became thus a novel and very popular way of interacting with a screen and another step in the lean-to development of human-computer interaction, with many of its usages applying directly to educational programmes. Needless to say, further usability studies in its educational applications are still required in order to ascertain what its actual positive impact is and it can be further improved upon in the future.

Screen theories have since become more sophisticated, in line with the development and multiplication of increasingly interactive screens, such as in the field of biometrics where screens now read our faces more so than vice versa, as was the case for over a hundred years prior. For now, our informational intake is still overwhelmingly determined by our limited interactions with traditional screens. Here we might actually argue that COVID-19 was a throwback in that forced us to momentarily return to a (purely) digital world, with all the absences it entails. In the future, education will increasingly consist of scalable navigation between and interaction with the digital and non-digital world. This is already the case for art education, as Tavin et al. (2021) have posited, when they interrogate technologies applied in current interactive art classes.

Before COVID-19, humans had already begun to create a post-digital world, a world described by Nicholas Negroponte as early as 1998 in the following way: "Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence", similar to electricity and water supply, things that many people in the more affluent reaches of the world take for granted. In 2016 the UN General Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution declaring internet access a human right. From today's perspective, for many Negroponte's view might already sound

historic and therefore “intended absence” rather than “absence” might be a better term to use, as it implies things that the digital cannot perform (anymore), also in education. For many others, though, (stable) online access continues to be an unattainable dream, and this is another important lesson the virus has taught us: the realization how deep and apparently unbridgeable the global digital divide is.

In 2016, Grace Woo reminded us of the fact that our visual interaction with reality is inextricably linked with the mostly undetected development of ever increasing numbers of devices monitoring and interacting with us. In “On Creating an Unobtrusive Coded Reality” (2016), she writes:

Our mind’s control center for interpreting the visual world takes up one of the largest chunks of our brain. It’s the primary way most of us experience the world. Thus, it only makes sense for our devices to understand this environment too. We have always built buildings with aesthetics in mind. It only makes sense that we now have to consider our devices and make them interact with our environment too.

Here, “unobtrusive” sounds too benign to be true, and, indeed, it can be argued that just as with the disappearance of our always-on status from our consciousness and the multitude of screens attempting to usurp a first reality, VR screens and AR usage are questioning our ontological being-in-the-world. We are at a stage where screens have begun to sense/censor us more than we do them and this in a clandestine way (cf. Ng 2021). Furthermore, we are certainly on the way of moving away from traditional film theory’s desideratum of more cinema to get to the truth and towards augmented realities, such as video mapping, with the image becoming the basis not for more but for less (rigid and predefined) truth. (cf. Ng 2014, p. 85). Friedberg is probably right when she writes that “Perspective may have met its end on the computer desktop” and that in the virtual age, it is “[this] new circuitry [that] takes us beyond and through the window, a defenestration that has new risks and pleasures. In this vision, the ‘age of windows’- and by extension, the age of screens-has, as H. G. Wells predicted, reached its end.” (2006, p.2, 244).

Indeed, the screen as we know it, with its ontological strictures and faux-epistemological aspirations, might be nearing its end, and while this development will still take some more time, the writing’s on the wall. In March 2021 Microsoft announced that its Microsoft Teams environment, along with Zoom one of the profiteers of the virus, will transform to Microsoft Mesh. This is the company’s vision for the future of augmented and virtual reality, or *mixed reality* in Microsoft terminology. A prototype is already available, in which users are represented by avatars grouped around a table for instance with some features of real-world communication employed, for example, head-turning when speaking to someone. It remains to be seen how much this will be able to “normalise” virtual reality features (cf. Dawley, 2011; Singal 2011)) and how Microsoft intends to overcome, for instance, Virtual Reality Motion Sickness (VRMS), so far one of the main deterrents VR environment developments.

It is these new risks and pleasures then that require careful navigation in education. If the digital world portends many such ontological pitfalls, as outlined above, a term that over the last 10 years or so has gained some traction might offer a way out. The term “post-digital” appeared for the first time in 2010 when Cascone (2000) and Andrews (2000) used it, albeit in different contexts, but with the idea in mind that by the early 2000s it had become imperative to re-interpret and extend the meaning of the word “digital” which by then had ossified to and became solely equivocated with the idea of something “better”.

However, even the idea of the post-digital needs to be pondered carefully, as Cramer (2015) states:

Silicon Valley utopias and post-digital subcultures [...] have more in common than it might seem. Both are driven by fictions of agency. There's a fiction of agency over one's body in the 'digital' Quantified Self movement, a fiction of the self-made in the 'post-digital' DIY and Maker movements, a fiction of a more intimate working with media in 'analog' handmade film labs and mimeograph cooperatives. They stand for two options of agency, over-identification with systems or skepticism towards them. Each of them is, in their own way, symptomatic of system crisis. It is not a crisis of one or the other system but a crisis of the very paradigm of "system" and its legacy from cybernetics. It's a legacy which (starting with their mere names) neither "digital", nor "post-digital" succeed to leave behind.

It would therefore seem that both the digital and the post-digital (understood in a specific way) are stages in the development of a technologically-led re-appraisal of and approach to realities, but that neither can solve for us the continuing issues of agency, however fractured it may have become (cf. Thomas, (2021) on "Transcendent Conformity: The Question of Agency for Postdigital Humans", assessing the difference between transhumanist and critical postdigital studies, and McLaren, (2020) on "Postdigital Dialogues on Critical Pedagogy").

A healthy distrust of both the digital as well as the post-digital seems to be in order, then, especially as we are ever more defined by our sense of vision and its dispersal via a multiplication of fractured screens and mirrors. The necessity for global online engagement is not in question and, given technological development, the next logical step in distance interactions and learning. However, a critical discussion of what the screens screen is in order, just like such a critical discussion had existed for the singular TV screen over the last 90 years or so. The mere fact that screens have become ubiquitous in their multiplication does not absolve us of continuing to critically address their original ontological and epistemological threats they pose. All the more so, as our interactions with them have quickly become the (ever more unquestioned) building blocks for our understanding of the world, and this despite their broken promise of providing us with a perspective and despite their duplicitous nature. In education, they are the tools of choice to transfer and co-create the visions of tomorrow, in unison with our students. But just as in Alberti's day, the perspective they promise remains an illusion. In order to engage students in the critical construction of post-postdigital realities, the inherent Derridean *différance* between the screen and reality must be part and parcel of any pedagogy. And that, indeed, might be one of the most valuable lessons the virus has taught us.

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**Is There a Correspondence Between “Orientalism” and The Orient? –  
Said, Dyson and Sen**

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### Abstract

The study of cultural encounters has thrown up many important methodological and theoretical issues. Besides, these studies often rely on certain underlying socio-political and economic theories too. The objective of this paper is to unravel some of these issues and theories which underscore a very important area of cultural study, namely, the study of West's cultural encounter of the Orient and the Western characterization of the Orient. Some of the cultural studies of this genre are obdurate and provocative, that is, the views of William Jones or Edward Said's Orientalism. The paper (a) first states Said's views. (b) then attempts to posit an alternative to Said's Orientalism (i) implicit in Dyson's book *A Various Universe* and (ii) inherent in the issues raised by Amartya Sen. The paper finally demonstrates that Said's Orientalism is based on inappropriate methodological and theoretical assumptions and incongruous theories in the light of the studies outlined in (b).

*Keywords:* alternative approach, cultural encounters, unified field theory of cultural encounters

The study of cultural encounters involves a complex set of relations that obtain among the historical-social-political-economic, ethical, aesthetic, religious and scientific-technological dimensions of the relevant cultures, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach. The first section of the paper discusses the nature of the interdisciplinary research that is required for such studies, with particular reference to the theories of *literary criticism* and *colonial history*. The second section highlights two specific approaches to the study of cultural encounter: one in terms of constructing a “grand theory” invoking such philosophical thesis as *essentialism* to justify it, as developed by Edward Said and the other, an alternative approach, to the study of cultural encounter in terms of analyzing a corpus of literary work, namely, “Indian Journals”. This section considers the latter alternative as an antithesis to the abstract essentialist theorizing and grounds it in favor of narrative, detail and diversity. The section that follows delineates three features of this alternative framework in Ketaki Kushari Dyson’s *Various Universe*. The next section discusses Amartya Sen’s work demonstrating that for him Said’s Orientalism is based on inappropriate methodological and theoretical assumptions and incongruous theories. This section extends Sen’s threefold categorization of Western attitudes and presents the various other shades arising out of Dyson’s more historically sensitive account. These categories make us skeptical about Edward Said’s claim for the linear causal relation leading to the thesis that Orientalism helped produce European imperialism. Finally, the concluding section emphasizes the fact that the study of cultural encounter cannot rest entirely on the cult of the victim and that the response to the “Other” may not necessarily imply hostility.

### **Received Views on the Relationship between Literature, Cultural Studies and Social Sciences**

Received views in the study of cultural encounters and cultural characterization construe literature and other social science disciplines as polar opposites on the ground that literature is concerned with the study of fictional texts and, therefore, forfeits the right to truth claims, unlike the social sciences which are concerned with the questions of ascertaining accuracy, reliability, objective facts and the deployment of ‘scientific method’. Nevertheless, cross-fertilization of these disciplines had been taking place for some time, resulting in the opening of new vistas and fruitful projects.

For example, in the nineteenth century the association of literature and history bound by a shared common past yielded many nationalist projects. This amounted, as Ernest Gellner (1983) has shown, in retrieving and reconstructing a national past through the production of standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures so as to legitimize the nation state. Moreover, historians were interested in the features of historical texts as narratives. Since prose fiction was the most influential literary genre in the nineteenth century, historians saw many realist novels mirroring historical narratives.

In the twentieth century the most exciting works in literary theory and criticism were concerned with historicizing the production and reception of literary texts. Initially, it appears that the rise of Modernism as a new literary movement led literature to drift away from social sciences, with greater attention being paid to the literariness and self-referentiality of texts and less upon their correspondence with an external social reality. Parallel movements in literary theory, such as Formalism or New Criticism, frequently concentrated on the text itself, and its relationship to the reader, rather than upon its relationship to a larger social world.

Eventually in a new configuration, however, Literature moved closer to Social Sciences. In Literary and Cultural Studies, the rise of Postcolonial, Poststructuralist and Subaltern Studies

movements has again raised the question of the relationship of literary texts to the communities in which they are produced and consumed. The answers to the questions relating to the nature of this relationship clearly require knowledge of the social sciences.

### **The Study of Cultural Encounters and Interdisciplinary Research**

The range of documents that fall within the purview of the literary theorists mentioned above were previously considered the province of historians, political scientists, economists and other social scientists. They include non-fictional historical and other social scientific documents: diary entries, autobiographies, journals, facts of economic transactions or even registers of births and deaths. The literary theorist examines, for example, how historical texts narrativize recorded data, and shape it according to unconscious ideological and narrational presumptions. In Hayden V. White's view (1975), the historian is not so much a discoverer of implicit patterns as a creator of new narratives, and as a result, can be regarded as one engaged in literary work.

These trends in interdisciplinary approach have been increasingly applied in our understanding of the Western attempt at comprehending the peoples, societies and cultures in the non-West during the colonial period and beyond. Thus Orientalism or "Third World literature" emerged as categories (Ahmad, 1992) Indeed these trends have spawned a whole cottage industry of scholarly and critical studies, particularly in the metropolitan West, but increasingly in the homelands of the Third World itself. It was a time when the literary critics were busy putting imperialism into cultural studies while the historians went about putting culture into studies of imperialism

### **Two Approaches: "Unified Field Theory" of Cultural Encounters versus the Genre in English Literature, namely, "The Indian Journal" and Their Analysis**

One of the most dominant views relating to West-East cultural encounters, versus a brand of Orientalism, was espoused by Edward Said (1995) in his book with the same title, and his followers. A considered judgment on this brand of Orientalism would raise several methodological issues relating to the prospect of one culture attempting to understand and making judgments about another, a passion for grand universalizing, relationship between knowledge and power, questions of ethical and cognitive relativism, incommensurability, and hermeneutics of suspicion and faith.

Although originally "Orientalism" denoted a composite area of scholarship comprising philology, linguistics, ethnography, and the interpretation of culture through the discovery, recovery, compilation, and translation of Oriental texts, Said gave it a different meaning by inducting imperialism into literary studies and building a grand theory of cultural encounter based on his perception of the Westerner's construction of the "Orient". While most scholars came to accept the multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural approaches, Said went on to provide a theoretical framework to this emerging field of "colonial discourse," couched in theoretical terms borrowed from French philosophers and thinkers.

### **Some Features of Said's "Unified Field Theory" of Cultural Encounters**

Said's central thesis is that there exists a persistent Eurocentric prejudice and arrogance against Arabo-Islamic people and their culture, and an aggressiveness necessitated by the colonial expansion of the European powers and their imperialist agenda. Said's main focus is on how within the time-frame of the late eighteenth century till today, English, French, and American scholars have approached the Arab societies of North Africa and the Middle East.

However, Said extends his examination beyond the works of recognized German, Russian, Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese “Orientalist” academics, and includes literature, journalism, travel books, and religious and philosophical studies to produce a broadly historical and anthropological perspective. This suggests, as Dyson (2002) points out, that Said intends to convert his thesis into a “...’unified field theory’ of cultural encounters, applicable wherever West met non-West” supported by the ideology of imperialism and a monolithic orthodoxy of the relationship of exploiter and exploited. Such a grand unified theory of cultural encounter is termed by Said “Orientalism”, although, as Dyson notes in the Preface to the 2002 edition of her book, the credit for the magnification of “Orientalism” into a grand theory goes in a large measure to Said’s followers. In fact, Dyson herself makes certain remarks about Said in her new preface (Dyson, 2002, pp. xii – xiv).

Twenty-four years after the first publication of Said’s *Orientalism* and despite his own admission that his work was not original, Said is now a cult figure and widely regarded as the founder of the postcolonial movement in literary criticism and cultural studies, and multiculturalism in politics. Indeed, *Orientalism* stimulated a great deal of interest and was followed by several other publications. It is now such a standard refrain within cultural studies that the thesis of *Orientalism* usually goes unquestioned, resulting in the failure to see the inapplicability of many of his ideas, especially in the Indian scene. Nevertheless, supporting Said to the exclusion of other scholars has become politically correct.

Many, including Aijaz Ahmad, have drawn our attention to the awesome and gnawing power that Western academia wields in subjugating and silencing dissenting voices, especially if they belong to individuals outside Western academic institutions. One may discern in this muting and marginalization the very signature of the breach of ‘epistemic sovereignty’.

### **Said’s Grand “Unified” Theory and its French Sources**

Said’s grand “unified” theory drew its sustenance from French sources, which he synthesized and elaborated. Said derived two important ideas from these sources:

(i) The concept of “*essentialism*”, which interprets a historically specific phenomenon in terms of a transhistorical conceptual construction, law of history or essences of cultures. Essentialism is a mode of representation of things based on a belief in the real, true essences, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity.

In the context of colonization, essentialism amounts to the reduction of the indigenous people to an “essential” idea of what it means to be African, Indian, Arabic, or ascribing characteristics or essences such as the Celtic spirit, *négritude*, or Islam, thus simplifying the task of intercultural comparison and colonization.

(ii) The ideas of Anwar Abdel Malek, a French socialist and one of the eminent Muslim academics working in Europe in the 1960s, enunciating the then Parisian versions of Freudian and Marxist theory. Abdel Malek indicted all Orientalists as “Europocentric,” having a constitutive otherness and essentialist character, being obsessed with the past and failing to pay enough attention to Arab scholars.

Abdel Malek claimed that this *essentialist* image of the Orientalists finds its manifestation through an ethnist typology and would eventually result in racism. Said claims that the doctrine of essentialism led Orientalists to define the Arab peoples and Islamic culture in terms of certain *essential characteristics*: sensuality, tendency to despotism, aberrant mentality, habit

of inaccuracy, and backwardness. These characteristics were ascribed to the *totality* of Oriental cultures and often understood in negative terms. For Said this tendency to resort to such descriptions of oriental cultures provided justification for colonialism and imperialism or even ordinary politics.

### **Alternative Approach to Studying Cultural Encounter: Dyson's Book and Its Sources**

In order to delineate Dyson's approach to the study of cultural encounter it would be necessary to contrast and critically review the approach she does not subscribe to, viz., that of Said. Incidentally both the books of Dyson and Said were first published in 1978. The books appeared at a time when disciplinary boundaries between literature and history were breaking down, giving rise to hybrid disciplines, such as, cultural studies, colonial, postcolonial literature. Interdisciplinary research, at least one type of it. These areas were meant to establish linkages between literature, on the one hand, and history, anthropology, political science, economics, philosophy and cultural studies, on the other.

Dyson's book contains many elements which urge us to re-think, compare and contrast, and critically examine the validity of this much-debated theory on cultural encounters between the Occident and the Orient. The documents surveyed in Dyson's book may provide a test case for a theory of cultural encounters between the Orient and the Occident, such as Said's version of Orientalism, and may suggest *an alternative framework* for the study of cultural encounter, although the author has made no deliberate attempt either to formulate one or to spell it out in explicit terms. Instead of suggesting a grand theory of cultural encounters between the West and the East or invoking any philosophical thesis, such as *essentialism*, to justify it, Dyson's book provides the reader with a perspective on a corpus of literary work – published journals and memoirs – written by men and women of British origin during their stay at different times in India between 1765 and 1856.

Dyson explains what light the journals of this period shed on the Indo-British cultural encounter. It also gives a glimpse of the diverse professional backgrounds and mindsets of the writers of these journals, the significance of these documents as records of observation, introspection and self-revelation as well as the historical, economic, political, sociological and cultural ambience that framed their perceptions and shaped their attitudes. Against the stereotypical colonial image of Indo-British relationship as “exploited – exploiter”, Dyson, based on the contents of the journals, upholds a more realistic and objective characterization of the encounter as a combination of arrogance and benevolence, wealth drain and development, exploitation and mutual enrichment, ethnocentric prejudices and tolerance, warmth, acceptance of cultural pluralism, intellectual curiosity characterized by the Enlightenment, despotism and liberalism, and people fired by an impulse to build, restore and conserve rather than destroy.

This certainly is in stark contrast with the thesis of Western essentialist characterization of the Orient as is evidenced by the statement:

The writers of the journals share in these intellectual oscillations and tensions” and show “the complexity of responses and reactions, how mutually entangled the attitudes are...It may be fairly said that there is hardly an opinion or attitude expressed in these works of which the antithesis is also not expressed somewhere else in the corpus.  
(Dyson, 2002, pp. 26–29)

Of course, the diversity of attitudes towards India and Indians articulated by the writers of these journals is the result of their varied academic and professional backgrounds and the distinct mindsets they evolved and cultivated. The professions of the journal writers ranged from being military personnel, civil servants, political officers, scientists and missionaries to women of distinction and sensitivity. They obviously came from different backgrounds: some with strong academic training and scholarly disposition, having been educated in the best private schools and most renowned British universities; some with artistic impulse and love for nature; some with a background of strong religious affiliation and zeal; some with military mission; some with commercial motives and political assignments.

They also represented a variety of mindsets – Evangelical, Conservative, Romanticist, Utilitarian, tolerant-rationalist-humanist of the Enlightenment era and Oriental scholars. As a result, one observes the particular nuances, predilections and antipathies in their views although “all the authors wished to be accepted as portrayers of realities as beheld by them...” (Dyson, 2002, p. 33).

Supporting the views of Arthur Ponsonby, a 20th century scholar who studied the diary genre and preferred the writings of obscure people to those of celebrities, Dyson says:

We are compelled to consider what may be regarded as reliable, realistic description and what as the accretion of fancy, what is a simple factual error and what a more serious misunderstanding of a conceptual or categorical nature, what in a given situation, are the European preconceptions and what the Indian realities, why failure in communication occurred, and so on. Such scrutiny, though cast in a literary framework, may supplement the findings of professional historians and sociologists. *All too often the attitudes of a handful of prominent men, usually politicians or thinkers, are regarded as all-important, and the views and feelings of ‘intelligent laymen’, including women, are neglected or bypassed. Yet it is in the latter that the real texture of opinion in a period is often most picturesquely conveyed...* (Italics Added)  
(Dyson, 2002, p. 33)

Perhaps these multiple portrayals of Indian reality help us to conceptualize what India culture stands for and explain the title of the book, “A Various Universe”. Bound by certain basic themes, (the most important being the fact that these journals and memoirs of the British diaspora in India “are records of first-hand experiences of India”), these works, however, legitimately constitute a distinct genre in English literature, namely, “the Indian journal”. Dyson’s unique contribution consists in demonstrating how an interdisciplinary approach can be brought to bear on records of Indian experience left by the British people revealing elements of *Indian identity*, and the social, economic, political, intellectual and cultural history of India and those of the British in India.

## An Alternative Framework

As I have already mentioned, there is no conscious attempt in Dyson's book towards an alternative framework or theory for the study of cultural encounter to Said's *Orientalism*, and a formulation of this may not have been her intention. Based on her own remarks in the book, however, one can envisage a competing alternative framework. I wish to spell out three important features of this framework here in order to put her work in perspective.

### **The Most Important Feature of this Alternative Framework is the Claim that when we Survey other Cultures We Must, as Richard Rorty Suggests, Look for New Genres – Genres which Arise in Reaction to, and as an Alternative to, the Attempt to Theorize (i.e. “Abstraction by Essentialization”) about Human Affairs**

Following Milan Kundera, Rorty argues that the novel could be a characteristic genre serving this function, because it helps us to develop an antithesis of structure, abstraction and essence in terms of narrative, detail, diversity, and accident.

### ***Said's Foucauldian Connection***

In contrast Said drew inspiration from the writings of the French philosopher and social critic, Michel Foucault on “text” and “discourse.” (i) “Texts”, according to Foucault, should not be regarded as having an independent semantic structure, but rather as being systematically related to a “discourse” with implications in a hierarchy of power relations. Said accepted this theory of meaning and “textuality” from Foucault that views “texts” being ensconced within concrete social and ideological constraints and their production involving an engagement with these constraints with their political and cultural dimensions. (ii) Said made extensive use of Foucault's notion of *discourse*. “Discourse” is the ideological framework within which scholarship takes place. This led Said to claim that within a discourse all representations are imbued with the language, culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. Hence there can be no “truths,” only formations or deformations. In Said's opinion Europeans cannot rise above the limitations of the prevailing discourse, which renders of necessity every European, in what he could say about the Orient a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.

The issue relating to the specification of “the dialectic between objective determination and individual agency in the theorist's own production” has been raised by Aijaz Ahmad. He says:

The characteristic feature of contemporary literary radicalism is that it rarely addresses the question of its own determination by the conditions of its production and the class location of its agents. In the rare case where this issue of one's own location – hence of the social determination of one's own practices – is addressed at all, even fleetingly, the stance is characteristically that of a very poststructuralist kind of ironic self-referentiality and self-pleasuring.

Ahmad, A. (1992, pp. 6–7)

### ***Dyson and the “Indian Journals”***

Unlike Said, Dyson chose as a suitable genre the “Indian journals” authored by British men and women, who “... were intelligent witnesses to a very interesting period of Indian history, and ... were participants in an absorbing cultural encounter” (Dyson, 2002, p. xi). This is consistent with Rorty's suggestion that one should look for a suitable literary genre as an apt means for studying cultural encounters, rather than building “One True Description” in the form of a theory that claims to exhibit the underlying pattern behind apparent cultural

heterogeneity and complexity of a given humanity, nation, country or even an entire geographical region. Arthur Ponsonby in his *English Diaries* (1923, pp. 36–37) says:

Anything which contributes to a knowledge of humanity, not only prominent humanity, but humble humanity, ought not to be ignored by historians, or indeed by philosophers and psychologists.

The British writers of the journals do provide an array of narratives and details. Their preoccupations were varied: “interpreting India to the West”, indulging in “self-revelation”, capturing in permanent form “intrinsically fugitive experiences”, making “observation as well as introspection” (often in the form of Romantic diaries containing “delights in reminiscences or recording rapt nature descriptions”), venting “intense emotions and obsessions” as well as frustrations, articulating “earnestly held convictions, ...sensibilities, already moulded to an extent by one cultural setting, ...receiving further impressions in an alien and exotic environment” (Dyson, 2002, pp. 3–4).

Following Dyson, I shall identify only a few reportage of encounters between the British and the Indians, representing varied aspects of Indian life and documenting reliable social information.

### ***Views on Indian Culture***

At a deeper level the journals contain many invaluable insights, reliable social information, as well as useful data about cultural encounter. On the important issue of Hindu-Muslim relationship, the journal writers observed two conflicting tendencies: on the one hand, “the tendency for the two communities to assimilate, for example, in paying homage at the same shrines and in participating in each other’s festivals”. In short, whatever is regarded as holy by others, they approach with reverence. On the other hand, hostilities between two communities living side by side were quite common and the reason for this could be something that is intrinsic to the religious doctrines themselves and customs or practices. Although the tension between the two religious communities existed from earlier times and was not created by the British, the journals do establish that the British used these hostilities as opportunities to intervene, arbitrate and consolidate their position in India.

### ***Self-Reflection and Critiquing the British Community***

The writers of the journals, while revealing astute observations about human affairs and reflecting the generally accepted values, also exercised their function as critics of the British community by applying both analytical thinking and moral criteria to forms of behaviour and actions of their own people as well as that of the Company. Major Edward Caulfield Archer was outspoken in his criticisms of the policies of the Company and the unfair means often used by the British while expanding their power. William Huggins represented the best of humanism and libertarianism. He disapproved of the British policy of annexation of new territories by despotic force and deplored the double-speak of continuing with territorial acquisition.

### ***Reflections on Indians and the British in India and their Attitudes***

Based on his wide-ranging contacts with Indians during his extensive travels and official duties, Sleeman developed a warm involvement, total rapport, and genuine intimacy with people of every hue. He refused to fit all people into the groove of *Asiatic character* within the stereotypes of narrowness, meanness, vacillation, cringing, opportunism, and so forth. Sleeman maintained that Indian behaviour, individual and social, was explicable in precisely the same terms as other human behaviour elsewhere.

### ***Rural Economy and Indian Development***

As an indigo planter, William Huggins was able to acquire extensive knowledge of problems related to a wide range of issues, such as land tenure, agriculture, rural manufactures, the relationship between peasants, money-lenders, landlords, farmers of rent and other village officials, social and religious practices, the pride of caste and family ties, and so on. According to him the artificial right to own land, often used as an instrument of oppression, had to be converted into a social contract for the betterment of the peasants.

William Henry Sleeman had intimate knowledge of the ways the rural society of India worked and admired village self-governance. He was concerned over the way British institutions were damaging the traditional values of Indian rural society and distorting people's conduct, teaching them "the value of a lie". While condemning useless and oppressive institutions, Sleeman was anxious to preserve useful and humane ones.

### ***Land of Contradictions and Inconsistencies***

Thomas Skinner reports that people are "very charitable"; "it seldom happens that the poor go away hungry while visiting a house", yet there is poverty and callousness. He also observed the regional variations in manners and a tendency "to pass slightly over many necessary rites when away from home" resembling the proverb "When in Rome, do as they do in Rome".

### ***On Women and the Rise of "Spirit of Enquiry"***

Miss Emma Roberts, the daughter of "a lady of some literary pretensions", moved within the literary circles of London, Calcutta, and Bombay, and engaged in literary and journalistic activity in both Britain and India. She was aware of the changing times: "The native papers, published in Calcutta" were discussing the question of women's education: "emancipation must follow as a matter of course". "A spirit of enquiry is now awakened in the minds ... which cannot fail to lead to very important results." The more gloomy and dismal conditions of women have been reported by James Forbes: child marriages and the harsh life of the widows.

The details from the journals of the British men and women, as seen above, indeed represent a diversity of perspectives and disparate perceptions of India and the people of India. The presence of these multiple viewpoints militates against the ascription of a straitjacket attitude to the Westerner as exploiter, entertaining an uncontaminated Eurocentric prejudice, always displaying arrogance towards Indians and exhibiting a necessarily aggressive stance against "the Other" arising out of these attitudes.

### **The Second Feature of Dyson's Alternative Framework: Eschewing Construction of "... 'Unified Field Theory' of Cultural Encounters, Applicable Wherever West met Non-West"**

Aijaz Ahmad has noted this phenomenon of the obsession with "theory" in literary studies. He says: "The notable development in literary studies, as these have evolved in all the English-speaking countries over the past quarter-century or so, is the proliferation, from a great many critical positions, of what has come to be known simply as 'theory'" (Ahmad, 1992).

Nancy Cartwright, one of the most well-known philosophers of science, states that the idea of a unified theory that claims to model all situations is a myth since "...we live in a dappled world, a world rich in different things, with different natures, behaving in different ways" (Cartwright, 1992, p.1).

Cartwright argues that these differences can be accounted for in terms of alternative approaches typified by their own individual theoretical concepts, models, experimental and observational techniques, which are characteristic of each domain.

In her book, Cartwright refers to the work of Sudhir Anand and Ravi Kanbur on Sri Lanka's welfare programme in which they criticize Amartya Sen for not adopting a causal relation that holds among designated quantities *across all developing countries*. Instead, Sen adopts a hypothesis representing *different causal mechanisms for different countries*. Cartwright has shown that Sen is right in his approach. Rather than treating the abstract models as vehicles of truth, one should treat *the macro-level theories* as merely expository devices for *understanding the specific socio-economic structures and causal mechanisms* true in a given society.

### ***Said's Linear Causal Relation: Orientalism Helped Produce European Imperialism***

Said validates his causal claim by deriving it from Foucault's idea of epistemic sovereignty and the idea that knowledge necessarily serves political ends (*Discipline and Punish*): the idea of epistemic sovereignty, similar to political sovereignty, amounts to the claim that there exists a nexus of knowledge and power in which the former served the latter; that academic disciplines do not simply produce knowledge but also generate power. Using Foucault in the particular case of Oriental discourse, Said asserts that no more glaring parallel exists between knowledge and power in the modern history of philology than in the case of Orientalism, although it appears to be an objective, disinterested, and rather esoteric field.

In order to buttress his thesis Said provides some supposedly historical facts. With regard to the products of philological work carried out by some Orientalist scholars around his time Lord Curzon, a Viceroy of India, said the following:

Our familiarity, not merely with the languages of the people of the East but with their customs, their feelings, their traditions, their history, and religion" [had provided] "the sole basis upon which we are likely to be able to maintain in the future the position we have won.

Said adduces this as evidence for the claim that Orientalism led to imperialism. Said concludes that:

the metamorphosis of a relatively innocuous philological subspecialty into a capacity for managing political movements, administering colonies, making nearly apocalyptic statements representing the White Man's difficult civilizing mission.

John MacKenzie, in his book *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (1995), has brought out in the open the ahistorical nature and other weaknesses of Said's views. He argues that the West and its various 'Others', far from being mutually exclusive, "were locked into processes of mutual modification" (MacKenzie, 1995, p. 209). The journals studied by Dyson also bear this out. Contrary to Said's claim, many journals show that rather than necessarily promoting ethnocentric, theological, and racial prejudices, Oriental Studies was regarded as an academic subject worthy of attention and respect, and was one of the first fields within European scholarship instrumental in overcoming such prejudices by opening the Western mind to the whole of humanity. This is especially true of those who subscribed to Curatorial Orientalism (see below) or were close to it.

In order to establish a causal relationship between Oriental Studies and imperialism, merely invoking Foucault's extravagant thesis that knowledge always generates power is not enough. The alleged causal relationship makes an empirical claim for which we need to provide an analysis of the impact of Oriental Studies on the thoughts and reasons of the imperial decision-makers at the time they actually entered upon Europe's Oriental adventures. Moreover, we are required to produce evidence that colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism and had a bearing on the actual causal sequence that led in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to the annexation of the Indian territories occupied by the imperial forces. Such analysis based on historical data is simply missing in Said's *Orientalism*. Of course, a complex set of historico-politico-socio-economic factors together with Magisterial Orientalism (see further below) was responsible for British expansion and imperial takeover, but in this nowhere did Philology figure as sufficient cause of imperial conquest.

Finally, some of the historical data alluded to by Said in support of his claim are inaccurate and fail to support the causal relationship. For example, the quotation cited above from the speech of Lord Curzon, who did acknowledge the importance of the work of the Orientalist scholars in helping to manage the Empire in India, was delivered in the House of Lords in 1909, four years after he returned to England from India, and about twenty-five years after the peak of Britain's imperial expansion. Lord Curzon's speech was in fact meant to support the funding of the London School of Oriental Studies for which he was recruited in the school's founding committee. The speech should be construed more as providing *ex post facto* justification based on hindsight rather than expressing the aims, motives and objectives of imperial decision-makers and their conquests at the beginning of British incursion in India.

### ***Dyson's Multiple Causal Mechanism***

Instead of looking for a unified theory in our study of cultural encounters, we need to pay close attention to the specific attitudinal, socio-historico-economic structures and causal mechanisms in a given society. Dyson's detailed survey and analysis of the journals reveal the multiplicity of attitudes and mindsets of the British, and describe the "interplay" of these which "formed the fabric of British thought in India..." (Dyson, 2002, p. 24). Surely, this variety of responses cannot be cast into a monolithic orthodoxy of the relationship of exploiter and exploited. (Dyson, 2002, p. 24) In the light of this, Said's one-sided fixation on the thesis of Orientalism appears less convincing than the economic-socio-historico-political *explanations of imperialism* investigated by Dyson and the recent historians, invoking multiple causal mechanism for the explanation of the ultimate triumph of colonial power in India appear to be plausible.

A great deal of new research on Indian economic and social history over the past decades based on empirical data on trade relations, investment, military considerations, rivalry with other colonial powers, protecting British financial interests from nationalist challenges, and so forth, lead us also to quite different conclusions, other than what Said would like us believe, about the explanations of the ultimate triumph of colonial power in India. Many historians, who studied the intervening period, the so-called interlude, between the fall of the Mughal empire and the expansion of British conquest, with which Dyson is mainly concerned, *depicted it less as a period of imperial transition than as a period of maturing*, as an era of long-term transformations and success in the field of education, modernization, local self-government, formation of social order, emergence of certain type of Asian capitalism, and an era in which autonomous growth and indigenous forces of change continued to flow strongly.

Regional historians, such as Muzaffar Alam, Chetan Singh, Iqbal Husain, Kumkum Chatterjee, and others, have shown how political economy in Bengal, Mughal Punjab, Awadh, Rohilkhand, Bihar, Marwar, Karnataka interacted with changing urban and rural societies to form territories. These formations developed into social forces sometimes with the patronage of the Mughals, but more often within expanding circuits of trade harnessing and channelizing the buoyant production and commercial system that flourished under the loose Mughal regime or areas where the Mughal writ had never run. These regional studies have shown that the fall of the Mughals may not have been as catastrophic as it was conventionally portrayed. It is because the eighteenth century has been discovered as an age of social and cultural creativity, and in places, efflorescence. The Mughal empire did not collapse leaving disorder behind, rather, it gave way to regional formations of power which developed under its administration and on its periphery.

Of course, shored up by Indian revenues, Britain's political domination and military power were in ascendancy. Undoubtedly, Britain derived large advantages from, what some historians termed, "drain of wealth," which started with Bengal's revenue yielding £3 million at the time of Clive around 1765 and rising to £22 million by 1818. Besides, the character of Indian economy changed from a primarily self-subsisting one to its integration with the world market serving the needs of the colonial master: exporting raw materials, such as cotton, opium etc. and importing finished goods, such as Manchester textiles. Nevertheless, a form of indigenous capitalism (the underlying currents of petty commodity production, marketing), during, what William Sleeman calls the "Age of the bania," helped to frustrate the more grandiose economic plans of the British. C.A. Bayly says:

Zamindar entrepreneurs denied labour to planters; European business houses rarely penetrated beneath the intricately layered network of Indian merchants and financiers; village magnates fought off the colonial state's attempts to extract the wealth of the rural elites in the style of Meiji Japan... the first half of the nineteenth century was a crucial period of the formation, by hammer and blows from outside, of the Indian peasantry. But ultimately, the resilience of country people is what must be emphasized...peasants continued to adapt in a creative way to their environment...The resistance movements throughout the nineteenth century were directed against more privileged groups of Indians as often as the British. In their turn, even the tribal, the low-caste farmer or the poor Muslim weaver created political strategies to protect their livelihood and communities... All attested to the vitality of the societies of the Indian subcontinent which survived, adapted and consolidated through the great changes which accompanied the twilight of the Indian state...

(Bayly, 1998, pp. 204\_206)

These eighteenth-century political and economic innovations, as well as social and cultural change, may indeed comprise the onset of Indian modernity and nationality, before colonialism. Dyson's detailed study of the journals demonstrates the existence of the multiplicity of regional cultures, social groups and relationships, and reflects the responses of the British men and women with different mind-sets to these. Surely this variety of responses cannot justify a monolithic orthodoxy of the relationship of exploiter and exploited.

### **The Third Feature of Dyson’s Alternative Framework Emphasizes the fact that the Study of Cultural Encounter Cannot Rest Entirely on the Cult of the Victim and on the Thesis that the Response to “the Other”**

#### ***Said’s Thesis***

This again contradicts Said’s thesis. Said claims that the construction of the identity of every culture involves establishing opposites. Thus, Orientalism helped define Europe’s self-image. Orientalism led the West to see Islamic culture as eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself, hence as static in both time and place. In contrast Europe was viewed as a dynamic, innovative, expanding culture, superior both culturally and intellectually. Thus, the West can assume the role of the spectator, the judge and jury of every facet of Oriental behavior.

In order to justify his thesis, Said fell back on the idea of “the Other” (*outrui*) or alterity originally developed by the French thinker, Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas emphasizes the lack of reciprocity, unlikeness, asymmetry and incommensurability between the Stranger (*L’Etranger*), the Other (*outrui*) and oneself (*le chez soi*), as the former disturbs or ruptures the being at home with oneself. This idea is based on the epistemological assumption of a persistent school of thought in western philosophy and psychology, especially the Structuralist, Freudian and Marxist theories, rather than on historical facts. According to Levinas the need for an “Other” is based on an epistemological assumption and built into human nature at both the individual and collective levels: an individual’s self-concept emerges only when one recognizes himself as separate from and different from others. Cultures need to go through an analogous process, and hence must identify themselves through an alter ego. Moreover, Levinas interprets the Western tradition, especially its politics and ethics, as an attempt to appropriate, comprehend, master, contain, dominate, suppress, or repress what presents itself as “the Other”. This violent alterity of “the Other” is manifested in imperialism and colonization.

#### ***Arbitrary Choice of Logic and Flawed Historical Grounds***

The underlying epistemological assumption of the thesis of “the Other” is flawed both on conceptual and historical grounds. Conceptually, as Derrida, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard J. Bernstein have pointed out, the idea of “the Other” appeals to the *logic* of “either / or”, rather than “both / and”. From their writings one can formulate the following line of argument that strongly denounces Said’s arbitrary choice of this logic. They maintain that acknowledging the radical or irreducible alterity of “the Other” does not mean that the relationship between “I” or “we” and its “other” is asymmetrical or the terms of this relation represent windowless monads completely impenetrable to each other – after all an asymmetrical relation is still a relation.

The thesis that cultural identity necessarily depends on a comparison with “the Other” is flawed on *historical grounds* too. A perusal of the history of Western culture for the last one thousand years would indicate that Europeans did not primarily draw their identity based on a contrast with other cultures. It was derived instead from their own heritage, historical references to their earlier selves, although occasionally there were attempts to distinguish themselves from the barbarians of the world. Europeans primarily identify themselves as joint heirs of classical Greece and Christianity, each tempered by the fluxes of medieval scholasticism, even the Arab influence on the European Renaissance, the Renaissance, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, and Modernism.

Dyson claims that attention to details is necessary to get to the texture of reality. In spite of the colonial connection and the exploitation that went with it and despite many divisive tendencies

that the West and the “Orient” exhibit, the Indo-British encounter as revealed by Dyson’s detailed research definitely offers us a model which shows that with more intellectual and spiritual resources different cultures are capable of dealing with the problem of the “other” as they learn how to become more tolerant and open-minded. Dyson’s work offers a more hopeful model for cultural encounter than Said’s *Orientalism*.

### Further Criticism of Said’s Thesis

Said’s *Orientalism* has many critics. Amartya Sen, in his two articles, entitled “India and the West” (Sen, 1993) and “Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination” (Sen, 1997), differed with Said about his views on “Western characterization of the Orient” only in Said’s terms.

#### **Said’s Orientalism is Based on Inappropriate Methodological and Theoretical Assumptions and Incongruous Theories**

As Sen points out, Said is not so concerned with “the correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, as with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient”. But then “a dissimilarity of perceptions has been an important characteristic of Western interpretations of India” and unless “one chooses to focus on the evolution of a specific conceptual tradition (as Said, in effect, does) “internal consistency” is precisely the thing that is terribly hard to find in the variety of Western conceptions of India.” (Sen 1997, p. 3)

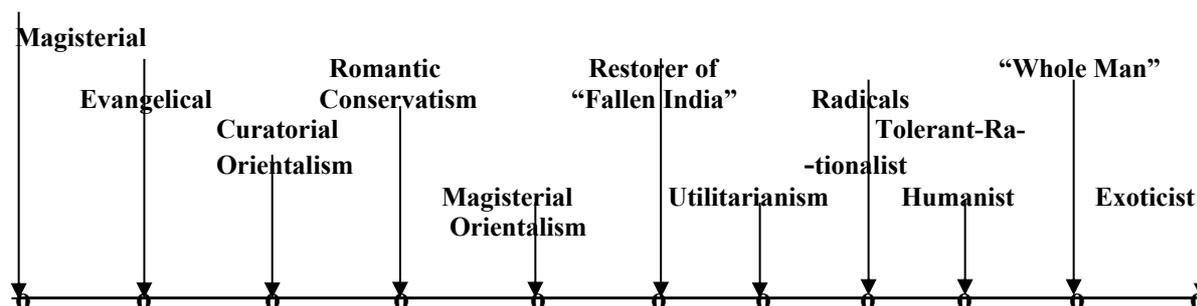
#### **Sen’s Threefold Categorization of Western Attitudes and its Extension**

Sen, then, goes on to distinguish at least three different, contrasting and competing approaches to understanding India: the *magisterial*, the *curatorial*, and the *exoticist*. Sen does not claim any definitive and exhaustive status to his threefold categorization of the Western approaches to the understanding of India: “other categories can be proposed that are not covered by any of the three. Also, established approaches can be reclassified according to some other organizing principle.” (Sen 1997, p. 3). What concerns Sen more is the overall effect of these Western conceptions on the self-perception of the Indians themselves. He argues that while the *magisterial* conception originating in India’s colonial past makes Indians pay continued deference to what is valued in the West, an exaggerated emphasis on the *exoticist* approach has been responsible for focusing more on the mystical and the anti-rationalist aspect by Westerners at the expense of almost total neglect of the rationalist, humanist, and less religious parts of the Indian intellectual tradition concerned with a form of life here and now. (Sen, 1993, p. 9).

One can see a multiplicity of Western understandings of the Orient and the possibility of multiple categorization in Dyson’s book. In order to see the validity of this multiple categorization, we may keep Sen’s threefold classification also in mind and observe that a historically sensitive approach, such as Dyson’s, would find various shades between Sen’s three categories, sometimes crisscrossing and overlapping, depending on the journal writers’ earlier background and mindset that shaped her/his perception of India and Indians.

A schematic representation of the spread of these categories with detailed explanations has been given Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Schematic Representation of Categories*



Let us explain and elaborate the three categories suggested by Sen along with the various shades of categories in between as can be found in Dyson’s more historically sensitive work.

### ***Magisterial Category***

So-called by Sen, because it “relates to the exercise of imperial power and sees India as a subject territory from the point of view of its British governors”; trying to bring a rather barbaric nation under the benign and reformist administration of the British empire. This attitude is best exemplified in James Mill (in his *History of British India*, 1817) and Lord Macaulay (in his “*Minute on Indian Education*”, 1835). Among the journal writers whom Dyson studies, the strongest articulation of this attitude can be found in Victor Jacquemont and the Marquess of Hastings, especially the Marquess’ passages on Hindu inferiority.

### ***Evangelical Category***

Characterizing those who had a “monomania” for salvation through the Christian faith, undertook a self-righteous crusade for missionary activities in India, and showered “savage scorn” on all religious groups in India, especially Hindus and Muslims. Perhaps the best person illustrating this category would be Henry Martin.

### ***Curatorial Approach: A Brand of Orientalism Represented by Sir William Jones***

In Sen’s terms this approach is the most “catholic”, does not look for “the strange” or what has the most “exhibit value” in the culture, is not necessarily “weighed down by the impact of the ruler’s priorities,” and is relatively free “from preconceptions.”

In 1783 a brilliant young Englishman, William Jones, arrived in Calcutta and was appointed judge in Calcutta. Jones became the first Western scholar to recognize the relationship of Sanskrit, the classical language of India, to Latin and Greek in Europe, and to suggest a common linguistic ancestor. As a result of this discovery, the attention of many European scholars was drawn to the vast literature in the Sanskrit language, and hence much of the recondite lore of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and other ancient Hindu writings became objects of study in the West. Under his editorship the publication of the *Asiatik Researches* left India with a legacy of systematic research and regular publications and with a wealth of knowledge about her past.

Many significant contributions in translation of classical Sanskrit texts and related publications by Charles Wilkins, Horace Hayman Wilson, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and Carl W. F. von Schlegel followed. Their efforts brought about an “Oriental Renaissance” in the West and cultural revolution in India and reinforced the conviction that the British and Indian interests could be reconciled.

### ***Romanticist Conservatism***

Those who combined within themselves, on the one hand, a “Linnaean impulse, nature-Romanticism” and knowledge of the Oriental response to nature, and, on the other, a clamour for the conversion of India sunk in barbarism. They made passionate plea for changing India altogether and believed that the British were involved in India for three reasons: proliferating British commerce, ensuring Indian political stability, and the propagation of Christianity.

### ***Magisterial Orientalism of Warren Hastings***

The British hoped to find in the priestly interpretations of some fundamental religious texts the legitimacy and authority for the personal laws of various Indian communities. When British authority was installed in Bengal under Warren Hastings, its first priority was to unravel the labyrinth of local custom and legislation by studying the ancient shastras in order to develop a set of legal principles that would assist them in adjudicating disputes within Indian civil society. They realized that for this task the knowledge of Sanskrit and other languages of their subjects would be the key to dominion. For this purpose several institutions were established: an oriental college at Fort William for the training of civil servants, a printing press at Calcutta, a Sanskrit college at Benares, and in 1784, the establishment of the famous Asiatic Society of Bengal.

### ***Restorers of “Fallen India”***

The proponents of this view subscribe to the following: they were secretly proud of India’s past and of British Orientalist research. They were too conscious of the duties of a beneficial imperial government, Britain’s special obligation to India, and the necessity of making amends for the injuries done to Indians by the British.

### ***Utilitarianism: T. B. Macaulay, Lord Dalhousie***

It was represented by those who were dissatisfied with static Indian institutions and social structure. They suggested a program of reforms, which had at its heart the doctrine of improvement in terms of legislation and greater power of government. They subscribed to the belief that society could be changed by effective law and a strong centralized government. T. B. Macaulay and Lord Dalhousie were able to execute radical utilitarian policies. Their initiative were responsible for establishing the infrastructure of a modern state: (a) railways (b) telegraph (c) universities.

### ***Radicals: The Marquess of Hastings***

The Marquess of Hastings was imbued with a sense of purpose in establishing new institutions, and still more such dispositions, as will promote the happiness of the vast population of this country.

### ***Tolerant-Rationalist-Humanist of the Enlightenment Era***

Maria Graham’s journals reflect a mind “moulded by the tradition of the Enlightenment, distinguished by ...urbanity, and intellectual interests, particularly her curiosity about Indian philosophy and religion, and her shrewd comments on the British communities. She wanted India to rise to her “former grandeur and refinement”.

### ***“Whole Man” With the Elizabethan Spirit Combining the Best of the East and the West***

Piercing the veil of mystery and exclusion that hung over much of India and rejecting the theory that the Indians were inferior in civilization to the Europeans and needed to be civilized by the British, William Henry Sleeman took the approach of empathetic understanding, affection and loyalty to “the people of this fine land”; showed evidence of intense sympathy, happiness and

anguish for every individual; and upheld the belief in the essential equality and universality of human nature.

### ***The Exoticist Approach***

According to Sen, the “exoticist category” concentrate(s) on the wondrous aspects of India” focuses on what is different, strange in the country that, as Hegel put it, has existed for millennia in the imagination of the Europeans.

Many journals are full of accounts of fantastic Indian achievements and objects: unique religious practices and beliefs, (e.g. a deity like *Kali*, Hindu mythologies or *Sufism*) or objects of culture (such as Indian iconography, dance forms like the cabaret aspect of the *nautch*, musical instruments, exotic dresses and ornaments of the aristocratic as well as tribal men and women).

### **Conclusion**

The extension of Sen’s threefold categorization and the collage of British perceptions and the viewpoints, implicit in their “Indian journals” may lead us to conclude that we are now in a position to look at the British-Indian cultural encounter from a better perspective. The historical data about the evidence on racial prejudice, cultural arrogance, and the philosophy of imperialism that may cause embarrassment to the British balance the data relating to the evidence on social, moral, and religious resurgence in India of the period which makes Indians proud such that there is no scope for one group to rejoice at the expense of the other at the net result.

The “hegemonic Saidian cult” has taught many to “denigrate the “Orientalist” interests of such men,” push such “excellent scholarship into the margins” and be dismissive of their contributions in promoting cultural understanding by endorsing an approach to the study of cultural encounter based entirely on the cult of the victim, and the thesis that the response to the “Other” necessarily implies hostility. The alternative point of view articulated by Dyson and Sen (i) demonstrate the *grounds* for the one-sided fixation and strident tone that can be found in Said’s *Orientalism* and (ii) provide evidence that cultural encounters need not necessarily imply discordant posturing. Imperial tyranny and cultural conceit notwithstanding, many, including Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, refused to malign Western people and culture, although they bitterly fought the British administration.

Which model do we adopt? Do we adopt the one that offers us a chance to deal with the “other” with empathy, or do we adopt a model that forecloses the possibility of reconciliation? For the model that we adopt will certainly influence the outcome of our efforts. I think towards the end of his life Said did realize that the model he had earlier offered had somehow failed the Palestinians, that it was not altogether the best one for Palestinians to work with, in order to achieve what they wanted to achieve. Dyson’s book and Sen’s work may counter Saidian tendencies by demonstrating that the British indeed had a pluralist understanding of India as revealed by their narratives.

The multiplicity of British attitudes towards India as discussed above – Sen’s threefold categorization and the various shades of Sen’s three categories arising out of Dyson’s more historically sensitive account – makes us skeptical about Said’s claim for the linear causal relation: that Orientalism helped produce European imperialism.

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**Psychological Effects of Iranian Mirror-Tile Artwork –  
A Phenomenological Approach**

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## Abstract

Mirror-tile artwork is one of the most recent and striking phenomena in Iranian Spiritual Art. Aside from being an aesthetic item for adorning architectural building space, mirrors also exemplify profound cultural ideas. It has been applied in interior design and the decoration of holy and royal buildings with symbolic expressions and enigmatic nature. Initially, it was created using the broken and unused pieces of mirrors as a recycling project. Muslim artisans did not approve of wasting material. They used basic techniques to construct spiritual and effective Iranian-Islamic architectural spaces and ornamentations filled with mystery and marvels. This study is inspired by Giovanni Caputo's research on the different psychological effects of mirrors, by the mirror phenomenon as an Iranian-Islamic architectural element, and as a psychological effect brought about by architectural components. It attempts to elicit responses from people who have been touched and encountered the phenomenon by asking them to describe their presence and experiences in a mirror-tile decorated environment. The interviews usually focused on two main topics; the first topic is concerned with the participant's experience quality during their presence in the architectural space; the second is concerned with the way a person interacts with the various elements of the environment. As a result, there are two direct views at the moment of encountering the mirror-tile decorated architectural spaces: the "Close-look" (looking closely at one's image) and the "Afar-look" (looking from afar, taking in the whole space). Moreover, the *light* a place and the *emotional* effects of the architectural built-up space on perception were the most critical factors for participants' responses to achieve the research's goal and thus laying the groundwork for future research in these areas.

*Keywords:* architecture, decoration, Iranian-Islamic, mirror-tile artwork; perception, phenomenology, psychology

As an introduction, it is first of all necessary to have a working understanding of the various aspects of Giovanni B. Caputo's<sup>1</sup> cognitive psychology (2010-2020). This will allow for gaining a better understanding of the impact of *mirror* phenomena on the human psyche in the latter part of this paper.

In his work, Caputo describes a “Visual Illusion” in which a person perceives their image reflected in a poorly illuminated mirror and came to the conclusion: “Phenomenological descriptions varied significantly among mirror-gazing participants”. In addition, he specified one such experiment:

Apparitional sensations while mirror-gazing were investigated ... Individuals looked at their own reflected faces in a mirror for 10 minutes under dim lighting. A nonvisible light source provided reasonably consistent face lighting. Individuals reported seeing unusual faces in the Mirror instead of their features after approximately a minute of staring at it – archetypal and frequently unfamiliar human or animal faces, living or dead parents with altered characteristics, and fantasy monster creatures. Strange-face Illusions may arise due to the psychodynamic projection of the subject's unconscious archetypal contents onto the mirror 's image”. (Caputo, 2010 b)

In other words, strange faces appeared in the mirror, and instead of one's own face, frequently others appeared. Caputo relates these phenomena to the historic *Nonnus of Panopolis, Dionysiaca VI 172-173*, and states:

Wearing a Dionysian theatrical mask and direct gazing in the mirror to conjure under-terrain living specters was most probably part of the initiation. The two young satyrs of the mural have identical aspects. Thus, they probably represent a single initiate individual together with his *dissociative* double.

The goal of the research had been to find out whether people would ascribe apparent vitality to an inanimate yet human-like mask, something that had been done in history before. (Caputo, 2011). In ordinary viewers, the perception of unusual faces in mirrors is triggered by looking at one's face in a mirror for a few minutes under dim lighting. This new perceptual illusion has been named as *Strange-face in the mirror* syndrome and has been studied also in Schizophrenia sufferers: “Apparitions of strange faces in the Mirror were significantly more intense in schizophrenic patients than in control groups. (Caputo et al., 2012)

In another experiment, Caputo had two individuals look at each other in a mirror . Such inter-subjective gazing generated an even more significant number of unusual faces perceived. “Inter-subjective Strange-face illusions were ever dissociative of the subject's self.” They supported moderate feelings of their reality, indicating a temporary loss of Self-awareness (Caputo, 2013). A follow-up experiment revealed that patients with depression were less able to see such apparitions.

The appearance of strange faces in the Mirror was reduced remarkably in depressed subjects compared to healthy controls; those subjects suffering from depression compared to normal controls showed less duration of apparitions; fewer number of strange faces; ... lower Self-evaluation rating of provoked emotion.” (Caputo, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni B. Caputo, Ph.D. DISTUM, University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”, Urbino, Italy.

Impairments may cause these depression reductions in facial expression and emotion detection, which are implicated in the connection between the patient (or the patient's ego) and the image of his face (or the patient's physical self) as reflected in the mirror.

In yet another experiment, the influence of the spiritual personality trait on strength and strange-face illusions was investigated.

Participants were first assessed for superstition (Paranormal Belief Scale, PBS) and spirituality (Spiritual Transcendence Scale, STS). The initial discovery was that SFQ was unaffected by PBS. Hence, Strange-face illusions, while staring are perceptual genuine hallucination-like phenomena, are not the result of superstition. The second result was that SFQ was negatively associated with STS's spiritual-universality scale (a belief in the unitive aspect of existence; e.g., 'there is a higher level of awareness or spirituality that connects all individuals'). (Caputo, 2017)

As a result, intersubjective gazing at low illumination can be a tool for conscious integration of unconscious *Shadows of the Self* to reach completeness of the Self. Finally, "empirical studies on mirror-gazing (including the *psychomanteum*) and eye-to-eye gazing, both in healthy individuals and clinical patients, including studies of Hypnotic mirrored Self-misidentification, mirror-gazing in body dysmorphic disorder, and schizophrenia, were critically reviewed for protocols, results, and potential implications." The richness, variety, and uniqueness of contents across these anomalous experiences indicate "mechanisms *beyond perceptual*" distortions or illusions. Mirror-gazing generated anomalous experiences nearly exclusively in the visual, physical, and self-identity modalities (Caputo, 2020).

Caputo's experiments and results are immensely formative for this study; its other methodological foundation is the phenomenological approach to architectural mirror-tile decorated built-space as propounded in the work of Gholamhossein Memariyan, Parvin Partovi's *Phenomenology of Place* and Arezou Sadoughi's *A Qualitative Research Method in Understanding Emotional Dimensions of Place*. All are important in the setting up of the work at hand to survey human emotions vis-a-vis uncountable mirror-shards and any psychological fallout such mirror-gazing might entail.

## Mirror-Tile Artwork

### Figure 1

*The Mirror Hall of Golestan Palace, the Royal Qajar Complex (18-19th Century CE) Iran, Tehran (Author, 2019)*



Glass mirrors were first manufactured and used in Europe around the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, and by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, they were spread across Europe, and their usage had grown. Such mirrors were uncommon and costly (Riazi, 1996, p. 10). Due to the high cost of glass mirrors, the usage of glass mirrors and mirror-tile artwork has economic origins and roots. Glass mirrors, imported to Iran in the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, were products that broke during shipping from Europe, mainly from Venice. Iranian artists devised a novel method to make use of these shattered fragments and made mirror tiles out of them (Riazi, 199, p. 12). “Muslim artisans recycle shattered mirrors into innovative art” (Mulla Salehi, 1998) because “being wasteful is an act that is abhorred in Islam” (Quran, 17:27). This issue is reflected in the following Persian poetry by *Kashmiri* [a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Indian Persian poet] (Azaimabadi, 2012, p. 244):

Every bit of my broken heart is like the grass from His look

The Mirror after it broke is a *collection of mirrors* [Mirror-tiles].

Binesh Kashmiri (Transl. by author)

**Figure 2**

*Creating Garih Mirror-Tile Artwork by a Craftsman with Elementary Tools (Shabestan, 2018)*

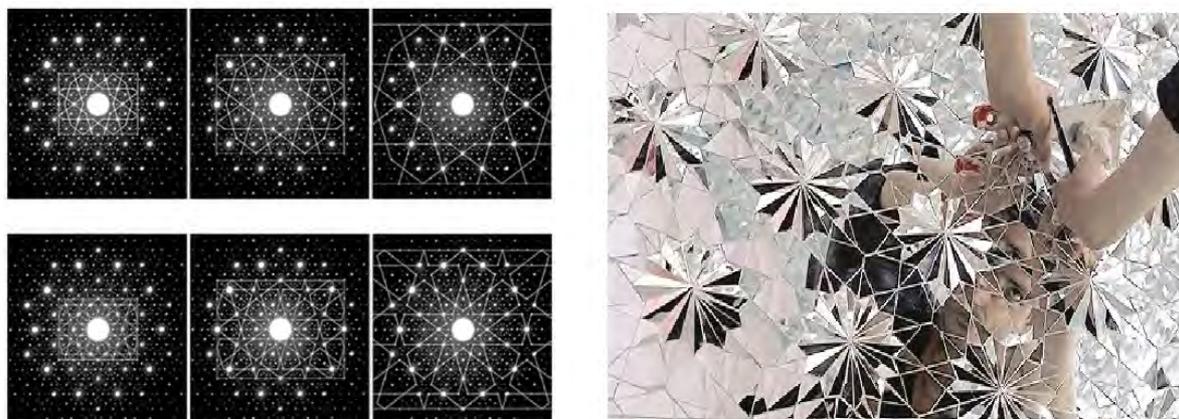


Many thin mirrors were manufactured in Germany and brought to Iran in the 19th century CE when mirror-tile decoration grew more popular, more delicate, and more precise. Iranian mirror-tile artisans can easily cut these mirrors into any geometric shape. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, they utilized tiny mirrors to create triangles, rhombuses, and hexagons (Figure 2).

The *Garih-tile* design is the most frequent one in mirror-tile artworks, and it is unrivaled in terms of the diversity of forms and its application in many fields of Iranian-Islamic Arts. (Riazi, 1996, p. 12). *Garih-tile* (Figure 3) is a geometric design that incorporates different geometric patterns and that are coordinated in a particular framework (Ardalan, & Bakhtiar, 2015, p. 70). Countless designs, with *no beginning* and *no end*, represent *multiplicity* in unity and continuous creation (Madkour, 2008). Iranian artisans' final effort in the fine arts category related to interior architecture and interior design, and should therefore also be regarded as mirror-tile artwork. Since its origin, performers of this area of art, which demands a great deal of accuracy, elegance, and patience, have always been Iranian artisans. By constructing traditional and more *geometric* forms and ornamental designs from minute and enormous pieces of mirror on the interior surfaces of buildings, light is continuously reflected in numerous sections of the mirrors, resulting in a bright, pleasant, and dreamlike environment (Kiani, 1997, p. 239).

**Figure 3**

(a) *The Geometric Similarity of Girih with the Silicon Crystal Structure* (Sajwood, 2017);  
 (b) *Girih in the Mirror-Tile Artwork* (Rostami, n.d.)



The architect has produced a fantastic order by fitting together these small components, including mirrors of all sizes and geometric forms. The repeated reflections of the light in the mirror pieces create a bright and sparkling environment in this work of art (Gardner, 2015, p. 600). Geometric designs (both regular and aberrant) and interlaced geometric patterns are fundamentally superior to Perception-based realistic pictures because they include hypothetical mental structures (HasanPour, 2017).

### Phenomenology of Place

To move on to its larger setting, a phenomenology of space needs to be laid down. The definition of one such theory is provided by Blake:

The manipulation of space, material, light, and shadow to produce a memorable experience via an effect on the human senses is known as Phenomenology in Architecture. In architectural design, phenomenological idea methods provide a different experience of space, light, and form phenomena. This idea advocates for sensory perception to be a function of the constructed environment.

(Blake, 2016)

It should be clear that humans are not just self-contained *Subjects* that evaluate *Objects* in geometric space for their usefulness. “Researchers could uncover how our meaningful relationships interact within our lifeworld through Phenomenology, discovering their relative effects, strengths, and significances” (Ray, 1992). However, experience is not an opening through which a world, existing before all experience, shines into a place of consciousness; it is not a mere taking of something alien to consciousness into consciousness. “Experience is the performance in which *I*, the *experiencer*, *experiencing* being, am present and present as what it is, with the full content and mode of being that *experience* itself, through the performance going on in its intentionality gives to it” (Moran, 2000, p. 6).

The greatest goal of Phenomenology is “to *return* to the *Nature of Objects*,” (return to the things = to the things themselves), which means a “knowing away from abstract concepts and facing the reality of phenomena most honestly and purely as possible” (Partovi, 2015, p. 13). Although Germany was the origin of phenomenology in the 20th century, the reference to

opinions of philosophers such as *Suhrawardi* (12th century CE) and *Mulla Sadra* (17th century CE) indicates that the roots of such ways of thinking also lie in Iran. Categories such as Intuition, Reliance on Contemplation, Meditation (Reflective Thinking), and Direct Knowledge of Phenomena are the substructure of an *Illuminationalism Philosophy* and the *Originality of Existence* (Partovi, p. 14). Husserl first extended the application of Descriptive Psychology to clarify concepts of the exact sciences in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891) and its *epistemological explanation* of logic's fundamental ideas. At this point, phenomenology is a sort of conceptual clarification that is part of a more significant criticism of reason. However, the key feature of this conceptual analysis was not that it engaged in examining the role of concepts in a language, but, rather, that it relied on the self-evident givenness of insights in intuition. The call of Phenomenology is to *return* "to the objects" *themselves* (Moran, 2000, p. 9). To realize the principle of the "back to the things Themselves," Heidegger would say, Let everything that exposes itself be seen through itself and in the way it reveals itself. In line with this, forming a *Sense of Place* about an environment and its meaning is an instinctive and *phenomenological human experience* (cf. Stefanovic, 1998). Don Ihde summarizes Edmund Husserl's "Phenomenological Approach" (Ihde, 1986) when giving the following rules:

- A closer look at the objects as they appear to us.
- An *Epoché* or phenomenological analysis deviating from the usual methods of observing and discarding current assumptions.
- The description of a phenomenon under consideration, not its explanation. (Because the explanation is subject to judgment and should be postponed until all the evidence is collected.)
- Horizontalization phenomena, mean that at the beginning of the study, all phenomena must be considered naturally equally. This attitude prevents the researcher from assuming one phenomenon to be more 'actual' than another. It means letting a phenomenon under study show a full range of its own appearances.

According to Ihde, these rules cover the first level of phenomenological research. In the second level of study, and according to the background prepared in the first level, it is possible to pay attention to the *nature* and the *essence* of a phenomenon; searching in order to find "Structural Features or Invariants." Hence, he states the last rule as follows:

- Search for structural features or invariants of the Phenomenon under study.

At this stage, repetitive patterns are significant and should be actively explored. Husserl called "the appropriate way to perform these steps *Fantasy Variations*." Free variations, which are applied systematically, are the core of the phenomenological method, are a property that Husserl calls a "*Correlation-a Priori relation*", and which he considers a context through which all other levels will realize themselves (Husserl, 1891).

### **Methodology**

In studying the reaction to mirror tiles, this research applied a qualitative research method utilizing interviews. "The phenomenological researcher with a qualitative approach seeks to describe the main quiddity of phenomena" (Moustakas, 1994). It tries to ask those who have touched and experienced the phenomenon to express it in the sense of "describing their presence" (*Ibid*). Generally, the interview asked two main questions. One was on qualitative quiddity of place and the other on the participant's mood and sensing of the environment. In the present study, participants were asked for this explanation in the form of semi-structured

on-site interviews. More explanations were requested after receiving the initial information from each participant in line with their general answers. If necessary, the researcher asked semi-structural questions for more data in proportion to each person's response. Questioning continued until a clearer understanding of the participant's thoughts could be achieved.

Ten participants were randomly selected (N = 10; 4 women; 6 men; age range 22–40 years; mean age 31 years). They consisted of students, employees, artists, and unrelated individuals. All participants were naive observers and had no history of psychiatric episodes, nor a deeper understanding of mirror psychology. They were volunteers and did not receive monetary rewards. Research was conducted by inviting them separately to the site; the nature of the research was not explained to them in order not to pre-influence them. After each discussion, its main points were immediately documented with the aim of conducting a thematic analysis later. The researcher did not control, change, or modify the study environment. The stages of data collection and analysis can be defined as follows:

- Choosing the right place
- Time and possibility of attendance of participants
- Conducting the interview
- Recording the text of the interviews
- Analysing the texts several times
- Content analysis, categorization, and formulation of meanings
- Extraction of themes
- Categorizing synonymous themes
- Data validity control
- Discussion and conclusion

## **Results**

The themes were analyzed and classified based on the classification of meanings and repetition of joint concepts of the interviewees. In “Part Perception Approaches” (Van Manen, 2006), the sentences and phrases or words conveying the purpose of who experienced the space and the obtained themes have been specified and highlighted until those common concepts were categorisable. Then, “the corresponding sections were imbued with possible meanings and definitions and a comprehensive description for preparing a single theme” was undertaken (Sadoughi & Memariyan, 2010). Index statements were taken from the recorded transcripts of the interviews, which were verbatim or conversational. After reviewing each interview text and comparing them with the others, more than 100 expressions were obtained and listed (see Table 1].

**Table 1**

*Examples of Index Expressions of Individuals in Mirror-Tile Decorated Architectural Space and their Possible codified Meanings*

Index Expressions	Codified Meaning
I see my broken image; It is not me from up close (1); I see myself shattered (2); I do not look in the mirror s (6); the small parts of the mirror (9 and 10); when you pay attention to detail, it looks like the Cubism (10).	Looking Closely Broken image and Mirror (Figure 5)
The whole space from afar is nice(1); bright and shining place; depth of space (2); chaotic space (3); mirror s are systematic (4); like diamonds space (5); integrated space (6); spiritual space (9); abstract space (10).	Looking from afar; Integrated and brilliant place. (Figure 6)
I like to see myself integrated; it does not feel good when I am not integrated (1); super-luxury; makes good sense (2); space is chaotic; disordered; I got heartbroken (3); a sense of beauty touches a person in the area (4); sheer luminosity (4, 5 and 6); shiny and radiant (5 and 6); the space is chaotic (7); geometric area (7 and 10); I like the assortment of light (8); I sense spirituality in the area (8 and 10); I feel suffocated; let us get out (9); I like the spirituality of space (10).”	General Looking; individual psychological effects; pleasant or annoying atmosphere. (Figure 7)

As a result, in encountering the mirror-tile decorated architectural space, there are two direct viewpoints: The Close-look (the own image); and the Afar-look (the whole place). (Figure 4). As for general looking, it combines both types of viewpoints.

**Figure 4**

(a) *The “Close-Look”: Broken Image in the Mirror;* (b) *The “Afar-Look”: Integrated and Glitter Place. Shah Cheragh [King of the Light], Iran, Shiraz (Joy, 2017)*



According to “Whole Perception Approaches” (Van Manen, 2006), an attempt was then made to express the commonalities between participants’ experiences in writing and explaining the themes. In such a way, the feeling engendered by a different environment represents the presence effects encountered in a place (Table 2). Reaching the themes and deeper meanings of the participant’s expressions, emphasizes the need for the group analysis of the content of the interviews, which was done in consultation with expert coders and consulting professors in this field.

**Table 2**

*Main-Themes and Sub-Themes Obtained from the Research*

Main-themes	Sub-themes
Light	Volume & Intensity (Figure 10) Sparkle & Glitter (Figure 11) Duplication & Shine (Figure 12)
Integration	Unity Multiplicity Geometry Rhythm Order Cosmic
Emotion	Luxury Charm Spirituality Move Search Discover Generalizable
Perception	Time Belong Difference Contradiction Conflict Surprise Admiration

Note: In the Sub-themes, some Emotion and Perception categories were merged or combined.

## Conclusion

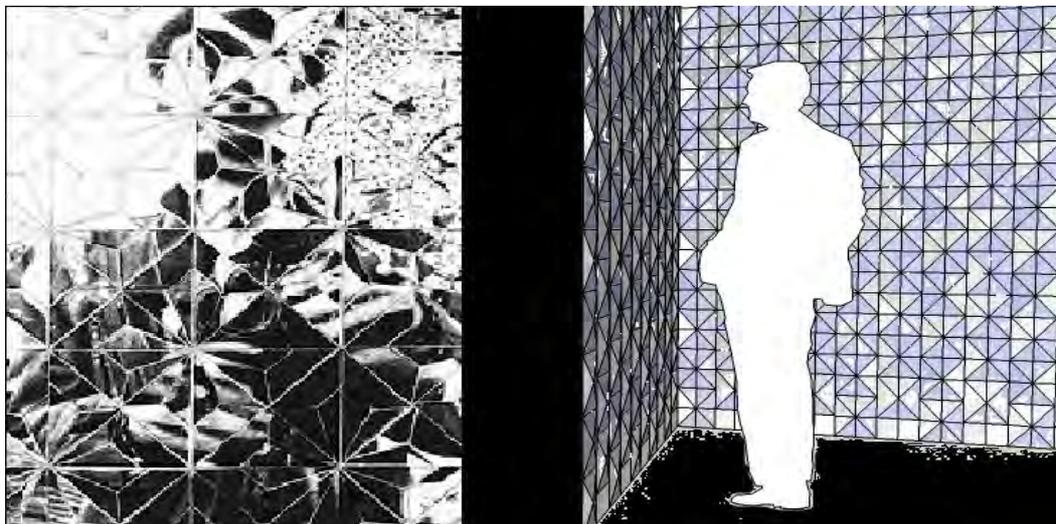
Participants were subconsciously directed into two different perspectives by being in a mirror-tiled space: a partial look at the nearest mirror-tiled part, wall mirrors close to their position in the *Close-look* (in the close-up view). Participants were often subconsciously moving their heads slightly in search of a mirror image of themselves; And a general and distant view to the mirror. The distance, the space, ceiling, and far walls in the *Afar-look* (simultaneously with the first encounter). The most significant factor for participant's reaction was the *Light* of the Place.

### The Close-Look

A brief look at the nearest Mirror-tiled part, the walls mirror closely a person's place in relation to them. The participants stated:

#### Figure 5

*One's Own Image, (a) The Close-Look: At the Broken Image on the Mirror-Tiled Wall (Javani, 2015); (b) the Close-Looking Sketch (drawing by author)*



“The interesting point is that when you look closely, you move and try to find a picture of your face, but you only see one of your eyes in one of the mirrors, and the rest is one of your other pieces.”; “I would like to see myself complete, and I do not like to see my broken image” (1). “I see myself broken from different angles.”; “I see the places that are a part of my image, in each of these small mirrors.”; “each one is in the form of something else.”; “You have to look closely and shake your head slowly to find different parts of your face” (2). “I do not look into the mirrors.”; “I only see the whole space.”; “I do not like to see my broken image.”; “I think if a person seeing himself in the mirror, he can see it completely, even for a short time” (6). “It looks like Cubism up close” (10).

### The Afar-Look

An overview and distance looking at the Mirror-tiles in the whole place. The ceiling and the distant walls recede to the depth of the built-up space participants noted.

**Figure 6**

*The Afar-Look; As the General-Look, There are Both Types of Viewpoints. (a) Mirror Hall of Green Palace, Iran, Tehran (Author, 2019); (b) The Sketch of the Same place (Drawing by author)*



“Approximately good from afar and bad from up close” (1). “Fractures of mirror s from bottom to top (walls and ceilings) extend the space, the corners seem to be infinite” (2). “I do not look in the mirrors; I just see the whole space as a single, integrated set.”; “I like the recesses and the protrusions of the space more” [Muqarnas, Arches, and Ears] (6). “In the first encounter, those [Muqarnas] jumped out of the ceiling to draw my attention.”; “Ceilings and walls look like carpet designs, like carpets.”; “A good ceiling, walls are boring” (9). “From a distance, space is integrated” (10).

**Move, Search and Discover**

When we stay in a place at a fixed point and look at an object, we receive some information about it while contained therein is still some unknown data. However, the remote part of the area is revealed when we move about inside the environment. Therefore, part of the evidence is invisible. That is, we are not the only ones moving. At the same time, the ambient light information changes as well due to such movement.

Moreover, the information changes as we move within the environment. When moving, we discover new things, and other things are hidden from us or remain hidden. Movement is an integral part of the information gathering system, and we obtain information from the environment by each movement. It is on the move that the energy or data of a place is better understood. When we move in one place, the hidden parts are revealed, and the evident part remains hidden. When we move in one environment, we do not think that the situation is the same as in another environment. However, in case of mirror tiles, we can say that this environment is also another environment (Figure 8). Although the movement system changes with the change of information, a place itself does not change. It remains constant due to the stability of the perceptual system. The environment is fixed for us because we perceive it continually. However, every moment may mean something else for the environment, but in our perceptual system, we see a new environment every moment because we perceive it moment by moment. However, this system also protects our perception of a place, promising permanence to a state of being. Participants expressed this in the following ways:

“When looking closely but using only one of your eyes, you are in one of the mirrors, and the rest is one of your pieces.” So “you move to find the image of your face” (1). “In these smaller mirror pieces, the larger mirror pieces you see catches your eye” [The

mind subconsciously searches for larger pieces of the mirror]. “From one angle, there is one eye, you move a little, your lip comes out in another, for example, with a part of your nose, but that other eye goes.”; “When you are looking closely, you have to look around and shake your head slowly to find different parts of your face” (2). “The place seems to kill a person in its own heart.”; “You are moving in space, and there is no desire to go around, but the environment is all blinking.”; “When you move, space flashes like a photographic flash” (6). “When you pay attention to details, the depth of space becomes much greater.”; “It is very different depending on where you stay and where you stand in space” (10).

### The General-Look; Psychological Effects

The two primary criteria for obtaining a hypothesis and a question are the pleasantness of the space (like) or the unpleasantness of the place (dislike), which is present in emotion and is significant (Motalebi, 2019). It is not only about the framework of the environment. Also, the events, material possibilities, and emotional effects of space affect perception. In some cases, the mirror space was not pleasant and even felt bad, and in some cases, it was quite the opposite. In this experiment, the participants’ perception of the mirror-tiled place seems to be significantly related to the personality and identity and the individual’s mood and inner self:

#### Figure 7

*Looking to Broken Mirror (a), (Behnoodi, 2019) & (b), (Javani, 2015); (c) Mirror-Tiled Decorated Place. Ali Ibn Hamzeh Holly Shrine, Iran, Shiraz (Joy, 2017)*



“I like and do not like the whole space” [Paradoxical Feelings]; “Overall, it gives a different feeling, sometimes good and sometimes bad” (1). “That means the space is whole except the floor of the mirror!”; “It’s very cool...” (2). “The atmosphere is chaotic.”; “I feel heartbroken, I want to get out of here” (3). “It feels good overall; I like being in this space.”; “It does not bother me at all; it is pleasant” (4). “It is a beautiful space; I like its beauty” (5). “It is too attractive, especially the center of place” (6). “I do not like these mirrored geometric shapes.”; “If space is more regular and simple, it is better” (7). “I do not like places in an environment that do not have rhythm.”; “Being irregular can sometimes be good, it means have the same rhythm” (8). “The whole space feels like old times”; “The feeling of suffocation in the place is depressing” (9). “The tiny pieces of mirrors that covered the walls and ceiling created a completely different and specific atmosphere.”; “That is amazing” (10).

### The Role of Light and its Effects

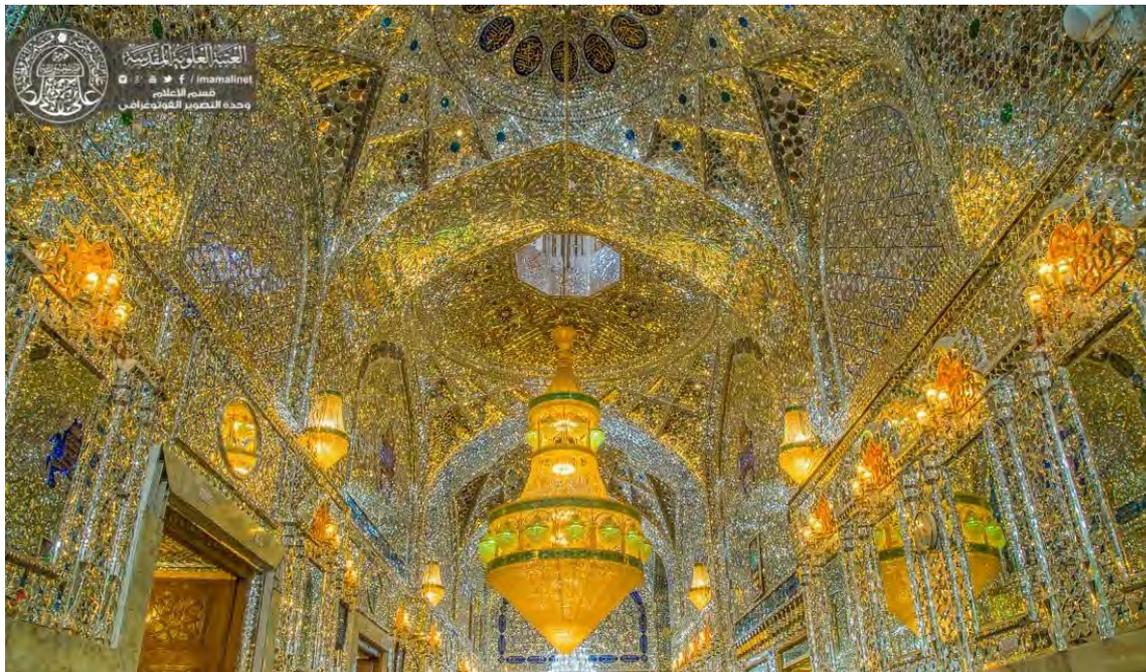
All data is in the light. The need for light is one of the most basic bodily needs (Motalebi, 2019). “Humans are similar to mosquitos.” An inflow occurs everywhere there is light, for no apparent reason. “We are on our way to enlightenment, whether we like it or not. We are attracted to Light” (Evans, 1981; *Morris Lapidus*). The environment contains the data structure. Light exists, and its information reaches our minds without the need for intermediaries. All rays of light and all environmental data travel with us as people move about. When a person moves, the rays of light that strike us change with our passage, and the hidden planes of the surroundings shift with us. More features emerge as the quantity of lights rises.

Moreover, when the number of light sources drops, they are deleted from the details, reducing the amount of information available in the environment. The quantity of information we receive from the environment rises or decreases as the number of light sources increases or decreases. We may sense the environment when we move in a place and the light rays that arrive at us, depending on those light rays. *Ambient Light* and *Radial Light* are two types of light. The light source in radial light is unique. Because the quality of the Radiant Light Source is essential, it has radiation, and we can see its radiation source (such as a lamp or candle).

Ambient light is emitted light that reflects on the surrounding surfaces (Figure 9). A reflecting surface is critical for ambient light to be present. As a result, any details about its surroundings needs to be factored in. While not conversant in light theory, the participants displayed a very astute understanding of these theoretical terms:

### Figure 8

*Radial Light and Ambient Light. Mirror-Tile Decorated Hall, Iraq, Najaf (The Official Website of Imam Ali Holy Shrine, 2016)*



**Figure 9**

(a) *Ambient Light* (Armin, 2020); (b) *Natural Radiant Light Enters Through the Apertures of the Dome*. Shah Cheragh, Iran, Shiraz (Joy, 2017)

***Volume & Intensity***

“Light is multiplied in the general space.”; “I like the volume of light in the space.”; “I preferred the light in the space to be low” [Refers to the number of light sources - lamps]; “It would have been better, for example, to have a few lighted candles that were reflected and rotated in all the mirror s, rather than large chandeliers and bright lamps” (1). “If the general light of the environment were less, from afar, it would be as if you were in the depths of a galaxy” (2). “The light of space is very scattered” (3). “As to create this place for the night.” “In the dark reflect a small light in the whole space” (4). “I think this space would be better if lit by candlelight, and it had a more mysterious feeling” (8). “The fact that light is reproduced in the general space, and I liked the volume of light in the space.” “I preferred the space light was low” [Refers to the number of light sources - lamps]. “It would have been better in this space, for example, to have a few lighted candles that were reflected and rotated in all mirror s, rather than large chandeliers and bright lamps” (1). “If the general light of the environment were closer than far, it would be as if you were in the depths of a galaxy” (2). “The light of space is very scattered” (3). “The dark reflects small light in the whole space” (4). “I think this space would be better by candlelight; it offered a more mysterious feeling” (8).

**Figure 10**

*Mirror-Tile Decorated Place* (a) *at Night*; (b) *at Day*. Ali Ibn Hamza, Shah Cheragh. Iran, Shiraz (Arman, 2020)



### *Sparkle & Glitter*

The further elements of sparkle and glitter were also discussed by the participants. Again, they had much to say about them: “The brightness in the space is very high, and the volume of light is high and dazzling.”; “Spaces like this are very luxurious” (1). “When you first enter the space, it is a beautiful super luxury, a radiant and shiny space.”; “Shining dots are like monkey stars.”; “Space is like a diamond” (2). “It fascinates you to be in front of the entrance to space.”; “When you move, space flashes like a photographic flash” [paparazzi]. (3). “I like the radiance of the space.” “The space is bright - the ceiling shines like the stars in the sky.”; “It shines with the slightest movement in space” (5). “It is a glamorous atmosphere.”; “You are moving in space, and there is no desire to go around, but the environment is all blinking.”; “Some of these points attract attention and remain in your mind because the vision leads a person to himself” (6). “It has improved the space; it has spiritualized the space” (8). “Mirrors make the space brighter than ordinary space” (9). “Very exquisite and magnificent atmosphere.” “It is extraordinary.” “Cosmic spirituality.”; “It is like a kind of abstraction” (10).

### **Figure 11**

(a) *Sparkle place* (Royalhandmaidens, 2020); (b) *Glitter Place. The Shah Cheragh Holy Shrine and Mosque [King of the Light], Iran, Shiraz* (CuriousPlaces, 2016)



Lastly the effects of Shine and Duplication were deliberated by the participants: “I like that it has a light that Duplication in the space.”; “It would have been better in this space, for example, to have a few lighted candles that were reflected and rotated in all the mirrors, rather than large chandeliers and bright lamps.”; “I do not like to have this space in my house, for example, in my bedroom, unless the light sources are low, such as candles, and the light in the space is also low” (1). “There is an order in space.” “Seems to create this space for the night to reflect a small light in the whole space in the dark” (4). “Some of these points attract attention and remain in your mind because the vision leads a person to himself” (6). “In mirrors, when there is light with color, it is kind of irregular” (7). “I like that light multiplies in space, the multiplicity of light.”; “The type of light bulbs that illuminate the space is also very influential.”; “It is very significant to count how many light sources there are or where the place is located” (8). “The reflection of light in mirrors [direct light] is annoying, especially in walls” (9).

**Figure 12**

*Light Shine and Duplication in the Mirror-Tiles. (a) Fatima Masoumeh Shrine. Iran, Qom; (b) Golestan Palace, Iran, Tehran (Mohammadi, 2016)*



As can be gleaned from the afore-said, participants in the experiment had very strong reactions to the light effects stemming from mirror-tiles. These eye-catching light effects of the mirrored interior spaces evoked two distinct groups of responses, namely those who strongly liked them and those who strongly disliked them. Furthermore, various perceptual and emotional contradictions were created in individuals, directing the audience's attention away from standard mirrors they were used to toward viewing the mirror shards and their effects as elements that are a part of the entire space. None of them reported seeing any strange faces in the tiles. It seems therefore safe to say that in comparison to Caputo's integrated mirrors, broken mirrors elicit other psychological effects on their viewers that alter the nature of the mirror-viewing experience. One of the strongest ones observed in this study is the search for meaning in the reflections, the attempt to create identities from the partial mirror images and the (imagined/unconscious) discovery of at least some of these when engaged in prolonged viewing. Of course, these results are based on a very small cohort of participants, and it remains the work of future research to broaden the participants' number and build on the findings from this smaller study. What did become very clear from this study, though, is the fact that even broken mirrors induce individuals to search for identities and make attempts to re-capture any kind of wholeness in one's self-image.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Author, (2019)

Figure 2: Shabestan, (2018), viewed 20 July 2021  
<http://shabestan.ir/mobile/detail/news/734059>

Figure 3: (a), Sajwood, (2017), viewed 20 July 2021  
<http://fhnews.ir/ImgGallery/ayneh/05.jpg>

Figure 3: (b), Hamid Reza Rostami, (n.d), viewed 20 July 2021  
<https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/607421>

Figure 4: Joythewanderer, (2017), viewed 20 July 2021  
<https://joythewanderer.com/ali-ibn-hamzeh-shrine>

Figure 5: (a), Asghar Javani, (2015), viewed 20 July 2021  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jfava.2014.55423>

Figure 5: (b) Author, (2019)

Figure 6: Author, (2019)

Figure 7: (a), Mohammadi Vakil, (2019), viewed 20 July 2021  
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Figure 7: (b), Sina faramarzi, (2012), viewed 20 July 2021  
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Figure 7: (c), Joythewanderer, (2017), viewed 20 July 2021  
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Figure 8: The Official Website of Imam Ali Holy Shrine, (2016), viewed 20 July 2021  
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Figure 9: (b), Joythewanderer, (2017), viewed 20 July 2021  
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Figure 10: (a) & (b), Trip Advisor, (2020), viewed 20 July 2021  
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## **Innovation in Cultural Heritage Preservation in Taiwan: Lessons for Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Despite having a long and rich culture, the preservation of cultural heritage in Indonesian cities is still facing numerous challenges. Modernization has gradually replaced countless historical monuments, and museums displaying the glory of previous civilizations are not as popular as other urban attractions. Different approaches should be considered to prevent further cultural loss and the fragmentation of Indonesian urban history. In this study, we attempt to learn from Taiwanese practices of preserving cultural heritage. In recent years, Indonesia and Taiwan have been developing intense economic and cultural ties through several cultural promotion projects. While the study identified the same challenges for Taiwan to protect built heritage from rapid urbanization, there are some good model practices in place that can be adopted by Indonesian society. First is the digitalization of cultural heritage that contributed to data preservation and availability to the public. Secondly, is the importance of defining those cultural practices/artifacts that reflect a nation's identity. Thirdly, attention to the design and enforcement of the heritage preservation act. The last point concerns creativity and initiatives to collaborate with the creatives and other potential collaborators.

*Keywords:* cultural heritage, Indonesia, innovation, preservation, Taiwan

The preservation of historic urban environments is important in order to maintain the social and cultural fabric of a community. Buildings, communal spaces, streets, passageways, traditional activities, and objects from daily life help modern people understand the values and the way our ancestors tried to adapt to urban environments. However, over the past years, historic areas and cultural artifacts are increasingly threatened by rapid urbanization, demographic changes, and even rampant commercialization. With the increasing destruction of urban heritage sites, new modes of preservation have become indispensable.

Besides preserving the architectural heritage and historic urban environments, another challenge is to attract young people to urban history and ancient artifacts. A survey by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS UK) in 2018 showed the significant decline of children's visits to museums, as well as other engagement with cultural facilities. The lack of young people's interest in their cultural heritage and museums as the place to exhibit artifacts and display the civilization history is possibly related to the lack of creativity and design of such facilities. As Fleming (2016) argued, the design of many old-fashioned museums forced the visitors to figure out how to interact with the objects that are placed behind glass. No touching, no possessing, and just looking are holding back visitors from enjoying the museum. Similar to this, Radua (2019) and Fadillah (2014) also highlighted how teenagers do not see the museum as an interesting space because it gives them a hierarchical structure that limits their space to grow and their voices to be heard. Therefore, some scholars have proposed the digitalization of heritage to engage people with historic urban environments or objects (Bozzelli et al., 2019, Cirulis et al., 2015). Other than preserving and documenting important artifacts from the past, digital heritage enables people to learn about past civilizations in a more interesting way.

In this study, we purposely chose Taiwan as the study area based on the growing cordial relationship between Indonesia and Taiwan. A relationship between Indonesia and Taiwan was established during the late Dutch Occupation in Indonesia (Paramitaningrum and Herlijanto, 2016). After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, the two countries did not develop any diplomatic relations (Kabinawa, 2013). Despite not having such diplomatic ties, the socio-cultural interactions between Indonesia and Taiwan have been getting stronger in recent years. Taiwan has established several academic agreements with Indonesian universities to promote the Taiwanese education system and invite more Indonesians to learn about Taiwan. Additionally, Taiwan also established the Taipei Economic and Trade Office (TETO) in Indonesia to secure its position in potential Indonesian markets. In terms of cultural promotion, Taiwan has supported many performing arts and Taiwan-related cultural events, such as the Taiwan Excellence Happy Run in Indonesia and the Indonesia-related cultural exhibition in the Taiwan National Museum (Rahmat and Tingai, 2020). Kabinawa (2013) argued that the intimate socio-cultural interactions among Indonesian and Taiwanese occurred because of the large population of Indonesian migrant workers and students in Taiwan and the presence of Taiwanese businesspeople in Indonesia. It seems that both countries have seen the importance of one another (Rahmat and Tingai, 2020), and this cordial relationship has created a strong reason for Taiwan and Indonesia to advance their economic and cultural ties.

There are many potential lessons that Indonesia can learn from Taiwan, for example, in the field of cultural preservation. Taiwan has been showing remarkable achievements in the digital preservation and promotion of its cultural heritage. All public museums in Taiwan had been challenged to digitize their collections by 2007 (Lin, 2015). According to Hou (2020), this digitization helped the Taiwanese society design more collaborative movements to preserve and promote cultural heritage. The global audience also acknowledges Taiwan's achievement

in promoting cultural heritage. In 2019, the National Palace Museum in Taipei was ranked 6th in the Top 20 Asia-Pacific Museums Attendance List (The 2019 AECOM and TEA Theme Index and Museum Index Report).

Emerging from this, we are interested in understanding how Taiwanese society preserves and promotes cultural heritage. Subsequently, we highlight lessons that can be adopted by Indonesian cities to better protect their remaining cultural heritage. To begin, the article describes and discusses findings on heritage preservation in Taiwan. The following section will focus on heritage preservation in Indonesia. The article will be closed with a concluding discussion that highlights the lessons learned for Indonesia.

## **Heritage Preservation in Taiwan**

### **Chinese Cultural Renaissance**

The cultural renaissance in Taiwan began as a countermovement to the cultural revolution in China. It was led by President Chiang Kai-Shek in 1966 to preserve the country's culture based on *tao t' ung*, the orthodox transmission of the Tao, or described by Tozer (1970) as the historical and cultural traditions of the sages. The movement also created to preserve Dr Sun Yat Sen's *san-min chu-i* (Three principles of the people) that President Chiang argued would protect the national tradition from the mainland's communism and cultural revolution. The cultural renaissance movement officially started on July 28, 1967, with the establishment of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance movement's promotion council. The council had several functions, mainly to promote cultural reconstruction based on Chinese culture.

However, Tozer (1970) also highlighted how the renaissance movement was lacking in cultural goals. The action was more of a political movement that repressed the development of Taiwanese cultural artists' arts and culture. The use of dialects, such as Taiwanese and Hakka, was restricted and was not allowed to dominate the Taiwanese broadcasting of radio and TV programming (Wai-chung, 2006). The architecture style developed during the cultural renaissance was mainly adopted from the Sinicism Style. (Wang and Heath, 2008). The Sinicization in architecture had three functions, (1) To demonstrate the grandeur of Mainland imperial cities to the native Taiwanese; (2) To serve a set of substitutes for the mainlanders who miss their hometowns; (3) To serve as a reminder to all people in the land to reconquer the mainland and fight the communist party (Wang and Heath, 2008).

Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the buildings produced during the cultural renaissance did not bring any resurgence to the Taiwanese culture (Deeney and Lefeuvre, 1968 in Tozer, 1970). While there was no official declaration about the end of the cultural renaissance movement, in the late 1980s the emphasis in Taiwan shifted to promoting cultural reconstruction. This reconstruction aimed to promote Chinese and uniquely Taiwanese traditions on the local level, so that culture could be categorized, commodified, and totalized (Chun, 1994). The cultural reconstruction enabled the local and indigenous culture to flourish and negotiate with the dominant Sino-Culture.

### **The Beginning and Development of Cultural Heritage Preservation in Taiwan**

The act to preserve Taiwan's traditional architecture was in turn carried out by young Taiwanese intellectuals. They started the early historic preservation movement to strengthen the cultural identity of Taiwanese people and preserve cultural heritage threatened by the country's rapid urbanization. Taiwanese famed historical literature scholar Heng-Dao Lin

described the destruction of ancient monuments during the 1970s to the 1980s thus: “Watching monuments is like watching flowers, they would be gone if you are too slow” (Wang, 2015). The preservation of The Lin-An-Tai in 1976 symbolizes the beginning of the country’s monument preservation movement. The Lin-An-Tai’s house was completed during the Qing Dynasty by a Chinese merchant named Lin Chin-Ming. The house was named An Tai to represent Anxi County, where he came from, and Rong Tai, the company built by his son. The house was demolished during the expansion of the Dunhua South Road. However, parts of the building were removed to preserve one of the remaining Fujianese-style architectures in Taiwan. The success in Lin-An-Tai home preservation generated more attempts to protect such traditions structures. In 1982, Taiwan finally established the Council for Cultural Affairs and promulgated the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act.

However, Wang (2015) discovered the Nationalist Government’s tendency to prioritize the protection of monuments built by Chinese migrants and represented mostly culture attached to Mainland China. After the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act’s approval, 24 historical monuments were listed in the first-grade category. The list included Lukang Longshan Temple, Tainan Confucius Temple, Beinan Archaeological Site, and Fort Zeelandia. Few of them were the cultural heritage of the indigenous people, and none of them were built during the Japanese occupation.

This cultural heritage preservation act was amended in April 1997, making the county or city governments responsible for managing cultural heritage. As a result, historical monuments built by *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) and Japanese were also registered in the protection list. The preservation act was again amended in 2005 and this marked a new milestone for cultural asset preservation in Taiwan (Chen and Fu, 2015). Compared to the previous laws, the 2005 version embraced the adoption of modern technologies and materials for repairs, citizen participation, and more attention was to be given to the concept of intangible cultural heritage (ibid, 2015).

The latest preservation act was amended in 2016, followed by the amendment of the enforcement rules of the cultural heritage preservation act in December 2019. To date, the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act in Taiwan has been amended seven times. However, Chiou (2017) argued that this Cultural Heritage Preservation Act was again used to serve political struggles. Morris (2018) highlighted the ignorance of Taipei’s government and even the historical society insisted on the protection of the Xindian Cemetery Heritage from the threat of rapid modernization in Taiwan’s capital city. Not long after Morris published his text, researchers wrote on artifacts from the Xindian Cemetery Site. The objects are texts dating to the Qing Dynasty and could reveal the history of Taipei Basin’s earliest settlers. These problems confirmed Bor’s argument about the chaotic situations of conservation against plural interest concerns in Taiwan (Chiou, 2017).

### **Innovation in the Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Heritage in Taiwan**

Despite these negative facets, the country once famous as Formosa or beautiful island does exhibit some good practices in heritage preservation and promotion to learn from as well. These shall be listed below.

#### **a. *Encouragement of Community Participation***

The rise of community participation in Taiwan began in 1994 with the initiation of a community empowerment program known as The Integrated Community Building Programme (Chan, 2011). Much of the proposed projects took the theme of identification, conservation,

and or revitalization of local heritage as those themes aligned with the cultural reconstruction as the significant political agenda at that time (Den, 2014). Some examples of the projects are the development of Baimi community and the Beitou Area. In the case of the Baimi community, the project started in the early 1990s to fight against environmental pollution caused by cement factories in the Baimi area. The community established the Baimi Community Development Association (BCDA) to develop the cultural potential of the area. The association finally spotted a potential in the wooden clogs that were famous during the Japanese occupation era. They received funding from several organizations to bring back the clog-making culture (Chan, 2011). To preserve the culture, the community transformed an abandoned dormitory into a local cultural museum and named it Baimi Wooden Clogs Museum. The Baimi area was then rebranded as the home of wooden clogs. Tourists were able to participate in making the clogs before finally buying pairs as souvenirs.

As for Beitou, the turning point for heritage preservation was triggered by school children's initiatives to save a neglected colonial complex of public baths. The abolishment of sex services in the public baths complex in 1979 made the area stagnant for a long time. As a result, many buildings were dilapidated and needed repair. In 1997, the government designated the area as a historical site. Local people participated in the investigation and planning of Beitou Hot Spring Baths as a community museum. Through the implementation of public-private partnerships, Beitou's image as the former red-light district in Taiwan gradually diminished. The movement was the starting point for the residents to explore the richness of their culture, history, and natural heritage. The participation of local people enabled the area to preserve an ancient stone archway from the Qing Dynasty that was nearly forgotten by most locals and recreate Beitou's identity as a new tourist hotspot in Taipei.

### ***b. Digitalization of Cultural Heritage***

The launch of the Digital Museum Project in 1998 marked the beginning of Taiwan's efforts to digitize its cultural heritage. In 2002, the government initiated a program aiming at digitizing cultural heritage in public and private institutions in Taiwan. In 2003, another program called National Science and Technology Program for e-learning was launched. However, the two programs were merged in 2008 to form the current Taiwan e-Learning and Digital Archives Program (TELDAP). Through TELDAP, the country is expected to be able to sustainably manage national cultural assets, promote national digital archives and e-learning applications. As well as facilitate the development of Taiwan's culture, society, industry, and economy (Homepage of TELDAP, n.d.), TELDAP facilitated public cultural institutions such as the National Palace Museum and National Museum of Taiwan History to digitize their collections. Later, TELDAP developed a multi-language portal called Digital Taiwan- Culture & Nature. The portal enables the global community to explore Taiwan's culture and digitization collections. The major contents of Digital Taiwan- Culture & Nature included a collection level, Facets of Taiwan, Slice of Wonder, educational resources, a photo gallery, and multimedia projections. In Facets of Taiwan, visitors can search digital information related to various categories such as arts and illustrations, lives and cultures, maps and architectures, biosphere and nature, archives and databases, as well as languages and multimedia.

One example of old literature presented in the Facets of Taiwan is the Shan Hai Jing, (The Classic of Mountains and Seas). This collection of texts is the earliest cultural and geographical record in China describing ancient myths, legends, and folk customs. Visitors can see parts of the digital book in the National Palace Museum. Apart from providing digital resources in the Facets of Taiwan, The National Palace Museum also provides open data information on its

homepage. Visitors can explore the museum's collections by dynasty or categories such as lacquer wares, rare books, and Qing archival documents.

Other than the National Palace Museum, the National Museum of Taiwan's History also provides open data for its visitors. The museum has stored digital audio tapes and recordings of Taiwanese pop music from the early Japanese occupation period. Likewise, the Traces to Taiwan's history can be tracked in an open-data platform provided by the National Central Library. Under the name of Taiwan's Memory, the National Central Library compiled old images and archives related to the country's history. In 2021, the collection reached more than 260,000 items and 2.7 million pages of images.

TELDAP came to an end in 2012 and Academia Sinica was appointed to continue the mission of digitizing Taiwan's cultural heritage. The institution executed the Sustainable Management of Taiwan Digital Archives Project from 2013 to 2015. Academia Sinica Center for Digital Culture has produced various creative heritage projects, including a series of creative comic collection in which 71 creators and 300 stories are included to reinterpret stories about Taiwanese society. The institution also produced books promoting old Tainan, Taipei, and Taichung (See Figure 1). The series are accompanied by free interactive historical maps that allow users to observe the new and old map at the same time. The utilization of graphic characters and technology clearly indicates the attempt of the institutions to attract the younger generation and foreigners to have knowledge of Taiwanese urban history and cultural heritage. Attracting a wider audience to become accustomed to knowing Taiwanese culture seemed to be one of the goals of some cultural institutions in Taiwan. Besides the Academia Sinica Center for Digital Culture, we also investigated the National Palace Museum's strategy to attract more youngsters to visit the facility. The National Palace Museum is actively promoting Linked Open Data (LOD) to increase the level of public participation and improve the effectiveness of information dissemination (Wu, 2014). In addition to this, the museum is currently collaborating with Nintendo's ANIMAL CROSSING game. Users can download a total of 22 images collections for free, including the famous Jadeite Cabbage and Meat-shaped Stone sculptures from the Qing Dynasty.

### Figure 1

*Books about Taiwanese Urban History* (Author, 2020)



## Heritage Preservation in Indonesia: Issues and Challenges

### The Heritage Preservation Movement in Indonesia

The conservation law in Indonesia was initially limited to the preservation of historical monuments, as stated in *Monumenten Ordonantie Statsblad* No. 238, enacted in 1931 by the Dutch Colonial Government. According to this act, all objects or parts of unmovable objects that are older than 50 years and have great importance for Indonesian prehistory, history, and art, as well as sites strongly estimated to have such objects, must be preserved. After the Republic of Indonesia's independence, the conservation activities in Indonesia were upheld due to the unstable political climate and an overlap in which authority should lead cultural heritage protection (Soekmono, 1992 in Isnen et al., 2016).

In 1988, the law was updated to give more attention to protect cultural heritage and improve its management. The bill was amended in 1992 to adjust to the changing structure of the Indonesian government at the time. However, the conservation orientation still focused on the objects that had archaeological values and antiques. Therein, the relationship between the objects and the site environment was, to some extent, overlooked (Isnen et al., 2016). This law was once again amended in 2010 as the previous act could not tackle many issues, particularly those that arose from the decentralization of Indonesia (Supartiyah, 2017).

In the current Indonesian Heritage Law, Indonesian residents are allowed to own and transfer cultural properties such as old houses and ancient objects to other people. However, several conditions need to be met by those who want to sell cultural properties. Those who wish to sell buildings of absolute architectural uniqueness may renovate the buildings only without changing their architectural style. For those who want to sell artifacts and other ancient objects, they may transfer the ownership as long as the next owner lives within the territory of Indonesia. However, they should report the artifacts and objects they discovered to the local authority before selling them to other parties.

However, cultural activists believe that this law is counterproductive. Some articles seem to legalize the demolition and destruction of cultural properties in Indonesia, such as Articles 71 and 72 (Adhi, 2010). Activists argue that the law is not strong enough to protect heritage buildings and sites from rapid urbanization and modernization threats. The concern about the remaining Indonesian heritage has been widely discussed since the first decade of the 21st century (Adhisakti, 1997; Zanchetti & Jokilehto 1997; JPPI, 2003; Mashuri, 2011; Harimu et al. 2012; Noviarti et al., 2012). The discourse led Indonesian scholars in 2003 to draft the Indonesian Charter for Heritage Conservation (ICOMOS, BPPI, 2003). This charter marked the first movement of heritage preservation in Indonesia. Instead of using the term "heritage preservation", the charter utilizes the word "conservation" that is argued to better cover the such preservation action.

### Remaining Issues and Challenges

Efforts to save and protect cultural heritage in Indonesia have always been fraught with difficulty. Three decades have passed since the beginning of the heritage movement in Indonesia, but there are still many issues to address.

#### a. *The Loss of Heritage and the Difficulty of Enforcing the Law*

The economic transformation and lack of political will are two factors behind the loss of built heritage in Indonesian cities. After independence, the demolition of colonial buildings had been continuously reoccurring, mostly in urban areas. The first president of Indonesia purposively

demolished the buildings with ancient Greek architecture and Amsterdam style to wipe out the colonization image from Indonesian cities. Soekarno even discontinued the tram network from the cities to make them less Dutch. However, under the new order regime, the demolition of buildings was triggered more by economic reasons and practical use than ideological reasons. After the 1980s, countless historic buildings were demolished for the sake of development and modernization. One example is the demolition of Societeit Harmonie Jakarta in 1985. Despite its history and strategic location, the building was torn down and replaced by a parking lot. Even to date, the heritage law seems to have no supreme power over Indonesian built heritage. Rahardjo (2013) argued that the different interpretations of urban stakeholders regarding the definition of cultural heritage had contributed to the loss of historical monuments or areas in Indonesia. The recent case of the Saripetojo Ice Factory in Solo supported this argument. The factory became disputed land between the Provincial Government of Center Java and the Municipal Government of Solo City. The government of Center Java insisted on building a mall while Solo City wanted to leverage the status of the ice factory into a cultural heritage site. The dispute turned into a personal conflict between the Central Java governor and the Solo City Mayor. In the end, the government of Solo City could not defend its remaining heritage. The ice factory met its final fate and it was demolished.

### **b. *The Challenges of Community Participation in Heritage Preservation***

Since 1980, community participation has been a fundamental issue within the development and involvement of heritage management in Indonesia. The government established *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Guidance Program), *Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa* (Council of the Village People), and *Karang Taruna* (Youth Organization) to facilitate a forum for encouraging Indonesian solidarity. The end of the new order era, which marked the beginning of the reformation era, promoted popular campaign freedom and human rights in Indonesian development. As a result, the discourse of community participation among Indonesian scholars revolves around specific thematic issues such as empowerment, capacity strengthening, local institutions, local wisdom, social capital, and local initiatives. The focus of community participation in Indonesia is on building a democratic society through political, social, and citizen participation (Slamet, 2003). In the case of cultural heritage, Wirastari and Suprihardjo (2012) argued that the community should be given the authority to protect and manage heritage assets and be nurtured by the government. This argument is in line with Isnén et al. (2019), who suggest that community participation should be facilitated to achieve a long-term strategy in cultural heritage preservation, such as aiming for sites to acquire world heritage status.

Due to the rise of decentralization in Indonesian regions, heritage preservation can easily become a top-down process. This top-down process often decreases the opportunity for local communities to engage in heritage preservation. From time to time, we discovered cases that show the preference of local governments to work with profit-driven entrepreneurs in the development or regeneration of heritage sites. One example is the regeneration of Braga Street in Bandung that chose a property-led regeneration to revive the city's historic district's vitality. The government worked with a real-estate developer to build Braga City Walk as the new magnet for Braga's regeneration project (Savitri, 2017). The residents were less likely to be involved in the decision-making process and preservation programs. Similar cases are also situated in the Old Town Semarang neighborhood (See Figure 2). The residents living near the old town area were involved but only up to the manipulation phase, as described by Arnstein in her Ladder of Participation (1969). Indeed, there are still challenges to promoting the bottom-up processes of decision-making in Indonesia. The government must involve the

people living within and near the historical sites to participate in cultural heritage preservation and management.

**Figure 2**

*The Old Town Semarang Neighborhood (Author 2020)*



**c. Digitalization of Cultural Heritage in Indonesia**

Indonesia has acknowledged the importance of digital preservation. Sitokdana (2015) has identified two previous attempts to digitize the local Indonesian culture. The first attempt was conducted in the Surakarta Sunanate Kingdom to develop the SECI (Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internationalization) of cultural knowledge. The second attempt was made during research to promote local cultural understanding in East Nusa Tenggara and based on knowledge management systems. As time passed, the initiatives to digitize culture in Indonesia increased significantly. In 2019, a startup called Indonesia Digital Museum developed a platform to introduce regional museums and their digital collections. This startup is being mentored and supported by the Innovative Academy, Gadjah Mada University, and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics. In the same year, Padjajaran University also established a digital center for Sundanese culture and its development. Yet another platform called [Indonesiaheritage.org](http://Indonesiaheritage.org) was established under the Pusaka Saujana Indonesia Foundation. Like Indonesia's Digital Museum, this platform offers i-heritage apps, an application aiming at integrating heritage databases from all across the country.

Another digitalization success is the increasing number of Indonesian museums with official websites and virtual tours. Museum Nasional Indonesia is one of the most advanced museums that promotes online exhibition and virtual tour. The museum has provided a platform to display cultural heritage documents and e-photos of old Indonesia. Unfortunately, the available information is still minimal. Faced with many less visitors due to COVID-19, the museum has been trying to communicate actively with interested parties by conducting webinars, online discussions, and infographic contests. Other museums also provide a virtual tour through their website or on Google Arts & Culture Platform, as listed in Table 1. However, we cannot measure the level of engagement due to the limited research time and opportunity.

**Table 1**  
*Museum's Virtual Tour Service*

No.	Nama	Museum's official website	Google Arts & Culture	Website of Ministry of Education and Culture
1	Museum Nasional Indonesia	o	o	o
2	Museum Kepresidenan Balai Kirti	x	x	o
3	Museum Sumpah Pemuda	x	x	o
4	Museum Kebangkitan Nasional	o	x	o
5	Museum Perumusan Naskah Proklamasi	x	x	o
6	Galeri Nasional	x	o	o
7	Museum Basuki Abdullah	o	x	o
8	Museum Tekstil	x	o	x
9	Museum Seni Rupa Keramik	x	o	x
10	Agung Rai Museum of Art	x	o	x
11	Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta	x	o	x
12	Monumen Nasional	x	o	x
13	Galeri Batik YBI	x	o	x
14	Balai Konservasi Borobudur	o	o	x
15	Balai Pelestarian Situs Manusia Purba Sangiran	x	o	o
16	Museum Benteng Vredeburg	o	x	o

Source: Adapted from Ramadhian, 2020

Our research discovered that there are still many museums in Indonesia without official websites, especially those situated in smaller cities and remote locations. Many museums appeared to depend on Instagram as the primary platform to engage with the public. Correspondingly, their challenges are providing sites for the visitors and digitizing their collections, such as old manuscripts and books that are deteriorating (Prastiani and Subekti, 2019). The challenge of digitizing a museum's collections included the lack of human resources who can carry out and assist the digitization process, the deterioration of the old manuscripts and documents, the past and broken equipment, and the distraction from the museum visitors (ibid, 2019). Certainly, digitalization needs to speed up and be supported for the future of cultural preservation in Indonesia. Instagram as the primary platform to engage with the public might not suffice. Improvement should be continuously promoted and facilitated on diverse sites to enable more Indonesians to learn about their cultural heritage.

### **Concluding Discussion: Lessons for Indonesia**

This study shows that Taiwan was once experiencing similar problems when compared to Indonesia in protecting its cultural heritage from the pressure of urbanization and economic development. While the country is still facing challenges to preserve its heritage assets, Indonesian cities can consider adopting some good model practices to support the current movement in cultural heritage preservation in the country.

First on the list is the early decision to digitize cultural heritage. The digitalization movement that started in 1998 indeed contributed to the data richness that Taiwan now has. The collections of Taiwanese cultural institutions are enormous, enabling the users to search for various information ranging from the image of the lost landscape heritage to the recording of old pop music dating back to Japan's early occupation. The decision to increase LOD (Linked Open Data) is one of the best strategies to encourage public participation in cultural heritage preservation. At the same time, when museums serve as the providers and promoters of open data LOD, they can increase the public's attachment to the museums (Wu, 2014). The utilization of LOD also enables the public to access more comprehensive information available in different museums easily. As such, Indonesian cities and museums could follow this initiative to address the lack of cultural heritage data and people's lack of attachment to the museums. Certainly, we need to appreciate the growing movement to digitalize the cultural

heritage and reconnect the museums, as is done by the Indonesia Digital Museum and other platforms. However, speedy improvements are required as actions are not integrated yet and the number of collections and information on them is minimal.

Second, the movement to identify Taiwanese culture that reflects the nation's identity. Taiwan also experienced a phase where a new ruler decided to destroy the built heritage from the former colonists to establish a new urban image. However, the cultural reconstruction in the 1990s had contributed to the safeguarding of Sino-culture. It also contributed to the promotion and protection of Taiwanese local and indigenous culture. A similar movement should be carried out by Indonesia to promote the safeguarding of local culture that is threatened by rapid urbanization. We currently witness how cities are being developed without much appreciation of vernacular architecture and urban history. Without further action to increase the awareness of how valuable our local heritage for civic identity is, Indonesian cities will grow into dystopian places with far less integrity.

The third point is the importance of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act, not only to guarantee cultural asset preservation, but also to determine the use of modern technologies and materials, citizen participation, and more attention to intangible cultural heritage such as knowledge and people's memory. For instance, digital media could preserve geographical records describing ancient myths, legends, folk customs, parts of the digital-book, digital audio tape and music recording, and old images and archives related to the country's history. With the cultural richness that Indonesia has, the state must increase the enforcement of heritage law that includes tangible and intangible culture. As we live in the digital era, the law must also cover and support the use of such technologies and materials to safeguard Indonesian cultural heritage. In addition, it is also important to ensure that local and regional governments understand and implement the law at the local level.

Fourth is creativity and initiatives to collaborate with creative classes and other potential collaborators. The narration of The National Palace Museum in Taiwan is here of interest. Unlike the traditional museum that often has a "boring" image, the National Palace Museum transformed itself into a fun place for everyone. It is actively working with creators to show different images of the museums and offer anti-mainstream activities for people to enjoy. The collaboration with Nintendo is an interesting example that breaks people's perception of how a traditional museum should be. While we have to acknowledge that Indonesian museums and other cultural facilities are getting better, we need to be honest that they still cannot attract the younger generation to become passionate about and enjoy the facilities. The way the Academia Sinica Center for Digital Cultures created an interactive map and comic series that introduces urban history is an eye-opening revelation in this respect. A technology that can be perceived as "cool" enough and the use of visual graphics are indeed important to catch the millennials and young people's attention. For that purpose, we need to pay attention to the quality and presentations of illustrations and graphic characters. To date, we are much focused on the education mission and neglecting the importance of presenting such interesting and eye-catching visual characters. Undoubtedly, it is time for Indonesia to leverage the quality of visual materials and graphic characters used to promote cultural heritage in museums and other facilities. The study highly recommends that Indonesian authorities consider more creative schemes and encourage participatory culture to preserve their cultural heritage.

**Authors' Contributions**

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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## **Media Power: Cigarette Package Design in China**

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### Abstract

Chinese tobacco packaging can be viewed as complex advertising practice. On the one hand, the cigarette pack is used to attract consumers, and on the other hand, it plays a role in health communication for discouraging smoking in China. When these two functions are mixed together, the media effect of the cigarette pack is supposed to be ambiguous and blurred. However, media effects of tobacco packaging in China seem to be lopsided: it is very effective in attracting consumers, but largely ineffective in discouraging smoking. What causes this phenomenon? Since the cigarette pack functions as a medium in the Chinese market, it has the power to asymmetrically influence the actions of others, but its power is subservient to the will of those who empower it. By using literature-based and focus groups methods, that the is piece of research finds that the incomplete health communication effect of cigarette packs is due to various reasons, such as political, economic, and cultural ones. The most influential factor is political, as the tobacco industry in China is entirely at the mercy of the government. The media effects and effectiveness of the package depend mainly on the government's will, interests, and values.

*Keywords:* China, health communication, media effects, media power, tobacco packaging design

China is the largest tobacco producer and has the most smokers in the world (Parascandola & Xiao, 2019; Leng & Mu, 2020). Although the Chinese government has taken many measures and introduced policies to control the tobacco industry and discourage tobacco use, smoking prevalence has been decreasing at a very slow rate. To describe the general situation of smoking in China, Yang et al. (2015) produced an overview. They start with a report by the National Patriotic Health Campaign Committee in 1984 which found that the average smoking rate among Chinese was 34.45%, which is higher than the global average of 14.3% (Gan et al., 2009). According to the Behavioral Risk Factors Survey conducted in 2002, smoking was prevalent among the Chinese population at a rate of 31.4% at the time. The year 2005 bears great importance for China, the Chinese tobacco industry, and Chinese smokers (as well potential smokers), because China ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) by the World Health Organisation (WHO, Lin et al., 2019). China had a smoking rate of 27.7 per cent in 2015 (Parascandola & Xiao, 2019). As noted by Wang & Xiao (2012), the latest report by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2018 indicates that the smoking prevalence in China was 26.6%. Here, only individuals aged 15 years or older were surveyed, and therefore the actual number is probably larger.

According to the statistics shown above, between 1984 and 2018 smoking in China decreased by just 7%. In comparison, the percentage of current American smokers dropped from 20.9 % in 2005 to 14% in 2019 (Cornelius et al., 2020). As a result, many researchers have commented that smoking reduction in China is far from optimal over the past several decades (Hu, 2006; Li et al., 2015; Leng & Mu, 2020). Previous research has indicated that the tobacco business can be more easily regulated in developed countries than in developing countries, owing mainly to the fact that developed countries' economies do not depend on tobacco revenues (Datte et al., 2018). However, compared with China, Thailand, a poorer nation, has a lower percentage of smokers, accounting for 22.8% of the population in 2018: it decreased by 5.3% between 2007 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the question is, what has kept China's smoking prevalence relatively steady over the last decade against a global background of anti-smoking successes?

Past research has proven that, "It is hardly controversial to suggest that the media are powerful social actors" (Freedman, 2014, p. 319). When the media creates, gathers, and shares "health information" to encourage/discourage the audience, this process is widely conceptualised as health communication (Kreps, Bonaguro, & Query Jr, 2003). The media's (both mass media and new media) power of organising anti-smoking campaigns has already been proven time and again and is advocated by many studies (e.g., Carson et al., 2017; Brennan et al., 2012; Nghiem et al., 2019; Thrul, Tormohlen, & Meacham, 2019). These studies all focus on the role of media in tobacco control and anti-smoking activities of developed countries (predominately, the USA). What is worth noting, is that anti-smoking campaigns have only been found effective in persuading youths and young adults; for "seasoned" smokers, the media influence/power does not work very well. However, in China, my interviewees all demonstrated that they rarely see anti-smoking campaigns on mass media and new media (this issue will be discussed in more detail in the later part of this study). Therefore, the warning message on cigarette packs could be the most important anti-smoking campaign in China. In this research, I will apply a combination of literature-based and focus groups methods to investigate the media power of cigarette packs in China.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed from: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/THA/thailand/smoking-rate-statistics> on 25 November 2021.

## Methods

### *The Literature-Based Method*

Three considerations led to the selection of a literature-based technique for my research. First, as Leng & Mu (2020) noted, the literature-based method can help get a comprehensive and correct grasp of the study subject's status quo and make the most use of available data, experience, and scientific research achievements. Secondly, this method can be used to clarify some notions and make some fresh arguments based on the previous literature. Finally, according to Fichtenberg (2002), specialists have differing viewpoints on tobacco control in China. Therefore, the literature-based method may be utilised to assess published articles and provide some of the most up-to-date data accessible.

### *The Focus Group Method*

Since this research aims to investigate the issue of “castrated” media power in terms of Chinese tobacco packaging's health communication process, it is vital to explore the case through the consumer's (the receiver) perspective (smokers and non-smokers), because, from Denis McQuail's point of view, media has the power is due to it has the ability to cause effects or influences on every individual and then our society (McQuail, 1979). Thus, it is necessary to understand Chinese consumers' perceptions of visual elements on cigarette packs. This section of my study will be designed on the basis of the findings of my literature search; the details will be presented in the beginning of section 4.

## Literature Research

### **The Relationship Between Media Power, Health Communication, Public Service Advertising**

As previously mentioned, to McQuail (1979), media influence is the proof for the power of media. Later research, for example, van Dijk (1995, p. 9) has advanced the old notion of media's influence on the audience and proposed that media influence/power “involves the role of the media within the broader framework of the social, cultural, political, or economic power structures of society”.

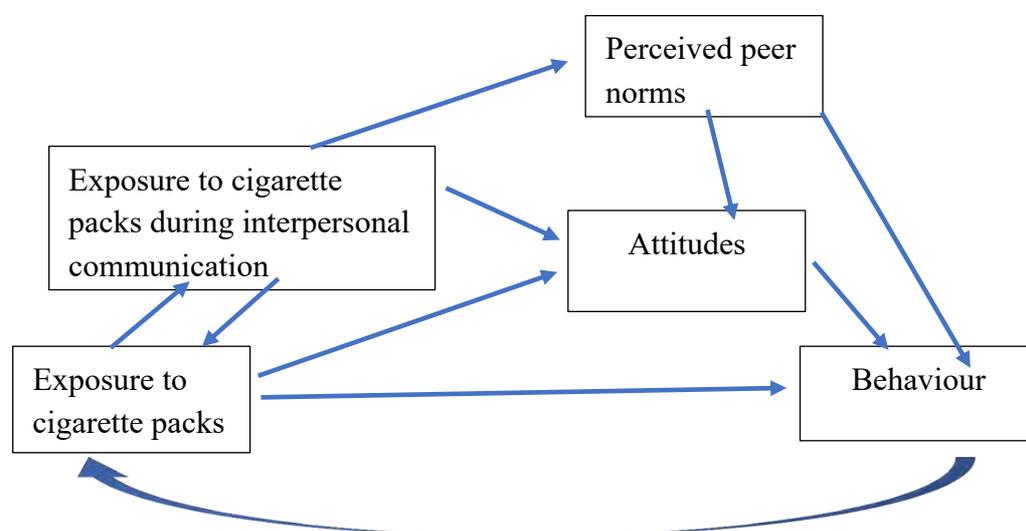
The scholarly interest in media effects or power began with the debate on advertising effects (primarily, propaganda) during the First World War (WWI), as it was discovered that individuals, such as WWI propagandists, advertisers, and totalitarian leaders, among others, came to believe in the media's ability to influence people (McQuail, 1979, p. 72). Within this concept of media power, public service advertising (PSA) for health communication is doomed to have “power”, because public service advertising aims to inform (encourages and/or discourages) the public, but only within the framework of non-profit objectives (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008). In the field of health communication, PSA has its specific goals and is designed to achieve these; it is thus salted to make media effects and influence. In McQuail's reading (1979), two terms, “effects” and “effectiveness”, are used to describe the power of media: “The former referring any of the consequence of media operation, whether intended or nor, the latter to the capacity to achieve given objectives, whether this be attracting large audiences or influencing opinions and behaviour” (p. 71). In short, these two terms can be understood as the strength of and the quality of media influence, respectively.

According to Freedman (2014, p. 319), media power is best understood as a link between disparate interests engaged in fights for various goals, including “legitimacy, influence, control, prestige, and, increasingly, profit”. Additionally, van Dijk (1995) has stated that it is vital to

find out what the “power” of media is and who controls it in the study of media impacts. More importantly, my research, in its nature, focuses on the media effects of Chinese tobacco packaging on Chinese consumers. Considering the above, based on the model of direct and indirect media effects on adolescent smoking (Gunther et al., 2006, p. 53), a new and advanced model displaying the progress of health communication of smoking cessation in China is proposed (see Diagram 1). Furthermore, previous research indicates that warning messages against smoking may incite existing smokers to smoke more and non-smokers to try (Grandpre et al. 2003); also, in the cultural context of China, sharing cigarettes is an important social custom and etiquette (Leng & Mu, 2020; Kohrman, 2007). Hence, the “unexpected” media effects and interpersonal communication will be considered in my model.

### Diagram 1

#### *Media Effects of Chinese Tobacco Packaging on Chinese People*



Various factors are involved in every communication process (Freedman, 2014; van Dijk, 1995; McQuail, 2010), and culture’s influence on health and health behaviour is becoming more widely acknowledged by health communication professionals in recent years (Kreuter & McClure, 2003). Thus, in the following of my literature research, in order to understand media effects of Chinese tobacco packaging on Chinese people, I will analyse the Chinese tobacco industry, Chinese tobacco packaging design, and Chinese smokers through various perspectives, such as political, economic, and cultural perspectives.

### Introduction to the Chinese Tobacco Industry

The Chinese tobacco industry is composed of three main sectors: tobacco cultivation, tobacco manufacture, and the tobacco trade systems (Leng & Mu, 2020, p. 1). First, as per tobacco cultivation in China, tobacco is prevalently cultivated in all provinces and municipalities except in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Tibet. Especially some underdeveloped western areas of China, like Yunnan and Guizhou province, depend entirely on tobacco to grow their economies. Second, tobacco production is run by the China National Tobacco Corporation (CNTC), which means that the Chinese government has created and controls the tobacco production monopoly. Although between 2010 and 2019, China’s tobacco output fell from 3,250,000 to 2,200,000 metric tons, it still is the world’s largest tobacco producer. Finally, the tobacco trade system

mainly consists of distribution and retail subsystems. From 1996 to 2000, over 4.2 billion yuan were spent on tobacco distribution infrastructure. Besides the above, Ma's (4 May 2021) report shows that from 2016 to 2020, profits earned by the Chinese tobacco industry grew exponentially. In 2020, CNTC made 115.63 billion yuan in profit. By thus contributing significantly to the government's income, the tobacco business has established itself as an integral pillar of the national economy.

The above data is in line with the findings of Datta et al. (2018), that is, that the tobacco industry usually plays the role of a national economic mainstay and is increasing in developing countries. In the light of this, the implementation of Chinese cigarette packaging design seems to be clear: the whole industry is fully controlled by government appointed companies; if we say the pack is the medium, its corresponding media power is controlled by government appointed companies; if in the market of common goods, the consumer has the final say, which in turn directs the market (Zhou & Belk, 2004), then in the Chinese tobacco market, the government is the only sovereign. This is to say, the "agenda" of the Chinese tobacco market is set by CNTC, and this state-run company decides what the consumer ("viewer") gets to read in China.

In McQuail's (2010, p. 458) typology of media effects, advertising (both commercial and non-commercial) is classified in the group of highly planned media effects; thus, the cigarette package's media effects and the strength of those effects will depend on CNTC's aims. But the quality of those effects is multidimensionally influenced by CNTC (the message sender), the consumer (the message receiver), and noise (unclear transmission interference), because "despite the pervasive symbolic power of the media, the audience will generally retain a minimum of autonomy and independence, and engage more or less actively, instead of purely passively, in the use of the means of mass communication" (van Dijk, 1995, pp. 10–1). Furthermore, while it is undeniable that the message receiver will influence the strength of media effects of tobacco packaging in China, the quality of the receiver's influence depends on the attribute of media effects, because the Chinese tobacco packaging, by its very nature, is a complex whole of encouragements and discouragements. Thus, I will explore Chinese tobacco packaging practices in the next section.

### **Chinese Tobacco Packaging Design**

Since the tobacco industry in China is a state-owned business, the design of cigarette packs in China results from governmental decisions. Chinese cigarette packaging is considered "beautiful" or "garish" by the public, even though it contains warning messages (Qin et al., 2011). Despite widespread criticism from the Chinese mainstream media (for example, *People's Daily Online*) and numerous experts, the very attractiveness of tobacco packages has not changed.

As previously mentioned, anti-smoking campaigns are rare in China; hence, warning messages on the packs seem to become the only (or the most important) communicator of "health information" for anti-smoking purposes in China. In this sense, the package is the medium for smoking-related health communication; however, the cigarette box is also the final advertising tool for tobacco promotions in China since tobacco advertising cannot appear on various kinds of media in China. Thus, I argue that tobacco advertising could be the most challenging advertising practice in China, simply because two contradictory advertising contents (persuasiveness and dissuasiveness) simultaneously appear in one medium.

Under pressure from social criticism, CNTC indeed made some improvements, but they are far

from enough. For example, as noted by CNTC (29 November 2019), first of all, the height of the font of the cigarette box pack is increased from not less than 4.0 mm to not less than 4.5 mm, with an increase of 12.5%, and the height of the font of the cigarette strip pack is increased from 6.5 mm to not less than 7.0 mm, an increase of 7.7%. Second, the space given over to the warning label is increased from 30% to 35% of the present surface, a 16.7% increase. Third, the warning area's font and background colour difference are raised from Eab30 to Eab40, a 33.3 per cent increase. In 2016, Xi Jinping announced the Healthy China 2030 strategy, setting "ambitious targets for the government to achieve, including a decrease in the rate of smoking to 20% by 2030" (Goodchild & Zheng, 2018, p. 409). This strategy aims at creating a "green", healthy national image at the global stage and is concerned with long-term economic development. As of 2004, smokers' yearly healthcare expenses have been greater than non-smokers' (Zhang, Ou, & Bai, 2011). Also, tobacco-related health issues disproportionately impact the working-age population, impeding overall economic development (Stillman et al., 2013).

However, CNTC still refuses to use pictorial warnings and plain packaging. In contrast, "Chinese cigarette packages are always designed with beautiful brand names and graphics, and with one sentence of text warning about the harm but without information related to specific smoking-related diseases" (Qin et al., 2011, p. 7). Many past studies have indicated that, compared with written warnings and branded packs, warning images and plain boxes can more effectively communicate the health risks of tobacco use and thus help users to quit smoking (e.g., Borland et al., 2009; Droulers et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2018). Thus, CNTC's intentions are manifested clearly. The company tends to weaken the media power of health communication and strengthens the media power of commercial advertising as far as possible within the framework of national laws and international treaties. As a result, we may deduce that the Chinese government does not want to completely prohibit smoking at present, because "the tobacco taxes are important and reliable sources of revenue for the central government" (Leng & Mu, 2020, p. 5), as was and still is the case for many other governments the world over. Besides this, the Chinese government hesitates to strictly control the tobacco industry because it could cause serious social challenges like increasing inflation rates and unemployment (Leng & Mu, *ibid*).

Aside from the appealing features of cigarette packs, the enormous quantity of point of sale (POS) outlets promotes tobacco exposure for both smokers and non-smokers. China has no POS advertising or display prohibitions. Chinese shoppers can readily find tobacco packs and cartons in shops and supermarkets. Consumers are drawn to the flashy packaging, because the cigarette packs' visual warnings are neither prominent nor eye-catching.

In sum, as a health-information communicator in China, tobacco packaging's feeble media impact is heavily reliant on the authorities' continued support for tobacco consumption. CNTC's intention remains to promote the sale by cigarette packs advertising rather than stop smoking. Warning messages do appear, because the FCTC asked the industry to do so; on the other hand, out of concern for long-term economic development, messages are not as strongly worded and illustrated as could be. Additionally, China's tobacco economy is also growing under the "protection" of the FCTC, because it merely gives a simple directive of warnings being "(iii) large, clear, visible and legible, (iv) should be 50% or more of the principal display areas and shall be no less than 30% of the principal display areas" (WHO, 2003, p. 10). Hence, the initiatives from the FCTC regarding stop smoking campaigns has only a tiny influence on the CNTC's advertising practice, because it provides continued flexibility for tobacco packaging in China. Also, "Healthy China 2030" is a "slowly-moving" or "long-term" project,

so its current influence is minimal.

On the other hand, the great deal of POS and the unregulated POS display greatly increases the cigarette pack's media effects in persuading the consumer to shop for tobacco products since the pack is well designed and the effect of the PSA is weak. Moreover, smoking, sharing cigarettes, and giving cigarettes as gifts have been viewed as a crucial socialising culture in Chinese people's social lives, which increases the re-exposure rate of cigarette cartons in public and private during interpersonal communication acts (Leng & Mu, 2020; Qin, 2011; Kohrman, 2007; Dong et al., 2007). Thus, in the following subsection, I will focus on Chinese smokers and their impact on non-smokers.

### **Consumer Culture in the Chinese Tobacco Market**

“China has the largest smoking population in the world, with around 316 million adult smokers, and accounts for nearly one-third (30%) of smokers and 40% of tobacco consumption worldwide” (Parascandola & Xiao, 2019). In current China, there are 296 million male smokers, but female smokers are merely 1.18 million in numbers (Wang & Xiao, 2021, p. 938). Tobacco use is a primary source of disease and mortality globally, accounting for six million deaths per year. (Tindimwebwa, Ajayi, & Adeniyi, 2021, p. 1). Leng & Mu (2020, p. 2) noted that by 2004, about one million Chinese died from smoking-related diseases annually, and this number is expected to reach two million by 2025.

Despite many Chinese being aware that smoking may bring severe sickness and even death, and the warnings on cigarette packs to discourage smoking, the number of smokers in China has remained stable for over a decade. Based on the previous discussion, there are probably four reasons for this phenomenon. First of all, as a health-information medium, the pack's media effects are too weak (Cheng, McBride, & Phillips, 2013). Second, as part of a commercial campaign, the pack is too attractive (Qin et al., 2011). Third, China has a strong cigarette sharing and gifting culture (Leng & Mu, 2020; Qin, 2011; Kohrman, 2007). Fourth, cigarette consumption/usage serves as a metaphor for one's status (Li et al., 2015). As the first and second factors have already been analysed in the preceding paragraphs, I will now pay attention to the third and fourth points. Also, since the number of Chinese smokers is predominately male, the “smoker” in the following discussion points largely to Chinese male smokers.

#### **Exposure to Cigarette Packs During Interpersonal Communication**

In aggregate, two main activities lead Chinese people to be frequently exposed to cigarette packets: (1) sharing cigarettes; (2) giving cigarettes as a gift. These two kinds of activities are common among adults and adolescents due to the absence of explicit rules regulating the minimum age for tobacco usage in China (Leng & Mu, 2020). In addition, giving cigarettes as a gift is widespread between Chinese smokers and non-smokers (Qin et al., 2011), increasing the frequency of non-smokers' exposure to cigarette packs and the likelihood that they might take up smoking.

Social custom is a major impediment to cigarette regulation in China (Kohrman, 2007). In China's Confucian society, *guanxi* and *renqing* occupy a very important position in social relationships; the former emphasises personal networking connections, and the latter addresses repaying favours in a relationship (Huang & Lu, 2017; Zhang & Weng, 2019; Wang, Siu, & Barnes, 2008). Research has found that cigarette sharing is an effective way to show respect and courtesy; hence, it is very widespread in many social contexts among members of various

economic groups, including physicians, merchants, and labourers (Dong et al., 2007). Furthermore, Cheng, McBride, & Phillips have discovered that in China, when smokers leave an employment, many of them are willing to stop smoking; but reasons for this fact are completely clear; however, it can be speculated that cigarette sharing is an important part of professional bonding at the workplace. Moreover, Leng & Mu (2020, p. 7) point out that sharing cigarettes “can be repeated many times, lasting several hours, and it not only promotes an active social interaction between men but also contributes to the consumption of a variety of cigarettes”.

Giving cigarettes (usually meaning cartons of cigarettes) as gifts is a well-documented social act in China. According to Qin et al. (2011, p.7), beautifully decorated “packaging and the high prevalence of cigarette smoking among males make cigarettes popular for gifting in social communication”. This kind of activity is happened not only among smokers but also between non-smokers and the smokers. Also, interviewees state that much of the time, non-smokers will actively get touch with smokers for enquiring about tobacco-related information (like brand, price, and taste) when they are planning to give cigarettes to their friends, bosses, leaders, etc.; also, some these non-smokers end up becoming smokers in the process of acquiring this information. Moreover, Leng and Mu (2020, p.7) indicate that “even for non-smokers, cigarettes are a suitable gift as well because they can transfer the cigarettes to their smoking friends and family members, thus saving them from buying gifts for others”. Thus, giving cigarettes increases not only smokers’ but also non-smokers’ exposure to cigarette packs. Besides the essential social function of sharing and giving cigarettes, consumer culture also contributes to China’s high smoking prevalence. Although “giving cigarette is giving harm..., the current Chinese warning labels have a limited effect on not giving cigarettes as a gift” (Qin et al., 2011, p. 7).

### **Cigarette Consumption/Usage Symbolises One’s Status**

First and foremost, smoking is a symbolisation of [Confucian] masculinity in China (Leng & Mu, 2020, p. 7), even though many men smoke to alleviate stress. One qualitative study indicates that nowadays, in second-and-third tier cities of China, “men and smoking can’t be separated. The two have become one”, as the connotation of smoking is highly associated with economically successful men, men’s high social status, good relationships with others, “powerful” husbands in families, and so on (Mao, Bristow, & Robinson, 2013, p. 161). Thus, the above is probably a powerful explanation for why almost all smokers in China are men.

Along with visually appealing packaging, Chinese tobacco packaging has been thoughtfully created to distinguish individual brands amongst customers in order to better satisfy the demands of a broader spectrum of consumers and represent their varying socioeconomic positions. According to Li et al. (2015, p. 28), “most consumers of very expensive cigarettes may use them as a type of ‘status good’, that is, to signal that person’s economic and social status to others, rather than for normal everyday consumption”. CNTC current provides a wide price range for cigarettes (from ¥2 to more than ¥100); low-income and middle-income consumers are more likely to switch from low-price brands to higher-priced brands, as it is perceived as a symbol of success. However, this will expose them to a wider variety (and possibly higher number) of cigarette packs.

The above is a summary and analysis based on established studies. In order to gain a better knowledge of Chinese smokers, a qualitative research study using focus groups was conducted and its results will be displayed in the next section.

## Qualitative Research

In order to find participants for the study, I have joined one Social Medium, a WeChat group with currently 436 members and which has been in existence since 2017. It is a smoker's paradise, as smokers discuss cigarette puffs and share knowledge about cigarettes with each other there. Also, my interviewees are all smokers, so I had difficulty finding a suitable meeting room—a place for eight people to smoke at the same time. Thus, participants were recruited from this WeChat group via convenience sampling. Research was conducted through video calling on WeChat for providing my interviewees with a relaxed environment (they can smoke whenever they want). These eight interviewees were male, between the ages of 25 and 45, have smoked for at least five years, and consumed at least ten different cigarette brands. To preserve the anonymity of my interviewees, they were marked as M1, M2, M3..., and M8 in this article. Here, I would like to make a special introduction to M4; he is the chat master of the WeChat group, who has been selling tobacco in China for more than 15 years (selling both domestic and foreign brands) and whose parents both work for CNTC.

Building upon previous literature research, the following questions were addressed to solicit smokers' opinions, remarks, and comments on Chinese tobacco packaging.

1. Why do you smoke?
2. Have you ever seen any anti-smoking campaigns, and what do you think of these ads? (if they all said “no”, I would remind them the cigarette pack is a kind of anti-smoking ad itself.)
3. Does the visual design of tobacco packaging affect your tobacco consumption, and, if yes, how?

First, it was interesting that my interviewees were all caught off guard when I posed the first question. It seemed that this short and simple question was difficult for them to answer. After about three minutes, M5 said that:

*I was probably heavily influenced by my father. My father is a smoker. When I was a child, he would smoke in front of me, and when I saw the smile of pleasure on his face as he smoked, I wanted to try it. However, at that time, my father forbade me to smoke, and I was afraid to do so for fear of being beaten up. However, you know, people are always tempted to taste the forbidden fruit. Thus, during my senior year in middle school (at the age of 14), I purchased a pack of cigarettes and smoked covertly, which was the first time I smoked.*

Following M5's answer, five other participants said that they had had similar experiences. Their smoking fathers had a massive impact on them, and they wanted to engage in activities that were considered prohibited for children by their parents. Their statements are in line with the finding of Grandpre et al. (2003) in some respects. These researchers found that children aged 9 to 15 are at significant risk of tobacco usage, and anti-smoking interventions will sometimes cause them to smoke in the first place. My interviewees' answers indicated that their first smoking experience happened when they were junior high school students (12-15). However, M6's words reflect the fact that cigarettes are really a convenient means of socialising in China, as he said that:

*I smoked when I was in junior high school because it made me look more “bad” and made me blend in with the other “bad” students very quickly. We smoked together; we shared cigarettes; we then were good friends. Also, this significantly reduced the likelihood of me*

*being bullied at school because the bully was my friend.*

Additionally, M1 and M7 added that they wanted to smoke when they were three or four years old because the tobacco packaging was too attractive.

*The Chinese tobacco packaging was even better looking than my candy packaging; I always thought that was a pack of candy for grown-ups when I was little. I had a fondness for cigarette packs (M1).*

When asked where they had seen the cigarettes at that time (at the age of 3 to 4), they said they saw it in the convenience store when they were buying candy. I then asked, “If you did not ask your parents to buy them for you?” M1 replied,

*Of course, I have asked my parents to buy them. But then the adults, including the shopkeeper, would have a good laugh when they heard it. Sometimes my parents would explain that it was terrible for my health and that children should not use it. But at that time, I was too young to understand the concept of health hazards, and there were all kinds of cigarette cases behind the glass window, so colourful and dazzling that you couldn't see the hazards. I couldn't read or write at that time, and I could only read pictures. As I got older, I learned about the dangers of smoking, but I still wanted to fulfil my childhood dream (try tobacco).*

M1's answer was echoed by many other interviewees. Past research had shown that youth are more aware of and like tobacco advertisements than adults (Grandpre et al. 2003). However, their research does not explain if this is because children are more curious than adults or because cigarette packaging is particularly appealing to children. Nevertheless, M1's words reflect that to illiterate people (especially young children), pictorial warnings will be more effective in showing the dangers of smoking.

As per question #2, many participants indicated that when they were in primary school, sometimes the school would organise trips to see public service announcements about quitting smoking and drugs. But after junior high school, they basically did not see them anymore. However, M8 said that he just saw an anti-smoking campaign while smoking (he showed us his Hong Kong version of the package of the cigarette brand *Furong Wang* while talking; the box is almost completely covered with a warning picture).<sup>1</sup> The other participants were puzzled by M8's words and questioned whether this could be considered an anti-smoking advertisement. They tend to see anti-smoking advertising as a video or poster appearing on television, in newspapers, and on other online mainstream media. After I explained that the pack is a kind of anti-smoking campaign, M1 argued that,

*I agree with M8. His Hong Kong cigarette box does look like a tobacco control ad. I have also bought the European version of Marlboro, which is very different from Chinese Marlboro, as some uncomfortable pictures are placed on the packs. But I do not think warnings on the Chinese cigarette packs [Chinese domestic brands] are anti-smoking ads. I believe advertising has to be convincing, and the Chinese cigarette boxes just have the words “smoking is harmful to health” on them. It is just a piece of very common knowledge rather than advertising warning; the text warning seems like a superficial way of dealing with some legal provisions.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Furong Wang* is a leading Chinese tobacco brand; it is produced in mainland China.

However, after M1's address, an interesting thing happened because at least three other participants contradicted him. M4's words (M4's remarks seemingly led the discussion and would extend the discussion to question three as well:

*I would like to say that although the threatening pictures could be effective in discouraging smoking in some foreign countries, in the current Chinese market, the horrifying images are very attractive to a lot of young Chinese smokers. This is because the box with threatening visuals is perceived as “coolness” and “mystique.” Many of my customers have asked me to help them find some foreign versions of cigarettes with scary pictures; the scarier, the better). This made me feel very confused. As a businessman, I needed to understand my customers' wants and needs. Thus, I did some short interviews with them. Most of my clients said that cigarette boxes with threatening pictures are rare in the Chinese market; hence, when they take the pack out and share it with their friends, their friends are amazed and can hardly wait to smoke because the box is so rare. The box is cool and mysterious.*

After M4 finished his contribution, all the other participants agreed with him. They said they had similar experiences and wanted to try the cigarette packaged by threatening pictures when they first saw it. This is a very interesting point. It reflects that instead of discouraging smoking, threatening images will attract more consumers in the current Chinese market, even though some other researchers have demonstrated that deterrent pictures are effective in discouraging smoking (Evans et al., 2013) and exhort non-smokers not to start smoking (Noar et al., 2015). But Grandpre et al. (2003) found that as teenagers mature, several effective anti-tobacco interventions lose their early advantages. Second, Droulers et al. (2017, p. 2) aggregate research which shows that threatening visual warnings have little or no influence on people's [adult smokers] responses and behavioural intentions toward smoking. These results may be explained by smokers' cognitive dissonance: individuals may resist threatening images by downplaying the harm, dismissing the issue, or disregarding the message.

Additionally, M6 commented that,

*I am not sure whether you guys have noticed that, in addition to the attractiveness of cigarette packs with threatening images, a kind of pure white cigarette pack [plain packaging] also draws Chinese consumers towards them. Strictly speaking, these cigarettes are not a commodity, as they are not available in shops and can only be obtained by those [a privileged stratum, namely governmental officials] with special access to them. These plain white packs are very popular. Some non-smoking officials who have these cigarettes will sell them on the second-hand market, and these goods are highly sought-after because they represent a unique social status and position in China.*

M4 explained that,

*Cigarettes in this type of plain packaging really cannot be considered a commodity, as money will not buy them. In the early days, these cigarettes would have been regarded as a special item for government officials only since the absence of brand labels and other visual cues made it more challenging to determine the price. However, these special offers were slowly withdrawn over a decade ago. The white packets of cigarettes that can be seen today are experimental products of new cigarette brands or so-called counterfeit cigarettes not produced by CNTC [illegal goods].*

Through M6's words and M4's two statements, we can see that plain and threatening packing does not always discourage smoking or reduce cigarette consumption. Conversely, such packaging stimulates consumer curiosity, and in particular, the plain packaging can represent a high level of power and social status in Chinese consumer culture.

As the discussion about the visual effects of tobacco packaging on consumption seemed to be slowly going off-topic, respondents were asked to list one or two favourite brands that they thought had the greatest design appeal (regardless of price and taste). Also, they were asked to indicate what they liked and disliked about them in terms of the visual design. Respondents offered three brands as their most popular choices, as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Three Popular Chinese Cigarette Brands

Brands	Strengths	Weaknesses	Price (RMB)
Figure 1. Ruan Zhong Hua (软中华). <sup>1</sup> 	Red colour has been heavily used. Red is widely perceived as a lucky, festive, and cheerful colour in China. Hence, this brand is suitable for various kinds of everyday social occasions, especially for the Spring Festival and weddings. Also, the visual element of <i>Hua Biao</i> (“marble pillar”) is placed in the centre of the pack, which shows a sense of tradition and “orthodoxy”.	The brand has not updated its packaging in decades, so it looks a bit dated.	70
Figure 2. Huanghe Lou 1916 (黄鹤楼 1916). <sup>2</sup> 	The brand name is written in <i>Zhuan Ti</i> (“seal script”) with other visual elements such as the images of the crane and Huanghe Lou (“yellow crane tower”) to give the packaging a harmonious look. The name of the brand is also identical with an ancient Chinese poem, which most Chinese students will be aware of and drawn to, as they perceive the poetic meaning in the packaging. In addition, the whole pack is made up of dark and light yellow. Yellow was only used by royalty in ancient China, and thus displays a sense of grandeur.	It is perfect.	100
Figure 3. He Tianxia (和天下). <sup>3</sup> 	The brand name is written in <i>Cao Ti</i> (“cursive script”), which produces a lively and “manly” feeling. Also, a mix of deep purple and violet looks mysterious.	The size of the brand name should be bigger.	100

First, it can be seen from Table 1 that the cigarette brands the respondents like and consider to

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://img1.cnxiangyan.com/2021/1103/61823543e54a3.png?x-image-process=style/sy>  
On 17 December 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://cnxiangyan-upload.xiazai63.com/uploads/180502/2-1P502141J5K1.jpg>  
On 17 December 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://img1.cnxiangyan.com/2021/1124/619e00f626b66.png?x-image-process=style/sy>  
on 17 December 2021.

be better-designed all are high-end brands. This might reflect the fact that the current Chinese tobacco industry is market-driven, because the more expensive the cigarette brand, the more sophisticated the packaging design. Also, as per the weakness of the packaging design, none of the participants said that they felt the warning text negatively influenced the visual effects of the entire tobacco package and then their consumption; they seemed to ignore the warning text naturally. When they were asked to list some warning words they knew of for the cigarette box, seven of them simply said, “Smoking is bad for your health”. Only M4 successfully listed the other warning labels currently used by CNTC in China; these are “Do not smoke in smoke-free places”, “Discourage young people from smoking”, and “No smoking for primary and secondary school students” (for more details, cf. CNTC, 29 September 2019). The above evidence shows that the warning text has no media effects on anti-smoking campaigns, or at least so for the respondents in this study.

### **Final Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the above discussion, it is safe to conclude that the media power of Chinese tobacco packaging is conflicted, because Chinese tobacco packaging does double duty as commercial advertising (attracting the consumer) and PSA (dissuading the consumer). In the research at hand, media power and health communication theories were applied to explore media effects of Chinese tobacco packaging. Results suggest that Chinese tobacco packaging has powerful media effects as a form of commercial advertising, but as a PSA, it has minimal media effects for discouraging smoking.

According to Yuan, Head, & Du (2003, p. 8), media effects are influenced by four main factors in the communication process. Since these researchers study net-based media, I slightly adjusted the four influential factors to make them applicable to my research. They are communication efficiency (the strength of the communication), communication effectiveness (the quality of the communication), positive social-emotional communication, and negative social-emotional communication.

Communication efficiency is achieved via tobacco packaging in China, since tobacco advertising cannot be published in traditional and online media in China. Also, anti-tobacco advertising is uncommon in China, and thus it is tobacco packaging that becomes the final communicator for both promoting and discouraging tobacco use in China. To enhance and promote tobacco consumption, CNTC has licensed tremendous distribution points and POS nationwide. There is no POS display ban in China, so people can easily access cigarette packs in various shops and supermarkets. Also, owing to the fact that China has many smokers and a strong cigarette sharing and giving culture., the cigarette pack has high visibility in public, and is therefore an efficient communicator.

As Chinese tobacco packaging is beautifully designed, warning pictures have never been used, and warning texts only occupy a tiny part of the package; hence, the pack is more effective in promoting tobacco consumption and minimally successful in promoting anti-smoking goals. There are many reasons for this result. First, the first and most important reason is that government revenues are currently dependent on the tobacco economy. Second, the FCTC does not oblige all countries to use picture warnings which provides flexibility for the tobacco packaging design in China. Despite the current public criticism of overly “garish” tobacco packaging, CNTC, as a state-owned enterprise, is virtually immune to its influence. There is some consolation in the fact that the Chinese government, mindful of long-term development and health reasons (“Health China 2030”), has promised some improvements, such as

increasing the font size of the warning text, increasing the colour contrast between the text and the background, and adding more warning messages. However, the evidence above still suggests that, whether tobacco packaging in China is market-oriented or health-communication-oriented, depends on the government's policy, will, and the level of economic development of the country.

Furthermore, the sharing and giving of cigarettes as gifts play an important role in China's social and cultural environment, and smoking is widely considered manly and a sign of economic success. This dramatically increases the exposure of the tobacco pack in the interpersonal communication process. In addition, as evidenced by the participants of the study conducted, the warning graphics on some foreign cigarette packs may not discourage some young Chinese customers from trying them, but rather serve as a source of attractiveness and curiosity. Also, since plain packaging design represents belonging to a privileged class in the Chinese cultural context, it does not have the effect of eliminating brand awareness in China.

Based on the above, we can see that smoking in China largely still produces positive social-emotional communication effects. It helps enhance social network connections, construct personal status, and foster trust among people. Smoking does also produce negative socio-emotional connotations, as everyone knows that smoking is bad; but it seems that not many people care. This clearly demonstrates that for various reasons, cigarette packaging has not been successful in achieving its health communication objectives in China.

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