

TRANSDISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC CONFERENCE FOR EMERGING SCHOLARS

TRACES 2025

28. 06. 2025

BOOK OF **ABSTRACTS**

Editors:
TSE Sheung Hei
NG Yui Hin



TRANSDISCIPLINARY
ACADEMIC CONFERENCE
FOR EMERGING SCHOLARS

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Transdisciplinary Academic Conference for Emerging Scholars

TRACES 2025

Book of Abstracts

28 June 2025

The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

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Dedication

To Professor Gray KOCHHAR-LINDGREN,
whose compassion, wisdom, and mentorship have shaped who we are.

And to friends of TRACES,
whose unwavering support made this conference possible.

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Society of Innovation in Health and Social Well-being, Hong Kong Baptist University

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Foreword

*KOCHHAR-LINDGREN Gray**

School of Humanities (Comparative Literature), The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
SAR

What is a trace? A movement of the hand that leaves a mark. A line on paper, for example, or the ink on the tattooed skin. A trace is a sign of the passage of something, animals for instance, along a pathway. It is something we follow, the scent of clues during an investigation, which is sometimes called “learning” or an “experiment.” What force is it that draws each of us forward more deeply into the currents of learning, into the currents of the arabesques of our own passage through time, sometimes called “our life”? We are traversed by an infinity of traces and we are incessantly leaving our own traces as we travel. We carry each other along through the networks of passages of the (non)human world. Rather than tracing what is already there, we are at the edges of actualizing something new.

Offering undergraduates a unique opportunity to work across disciplines and sectors to create new knowledge and to weave new points-of-contact, TRACES emerged from Shum Hou Zit (Damien), Tse Sheung Hei (Odo), Ng Yui Hin and Li Chun Hong (Philip)’s participation in the HKU Common Core’s 2024 Transdisciplinary Research & Writing Fellowship on Critical Zones: Water in Hong Kong (<https://commoncore.hku.hk/cc-ug-research/td-student-research/>). Two of these founders first presented the paper that they composed for the seminar at an academic conference in Dublin and were then inspired to generously extend their experience through an invitation open to their fellow HKU students, others across Hong Kong universities, and then undergraduates from around the world.

Run by students for students, TRACES has invited peers to submit papers, to present at the first inaugural conference, and—for selected contributions—to publish in the TRACES Chronicle (which includes an ISBN number to better track readers and citations). These are all essential learning opportunities that share research, writing, time-management, and presentation practices for all undergraduates across all majors. This is innovative transdisciplinarity at its best.

The term “transdisciplinarity” has a complex history, which we can only begin to trace in the barest of outlines. It is, in important ways, tied to the profound transitions of the European Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the growing importance of science and reason. This context shaped the emergence of the German model of the research university, first founded at the University of Berlin in 1810 under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humboldt. This new model of the university would focus on research, teaching, the development of globally aware citizens, and connections between universities, the state, and regional centres of economic activity. Sound familiar?

With the further explosion of scientific knowledge, the industrial revolution, and the needs of capitalism for new forms of knowledge and human capital, this model was emulated in other

places and new disciplines began to form into specialisms, which eventually becomes the full-fledged university of disciplinarity during the 20th century. There was, however, always a latent tension in the dominance of the disciplines because of the ongoing emergence of new knowledge across the board, the tension between research and teaching, and the desire to help shape a holistic life for the students.

John Dewey, an American pragmatist, persuasively addressed an early version of this ongoing tension, and—to skip many steps—with the arrival of nuclear power, a new globalisation, systems theory, the explosion of computing machines, knowledge across scales from the nano to the cosmic, and an accelerating range of crises in society, ecology, and knowledge itself, other shifts toward transdisciplinarity began to occur. Most prominently this initially occurred in the natural sciences, but other faculties were changing rapidly as well. This, in turn, often fractured the social sciences into a quantitative-qualitative split; strained the relationship of “professional” (Law, Business, Education, Engineering, Architecture) and “non-professional” degrees; and foregrounded the humanities and the arts around questions of value, meaning and personal development even as all of these fields were themselves all undergoing fundamental changes.

This history is, of course, merely the sketchiest of sketches, but by the late 1960s there were multiple experiments underway in university structures and curricula that opened toward the inter- and the trans-disciplinary across all fields. There are now a multitude of transdisciplinary programmes within universities such as the Common Core in many different forms, BASC programmes and double-majours, and explicitly cross-disciplinary degrees that are arriving at an accelerated speed.

In addition, there have more recently been notable examples of the emergence of entirely new Faculties of Transdisciplinarity, such as at the University Technology Sydney, the University of Zurich, the London Interdisciplinary School, the Olin School of Engineering and, in many different forms, all of the publicly funded universities in Hong Kong. These impulses have continued to spread around the world in order to complement, and not (usually) to replace, the need for specialised knowledge as one of the requirements of our global knowledge economy. There is both a desire and a necessity for the ongoing reconfiguration of the university experience for both undergraduates and post-graduates.

TRACES—as an organizational, conceptual, and social innovation—is an important indicator of such changes. It brings curious and highly capable students together in the midst of their undergraduate experience to explore a variety of methods for addressing the most vexed problems and questions of our times. The goal, initially, is to find methodologically astute means of responding to, not “solving,” this range of crises and conundrums. This experience for students is invaluable for the practice of thinking and learning, of developing skills and dispositions for creatively impactful activity, of imagining forward toward the pathways for meaningful work in the age of AI, and of forging new friendships.

Welcome, then, to TRACES and thank you for leaving your own marks on the page and on the world.

***Gray Kochhar-Lindgren** is an Advisory Board Member of TRACES; an Honorary Professor of Humanities at the University of Hong Kong (where he served as Director of the Common Core between 2014-2022); and Eminent Scholar of Humanities & Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alabama: Huntsville (2025-26). He is also the Lead Editor of *Transdisciplinary Experiments: Research Teaching and Institutionalisation* (UCL Press, forthcoming 2025).

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Preface

“Are you confused enough?” This is a question our mentor, Gray, always loves to ask. It outlines the nature of conducting empirical, conceptual and artistic research. The curiosity to pursue new knowledge is what fuels our adventure into the unknown; the confusion, the stagnation, and the frustration amidst the journey are inevitable. After all, a pioneer must come with an idea to address unexplored issues, and it is certainly not an easy task. If everyone can do that, where is the fun in the pursuit? Curiosity kills a cat, but satisfaction brings it back – this is the motto of our conference.

We believe that the research journey, especially for undergraduate students, can be enhanced through a network of support and a platform of expression. Transdisciplinary Academic Conference for Emerging Scholars (TRACES) is, however, more than a conference for academic dialogues; it is a student-initiated project from a group of HKU undergraduate students to advocate for transdisciplinary academic rigour. It is organised by emerging scholars and for emerging scholars. We believe that our findings are more than an assignment and a grade; they are the output of our dedication. Therefore, we provide an opportunity for every presenter to showcase their hard work, receive feedback for improvement and meet like-minded peers. It is also a golden opportunity for attendees to step outside of their comfort zone and gain insights into an unfamiliar topic.

On behalf of the organising committee, it is our honour to present the Transdisciplinary Academic Conference for Emerging Scholars TRACES 2025 Book of Abstracts. This year, we have received dozens of submissions from across the globe. Among the keen competition, 24 presenters are selected to present at our conference on transdisciplinarity in the sciences and humanities. Their topics range from psychology to history, but all submissions have one feature in common: they adopt a transdisciplinary approach that surpasses conventional methodologies from one specific discipline. By combining expertise from multiple fields and embracing transdisciplinary methodologies, our presenters represent a synthesis of modules and knowledge domains, addressing complex real-life issues. The abstract of each presenter is available for your exploration.

We are grateful to have Prof Javier CHA as our keynote speaker. He is an Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities in the Department of History at the University of Hong Kong, specialising in the intellectual and cultural history of East Asia, digital history, and the intersection of big data with the humanities. His work aligns perfectly with the conference’s theme of fostering innovative, transdisciplinary research, making him an inspiring figure for students eager to explore the future of academic inquiry in a digitally transformed world. In the conference, he will share his insights on the interplay between AI and digital history, which the abstract can be found.

Once again, please allow us to express our deepest gratitude for all your support and participation. We wish you a great day and we are certain there is always something new and unexpected to discover.

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Conference Overview

Themes of the Conference

The very first Transdisciplinary Academic Conference for Emerging Scholars introduces three major themes of transdisciplinary research, celebrating enquiries through discourse and humanity, saga and statecraft, and by mind and innovation to facilitate panel discussions.

Discourse and Humanity stems from humanistic and linguistic research. Scholars explore how their fields intersect with technology and social sciences, employing concepts drawn from artificial intelligence, sociology and geography.

Saga and Statecraft roots itself in historical and socio-political investigation. Emerging scholars employ methods in economics, education and psychology to analyse complex topics such as war, law and public policy.

Mind and Innovation originates from psychological, philosophical and scientific scholarship. Budding researchers tackle pressing issues in mental health, engineering and ethics through transdisciplinary methodologies drawn from various fields.

Together, this conference promotes transdisciplinary undergraduate research through active writing and sharing, highlighting intriguing studies from three main themes of academic exploration.

Programme Rundown

28 June 2025

CPD 4.36, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong Island, Hong Kong SAR

09:00-19:00

09:00-09:30	Reception and Networking
09:30-10:00	Opening Ceremony
10:00-10:45	Keynote Speech by Professor Javier CHA <i>Automating the Past: Artificial Intelligence and the Next Frontiers of Digital History</i> (Q&A session included)
10:45-12:15	First Presentation Session YUM Wang Ngai LIU Yao Si SZETO Wing Kiu HO Jo Wei LOK Yuen Kei XU Caiyu
12:15-12:30	First Panel Discussion
12:30-13:30	Lunch Break
13:30-15:45	Second Presentation Session GAO Xinyue WONG Yu

	KWAN Ho Man Benjamin FERREIRA Ilona NAZIH Marwa LEE Yuen Ching TAI Kwai Nam Marvin LEE Junyong FAN Chun Kiu
15:45-16:00	Second Panel Discussion
16:00-18:15	Third Presentation Session WONG Seng Ying Amber CHAN Jeffrey LIU Hong Yi LACHERAY ALARCON Rose Simone IVANISHVILI Tsotne MAY Alexander P.W. JIANG Haotian YU Jakie YU Man Wai
18:15-18:30	Third Panel Discussion
18:30-19:00	Closing Ceremony

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Keynote Speech

Automating the Past: Artificial Intelligence and the Next Frontiers of Digital History

CHA Javier

School of Humanities (History), The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

This keynote explores the impact that transformer-based machine learning brings to the interpretive work of historians. As historians increasingly encounter vast amounts of digitized and born-digital sources, the challenge has shifted to developing strategies for making sense of large, complex collections with the nuance that historical inquiry demands. The discussion begins with an earlier phase of my research, which aimed to engage in digitally mediated multiscale exploration (“digital (re)reading”) through graph queries and data reuse. Using structured and relatively unambiguous sources, such as biographical data modeled in Neo4j, this phase underscored the potential of digital historical research to uncover latent structures and reveal surprising connections in a manner that preserves the historian’s interpretive agency.

Building on this foundation, I then turn to the present, where my team and I are focused on leveraging large language models (LLMs) and vision-language models (VLMs) to assist with “algorithmic reading” across heterogeneous and semantically complex corpora. This next phase of inquiry explores the affordances of LLMs and VLMs for conducting semantic, stylistic, sentiment, and multimodal analysis, moving decisively beyond the limitations of keyword-based search and frequentist approaches. Whereas the earlier digital macroscopes allowed users to zoom in and out of structured datasets, transformers enable engagement with more affectively and rhetorically rich sources, such as memorials, petitions, contracts, philosophical treatises, ritual guidelines, and poetry.

Finally, I introduce the modular artificial intelligence (AI) framework developed in the DeepPast project, which promotes the use of pluggable, task-specific components running on low-power hardware rather than a hyperscale, monolithic, general-purpose system. The DeepPast architecture supports varying interpretive modes in a flexible environment where the historian purposefully engages in conversation with an AI assistant and research partner—one capable of offering critique, reframing questions, and proposing alternative perspectives. The lecture concludes with a set of guiding principles designed not only to keep the human in the loop but also to produce AI-assisted historical research marked by greater interpretive sophistication.

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Theme I: Discourse and Humanity

Reconsidering Literary Excellence: When AI Imitates an Award-winning Poem

YUM Wang Ngai

Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong SAR

Creativity and diversity have been two of the most noble pursuits in the literary realm. While some claim that local literary competitions encourage such value, some argue that these competitions are usually biased to certain aesthetic preferences and lead to an ossifying fashion of writing. Artificial intelligence (AI) is used in this paper to evaluate the winning odds of different pieces of Chinese Modern poems in a specific poetry contest and to test whether the awarded poems have a prominent tendency to a certain style. The AI used in this experiment is DeepSeek V3 (“DeepSeek”). Names of judges and full text of a poem (which might or might not be awarded) are provided, and the true results of the competition(s) are not disclosed (to mimic a fair judge with the amount of knowledge beyond any human readers). It is found that DeepSeek’s evaluation (i) generally matches the true results and (ii) suggested a set of decisive factors for each case. The results reveal the predictability of certain judgements in local poetry competitions and thus suggest (iii) a potential for replicating the winning features. While such an operation is feasible, the value of human creativity and the diversity of the local literary landscape is put into question. It begs a reconsideration of the common notion of “literary excellence” and urges for revaluation of literary diversity beyond the imitation of AI.

Keywords: Creativity; Diversity; DeepSeek; Modern Poetry; Literary Appreciation; Prize Culture

GIS-based Geospatial Analysis of Language Diversity and Endangerment of New Guinea in Asia-Pacific

LIU Yao Si

Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach integrating sociolinguistics, ecology, cultural geography and computer science to understand the spatial distribution patterns of languages in New Guinea. Using Wurm and Hattori's atlas digitised by Forkel and Hammerström, it examines local-scale correlations with environmental variables and explores the role of nature in language diversity and endangerment. The results reveal intricate human-nature interactions shaping linguistic evolution. Language diversity correlates moderately with biodiversity, but local inconsistencies arise, which do not stem from correlation with population as in the human-nature conflict hypothesis. Elevation appears to lower language endangerment, which is supported by isolation and ecological risk theories. The apparent dichotomic altitude-endangerment correlation in coastal areas is explained with the same theory under sociocultural inspection. Climate has the least correlation with endangerment, yet elevation difference may create differential climatic zones, favouring language stratification as that of species. Individual environmental factors in isolation apparently fail to capture the human-nature interactions; the integral, complex ecosystem dynamics as the backdrop of socioeconomic and cultural influences should be recognised. The study highlights the importance of systematic analysis of language as an ecosystem and calls for biocultural conservation with integrated management strategies.

Keywords: AES; Biocultural; CHANS; Geolinguistics; Homogenisation

How John Donne and William Shakespeare's sonnets challenge the gender and sexuality norms of the Early Modern Period

SZETO Wing Kiu

School of English, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

Sexuality and gender role issues have fascinated literary critics, particularly in the case of those who deviate from established expectations. For example, during the early modern era that was conservative and religious, heterosexuality and masculinity were fundamental social norms. Through the presentation of the range of sexual identities and gender roles in their sonnets, Donne and Shakespeare destabilize these established social norms. This essay looks at how these poets' stories feature submissive male characters that deviate from absolute heterosexuality instead of fitting into the normative masculinity ideal. This paper studies how the narratives of these poets show submissive male images that differ from strict heterosexuality instead of adhering to the dominant masculinity stereotype.

Through the close reading of literary devices in their sonnets, this paper finds out that Donne challenges sexual norms by submitting to religious order with humility, which is presented in a sexual manner, while Shakespeare mainly expresses romantic feelings towards those of the same gender. The sonnets of the poets share a similarity when they both display a submissive male image that challenges the conventional male model of the conservative period.

This paper adopts a comparative literary analysis approach, with an emphasis on identifying gender roles based on close reading of some chosen sonnets. Through analyzing expressive language, imagery, and thematic concerns, it establishes the way Donne and Shakespeare offer multifaceted portrayals of masculinity and sexuality. The discussion also draws from psychological theories, including gender presentation and queer theory to enhance the understanding of these works in the broad fields of English literary studies. Comparing their poetic works to the conservative frames of the Early Modern Period, the research demonstrates the contrast between the poets' queer mentality and societal norms, including religious creeds, traditional masculinity and heterosexuality. These theoretical frameworks offer a basis for studying how the poets' presentation of gender roles and sexualities mirror and contradict these social norms.

Through studying these themes, this study aims to explain the diversity of sexuality and gender among men during a period of conservatism. They not only help us understand the historical significance of these models but also contribute to modern perspectives on gender and sexuality.

Keywords: Gender and Sexuality; Early Modern English; Sonnets; Shakespeare, Donne

East meets West: Gender Performance in Cantonese Opera Performers and Drag Queens

HO Jo Wei

School of English, School of Humanities (History), The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

Cantonese opera performers and drag queens share noticeable similarities, both engaging in acts of gender-bending. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of both forms of performance, examining how each performance respectively negotiates on-stage and off-stage gender identities and how both have challenged gender labels and engaged with queer discourses. Taking on both a gender studies approach and a historical one, this study draws from existing queer literature and gender theories as well as examines historical accounts in addition to existing interviews with performers themselves. Findings show that Cantonese opera performances view gender as a label insofar as a mentality that one can embody completely on-stage and remove off-stage. Meanwhile drag queens tend to disregard the importance of labels as imitating a gender is less important, continuing their queer identities off-stage. On the other hand historically drag queens are more explicitly concerned with the importance of their sexuality and queer resistance, though further inspection shows Cantonese opera performers also cultivated homoerotic undertones in fans and faced obstacles from authorities. This study aims to provoke interest in the juxtaposition of both art forms and reveal different forms of challenging gender binaries across cultures, challenging Eurocentric assumptions of gender performing traditions and queer resistance.

Keywords: Cantonese Opera Performers; Drag Queens; Gender-bending Performance; Gender Embodiment; Queer Advocacy

Reviewing the Translation Wave of Jules Verne: Scientific Fiction as a New Ideological Discourse in the Pre-May Fourth Period

LOK Yuen Kei

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Jules Gabriel Verne was a prominent French novelist who specialised in contemporary scientific fiction and adventure writings in the 18th century. Jules Verne extended his ideological influence from European countries to transitional modern China at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, Chinese intellectuals sought a comprehensive solution to resolve the entrenched symptoms of the imperial Late Qing. The intersection between scientific novels and Western scientific knowledge then opened a gateway for intellectuals to reinvestigate the adaptability of modern science, which was utilized to promulgate enlightenment ideas in the Chinese context. Therefore, Jules Verne became one of the first-wave scientific novelists to be introduced into Chinese society, mainly through translation work and introductory featured articles published in multiple intellectual magazines.

In 1900, Xue Shaohui (薛紹徽) and Chen Shoupeng (陳壽彭) published their collaborative translation work "Around the World in Eighty Days" (《環遊世界八十天》) in the Literary Society of National Management (經世文社), contributing to the earliest public exposure of Jules Verne in China. Since then, the scientific novels of Jules Verne gained the attention of a vast amount of influential Chinese intellectuals who established leadership of Chinese political and cultural movements. For instance, Liang Qichao (梁啟超) and Lu Xun (魯迅) were both involved in the discussion and translation of Verne's work. Their interpretations demonstrated how modern intellectuals resolved the entanglements between Western science and humanitarian concerns.

The key research question would be how Jules Verne's scientific fiction was converted into a national allegory with Chinese literary characteristics throughout the translation process before the 1920s. Then, Western science was incorporated into the existing Chinese ideologies behind the transcultural adaptation and reframed the political blueprint of modern China based on intellectual belief in scientific knowledge and modernity. Does the genre of science fiction enjoy exemption when we criticise the influence of literary politicisation in dominating the stream of literary development? Furthermore, what has been the impact of intellectual mediation through translation in constructing the Chinese populace's vision of a "scientifically modernised China"?

Keywords: Jules Gabriel Verne, Modern Chinese Intellectuals, Obsession with China, Scientific Fiction, Translation and Literature.

Forged Text or Not? A Critical Analysis on the Authenticity of Peng Jiuwan's *Dongpo Wutai Poetry Case* (*dōng pō wū tái shī àn*)

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Wutai Poetry Case (*wū tái shī àn*) refers to the political case caused by Wutai officials, in which Su-Shi, a scholar in Northern Song dynasty, was slandered and went to prison because of his poems. *Dongpo Wutai Poetry Case* (*dōng pō wū tái shī àn*), said to be authored by Peng Jiuwan in Song dynasty, was regarded an official copy of archival records of the poetry case (*shī àn*). This study reveals that while the extant version retains partial characteristics of Song-era judicial archives, it is not likely to be the original records of the Yuanfeng era (1078-1085). This paper examines the authenticity of this text by Peng Jiuwan from multiple perspectives, including textual collation, historical source tracing, institutional analysis, and textual-poetic cross-verification.

Through digital humanities tools, such as Scikit-learn and a collaboration of Python and Jieba, this paper analyzes the doubts in language styles and forms of the selected texts through the summary and reconstruction of the judicial terminology of the Northern Song Dynasty and the comparison of the Wutai Poetry Case. The study reveals that the *Dongpo Wutai Poetry Case* represents a hybrid artifact, neither wholly forged nor authentically archival, but a dynamic cultural product likely to be shaped by evolving historical memory.

Keywords: Wutai Poetry Case; Textual Authenticity; Su Shi; Judicial Archives; Linguistic Analysis

Theme II: Saga and Statecraft

Reassessing the Composition Era of Mu Tianzi Zhuan: A Transdisciplinary Evaluation of Evidence

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This paper critically evaluates competing theories regarding the composition era of Mu Tianzi Zhuan (The Biography of King Mu), a text discovered in the Ji Tomb (281 CE) that blends historical, geographical, and mythological narratives. Through a transdisciplinary synthesis of archaeological, calendrical, and literary scholarship, it examines three primary hypotheses: Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE), Warring States (475–221 BCE), and post-Han forgery. Bronze inscriptions (e.g., Mu Gong Gui, Ban Gui) corroborate historical figures mentioned in the text, such as "Jing Li" and "Mao Ban," supporting early narrative origins. Calendrical reconstructions that align with Zhou-era astronomical records (c. 952–947 BCE) further validate pre-Han origins. Conversely, textual anomalies—including place names, titular usage, and literary motifs—indicate Warring States editorial layers. Collectively, these findings refute post-Han forgery theories while revealing a dual-layered textual history: core traditions likely derive from Western Zhou sources, though the received version appears to reflect Warring States compilation. This study models transdisciplinary methodology through its synthetic approach: weighing archaeological evidence against textual criticism while incorporating scientific data and calendrical reconstructions to verify temporal claims, all contextualized within evolving Chinese historiographical practices. The analysis demonstrates how Mu Tianzi Zhuan's dual temporal structure embodies intersections of history, geography, and mythology, challenging rigid genre classifications and reconceptualizing textual authenticity as a product of temporal layering, thereby contributing to understanding of textual transmission in pre-imperial China through evidence-based interdisciplinary dialogue.

Keywords: Chinese Historiography; Evidence Synthesis; Textual Dating; Transdisciplinarity; Warring States Period

Hello Vietnam, but Why? On the Politics of Financing a Perpetual War

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The Vietnam war was usually studied as a political controversy, and its economic properties largely glossed over. This paper seeks to contrast with such popular conceptions by presenting the war primarily from an economic perspective. To avoid presenting reductionist accounts, a transdisciplinary approach is adopted by combining insights from history, politics, sociology, and international relations under the overall framework of international political economy. By first comparing macroeconomic conditions — under Keynesian interpretations — with biographical evidences of American war leaders, this paper presents economic considerations as integral underpins for the United States' deliberate escalation of the war in 1965. A Marxian analysis was then conducted to study the real wealth transfer during the war, concluding that Europeans supported the United States' wartime prosperity in actuality. Finally, to explain how Nixon conducted American withdrawal from Vietnam without jeopardising previous designs, the socio-economic roles of the American military-industrial complex was articulated; this was done by juxtaposing the geographical relocation of America's armament industry to the South with Republican 'Southern strategy' under contemporary racial politics. These suggest how war as a global issue pertains explanations beyond compartmentalised and linear accounts, while also highlighting inherent war-making incentives in American democracy under the current world order.

Keywords: Vietnam War; War Studies; Modern History; International Political Economy; International Relations; American Studies; Sociology; Politics; Macroeconomics; Civil Rights; Political Realignment

Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: Ideological Foundations and Geopolitical Implications in the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict

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This paper examines Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and its ideological foundations within the context of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, beginning with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent unrest in Eastern Ukraine. It explores the geopolitical motivations behind these actions, emphasizing Dugin's dualistic view of geopolitics, which contrasts Russian-led Eurasianists with US-led Atlanticists. The paper reviews key sections of Dugin's work, *Fundamentals of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia* (Основы геополитики: геополитическое будущее России, *Osnovy geopolitiki: geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*), particularly regarding his vision for establishing Russian control over Ukraine. It investigates the correlation between Dugin's proposals and the Russian Federation's actual invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territories since 2014, revealing a clear parallel between the two. Furthermore, the history of Donbas is briefly introduced to elucidate Dugin's claims regarding the necessity of a Russian-controlled Donbas. The paper compares the strategic goals advocated by Dugin with Russia's military offensives since the full-scale invasion in 2022, referencing war assessment reports published by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). While quantifying the extent of Dugin's influence on Putin's foreign policy based on open sources is challenging, this parallel suggests that Russia's efforts to absorb Ukrainian territories align with Dugin's vision of a Russian-led Eurasian heartland. These actions appear aimed at obstructing Ukraine's alignment with the West, particularly concerning NATO accession.

Keywords: Aleksandr Dugin; Neo-Eurasianism; Russo-Ukrainian War

From the "Forgotten War" to the "Path of Remembrance": A Study of Government Programs on the French UN Battalion in the Korean War — Institutional Discourse and Collective Memory

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Often called the “Forgotten War”, the Korean War remains poorly known in France, even though the French Battalion fought alongside the United Nations between 1950 and 1953. This research addresses the following question: how do ministerial memory-building programs contribute to shaping the collective memory of a "forgotten war" and defining the contours of an official historical narrative? By mixing the disciplines of history, international relations and social sciences (specifically constructivism), this research will shed light on the intricate relationship between states, national memories/psychologies and contemporary diplomacy. Drawing on the theories of Collective Memory, Social Imaginaries and Places of Memory, this study tests two hypotheses: The construction of a collective memory by ministries allows for the construction of a narrative of a war omitted by French society. This memorial construction is not necessarily empirically true (H1), and the construction of this imaginary is carried out through symbols associated with the Jungian heroic archetype, celebrating a "glorious" national and official memory (H2). Finally, this work analyzes the memorial reactivation of state public institutions, legitimizing a narrative that can serve as a bilateral diplomatic tool. This work examines how institutionalized memory is never neutral, but always constructed, raising broader questions about the role of symbolic politics in contemporary French-Korean relations. Both hypotheses are confirmed: ministerial memory-building effectively constructs a collective narrative that reshapes the forgotten status of the war, while simultaneously employing symbolic archetypes to promote a glorified national memory.

Keywords: Collective Memory; Diplomacy; Monuments; Social Imaginaries; Symbolism

The Liancourt Rocks Dispute: A Transdisciplinary Analysis of the Strategic and Symbolic Importance Attributed by South Korea and Japan

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This research focuses on the reasons behind the significance attached to the Liancourt Rocks by Japan and South Korea. It aims to answer the following question: What are the strategic and symbolic motivations that drive both countries to continuously assert their sovereignty over this territory? To do so, the study relies on legal analysis (notably the 1982 UNCLOS and the 1951 San Francisco Treaty), historical primary sources and historiography, geopolitical realism, and economic considerations. This multi-angle analysis allows for a more holistic understanding of the enduring and complex nature of the Liancourt Rocks dispute. The research identifies three main dimensions: historical grievances, the persistent effort to legitimize national identity, and economic strategy. First, the islets allow both countries to assert their regional influence. Second, for South Korea, the dispute is deeply rooted in post-colonial resentment, turning the islets into symbols of liberation from Japanese domination. Third, the desire to expand the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) drives economic interest, as the area offers valuable fishing rights and access to seabed resources such as gas and methane hydrates. Ultimately, this paper raises critical questions about the role of unresolved post-colonial memory in shaping territorial disputes and obstructing prospects for regional cooperation in East Asia.

Keywords: Geopolitics, International Law, Economic Incentives, National Psychology

Reimagining Disability Inclusion in Hong Kong: A Transdisciplinary Analysis of Legal and Cultural Dynamics

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Disability inclusion in Hong Kong, particularly for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is shaped by complex legal, cultural, and social dynamics. This study employs a transdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from law, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies to provide a holistic understanding of the barriers to inclusion. By emphasising neurodiversity, the research focuses on ASD and evaluates the relevance of four disability models—medical, social, charitable, and human rights—arguing for a shift from medical and charitable models to social and human rights models to achieve meaningful inclusion. The study utilises a mixed-methods approach, including surveys designed for autistic and non-autistic individuals, in-depth one-on-one or focus groups interviews, a case study of Hong Kong’s first autism-friendly Art Bus introduced at the AIA Carnival, and a comparative analysis of anti discrimination laws across jurisdictions. Key findings from the surveys reveal that a significant portion of autistic individuals report feeling pressured to camouflage their traits in social situations, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety. Non-autistic respondents often labelled autistic individuals as “unpredictable” or “difficult to communicate with,” reflecting deep-rooted stereotypes. These results highlight both societal stigma and the emotional burden on autistic individuals. The discussion calls for alignment with international best practices, proposing psychological interventions like mindfulness-based therapies and community initiatives to reduce stigma. Beyond statutory requirements, the study advocates for sustained efforts—exemplified by the Art Bus—to foster genuine inclusion. This research suggests that policymakers and practitioners should prioritise different programs to challenge stereotypes and promote neurodiversity, paving the way for a society where all individuals, regardless of neurological differences, can thrive.

Keywords: Accessibility; Neurodiversity; Social Stigma; Community Initiatives; Equity

Hong Kong Local Secondary School Students and Educational Policies Near the End of Colonial Hong Kong – The Case of the *Torch Magazine*

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Histories of the implementation of educational policies have given readers a sense that mainly the government and sometimes educators made effort in the process near the end of colonial Hong Kong. Voices from local secondary school students are largely missing. In this article, I try to renew our understanding of this period by raising two research questions: (1) What was civic education? (2) How did local secondary school students attempt to contribute to implementing civic education? I argue that local secondary school students, acting inside their schools, attempted to help implement civic education, a policy that aimed to nurture citizens with a sense of community and the ability to adapt to political changes. They armed other students with preparedness through a student magazine, involving cooperation with other students and a teacher. To grasp the student voice and discuss the subject in depth, I concentrate on an article regarding civic education found in Ying Wa College's student magazine, the *Torch Magazine*, a rare and unused source I discovered while visiting the College's library. I adopt a transdisciplinary approach: By bringing the discipline of history into conversation with the discipline of education, I aim to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of students' strategies. For instance, I use the idea of "teacher authority" to demonstrate that the editor(s) set up an interview since they considered the teacher authoritative and tried to further reach their goals by granting the teacher authority. By recovering the neglected voices of students, research results show that students used their tactics to prepare other students for an educational policy. Not only does this tell us there were other reactions during the period of Hong Kong's planned handover, but it also reminds us that we could all contribute to one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – Quality Education.

Keywords: Civic Education; Education Department; Quality Education; Student Magazine; Ying Wa College

Analyzing the Success Factors of Third Parties: The Case of the Cho Kuk Innovation Party in South Korea's 22nd General Election

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This study explores how third parties can achieve electoral success in South Korea's predominantly two-party system by integrating insights from political science, sociology, and behavioral psychology, thereby taking a transdisciplinary approach. The central research question asks: What are the necessary conditions that enable the emergence and success of third parties in South Korean parliamentary elections? Focusing on the case of the Cho Kuk Innovation Party during the 2024 general election, the study applies the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) method to qualitatively assess three hypotheses: (1) high levels of split-ticket voting are essential to third-party success; (2) simultaneous public discontent with both major parties creates an opportunity structure; and (3) the presence of a symbolic political figure enhances a third party's legitimacy and visibility. Through comparative analysis with past third-party cases such as the People's Party (2016), Pro-Park Alliance (2008), and the United Liberal Democrats (1996–2000), the study finds empirical support for all three hypotheses. These findings suggest that structural electoral dissatisfaction, identity-driven leadership, and strategic voter behavior are jointly necessary conditions for third-party breakthroughs in Korean politics. The study contributes to the broader field of electoral studies by offering a framework that integrates both institutional and psychological variables, with implications for emerging democracies beyond Korea.

Keywords: Third Party; Cho Kuk Innovation Party; Split-ticket Voting; Retrospective Voting; Symbolic Political Figures; Most Different Systems Design; Transdisciplinarity; 22nd General Election (South Korea)

Progressive Times, Regressive Birth Rates: The Rise and Fall of Hong Kong Babies?

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Since the 1970s, birth rates in Hong Kong have continuously experienced a significant decline, even before the outbreak of COVID-19. To the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK), this is an unexpected outcome of their earlier attempts in advocating birth control after the 1950s to tackle a baby boom. My research begins by exploring in depth the FPAHK's origins, methods deployed by it to advocate family planning in its early years such as promoting sex education and providing technical assistance through practical guidance, success achieved in the late 1970s to early 1980s through the well-known "2 is Enough" public media campaign as well as its fall from grace in the 21st century. I will show how new strategies of the FPAHK failed to appeal to the Hong Kong public, particularly public receptions towards more recent FPAHK campaigns such as "How Many Is Enough" and Hong Kong's population decline, as in the rest of East Asia, might be irreversible. By combining insights from the disciplines of History, Media Studies and Science and Technology Studies (STS), I argue that key to reverse declining birth rate lies in several aspects. Firstly, public perceptions towards older people giving births, which can be observed in news article from media such as the BBC, should be changed in Hong Kong. Secondly, further reducing the cost of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) including In-vitro Fertilization (IVF) can be encouraged. Last but not least, more promotion of egg-freezing among young, unmarried women should be endorsed by the Hong Kong government, going further than their current efforts in the matter. My research concludes by projecting the possible severe impacts that a possibly irreversible decline in birth rates can bring to Hong Kong society through the lens of what East Asian regions are facing.

Keywords: ART; Birth; Control; Family; Planning

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Theme III: Mind and Innovation

Social Support is Associated with More Abstinence in a Community Smoking Cessation Program in Hong Kong

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Aims

To assess the association of social support, in addition to smoking cessation interventions, and smoking abstinence.

Methods

Community daily adult smokers joined a smoke-free campaign (12th “Quit to Win” Contest) in Hong Kong, in which they received different types of smoking cessation interventions. Biochemical validated past 7-day abstinence (through exhaled carbon monoxide and saliva cotinine) was assessed at 3 and 6 months after intervention initiation. Self-reported past 7-day point prevalence abstinence (PPA), smoking reduction, quit attempts, and use of smoking cessation services were assessed at 1, 2, 3, and 6 months follow ups. Social support was assessed by asking participants whether they received any support during the 3-month program, with responses of "No Support", "Partner", "Children", "Parents", "Siblings", "Relatives", "Medical staff", "Colleagues", "Friends," and "Others". Multivariable logistic regression examined the prospective association between social support and smoking abstinence, adjusting for different intervention types, sex, age, education, nicotine dependence level, quit attempts, and readiness to quit.

Results

Of the 1461 participants, 79.9% was male and 64.0% was aged 18-49 years. A total of 53.0% (750/ 1461) reported receiving at least one type of social support. The types of social support with the highest prevalence included friends (484/ 1461), partners (306/ 1461) and colleagues (248/ 1461). Receiving any types of social support was significantly associated with more validated abstinence (aOR 5.47, 95% CI 3.29-9.10), self-reported past 7-day PPA (aOR 3.60, 95% CI 2.59-5.00), smoking reduction (aOR 4.72, 95% CI 3.37-6.61) and quit attempts (aOR 4.89, 95% CI 3.80-6.30) at 6 months. Similar findings were observed for all smoking cessation outcomes at 3 months.

Conclusion

The presence of social support during smoking cessation interventions is associated with higher rates of abstinence.

Keywords: Association; Smoking Abstinence; Smoking Cessation; Smoking Cessation Intervention; Social Support

The authors have provided additional attachments for references. Please refer to the appendix.

Kantian Intuitionism and Social Intuitionist Model: An Investigation in Explaining Moral Judgement and a Possibility of a Hybrid Model

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Introduction

The tension between Robert Audi's Kantian intuitionism and Jonathan Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) exposes a foundational debate in moral philosophy: Is moral judgment rooted in universal rational principles or socially conditioned intuitions? The former approach proposed by Audi who synthesizes W.D. Ross's prima facie duties with Kantian deontology, positing that moral judgments arise through reflective equilibrium, a deliberative process harmonizing intuitions (grasping of prima facie duties) with ethical principles (Kant's Formula of Humanity). In contrast, Haidt's SIM, grounded in empirical psychology, argues that moral judgments are intuitive, emotion-driven responses later rationalized by reasoning.

Methodology

The investigation divides into three parts such as evaluating the empirical challenges to Audi's rational intuitionism, defends intuitionism's compatibility with psychological findings, and identifies pathways for an interdisciplinary hybrid model.

Empirical Challenges to Rationalism

Haidt's experiments reveal a critical gap in Audi's framework: If moral judgments rely on deliberative reasoning, why do subjects condemn actions even when their justifications are systematically refuted? On behalf of Audi, I believe he might counter that dumbfounding reflects a lack of deliberative skill, not the absence of principled grounding. However, this defence raises concerns about psychological realism: Is Audi's framework a purely theoretical ideal, or does it accurately describe how humans form moral judgments in practice? If even educated individuals struggle to articulate principled reasoning in dilemmatic cases, can reflective equilibrium truly explain everyday moral decision-making? Haidt's empirical findings suggest that intuitive processes dominate real-world judgments, while Audi's model risks relegating reasoning to an elitist tool accessible only to those trained in ethical philosophy. This tension underscores a deeper methodological divide: Audi's rationalist approach prioritizes normative rigor, whereas Haidt's empiricism prioritizes descriptive accuracy.

Building on the role of moral reasoning, the discussion led to debate about the source of moral judgment and its explanatory power. Haidt can further contest Audi's intuitionism by emphasizing cultural variability in moral norms, for instance, Western individualism's prioritization of fairness versus Eastern collectivism's focus on communal harmony. If prima

facie duties are self-evident, why do societies rank them differently? Audi might respond by distinguishing principles from applications: Universal duties manifest contextually without compromising their objectivity. For example, the duty of beneficence might require supporting individual autonomy in Western contexts but emphasize familial obligations in collectivist societies. Both align with the same foundational duty: promoting others' legitimate ends, as mandated by Kant's Formula of Humanity. While cultural norms shape how duties are enacted, the underlying principles remain invariant. If such a response succeeds, the debate will ultimately centre on justifying self-evident *prima facie* duties and the account in influence of socio-cultural norms. However, the methodological differences between rationalist philosophy and empirical psychology may confine each theory's explanations within its own paradigm.

Toward a Hybrid Model: Integrating Strengths and Mitigating Limitations

To further investigate the explanation of moral judgment, especially its relationship with moral intuition, and avoid the loop of confinement within own paradigm, I extract strengths from Audi and Haidt's framework and propose a possible hybrid model. Briefly, Audi's Kantian intuitionism provides normative rigor by grounding morality in self-evident duties, ensuring meta-ethical objectivity. On the other hand, Haidt's SIM excels at explaining moral diversity through social conditioning. By forming a hybrid model with the strengths of both framework, two immediate challenges in moral philosophy can be solved. Regarding the possible integration, Audi's concept of reflective equilibrium need not conflict with Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model (SIM). I identify Haidt's insight that intuitions can be "educated" through social learning, a strength that parallels Audi's emphasis on refining intuitions via reason, which brings normative rigor. For example, social ethical training could align individuals' gut responses with *prima facie* duties, thereby transforming raw intuitions into principled judgments.

While SIM effectively explains how laypeople form moral judgments, Audi's framework offers a prescriptive path for moral improvement. If these approaches are successfully integrated, they can jointly account for moral progress in practice. For example, legal systems often exemplify this synthesis: judges may initially intuit outcomes based on precedent and social context (as Haidt's model describes) but ultimately justify their rulings through the reasoned application of ethical principles, as in Audi's reflective equilibrium. This integration illustrates how intuitive processes, and principled reasoning can work together to guide moral decision-making in complex real-world contexts.

Conclusion

A hybrid model, where cultural intuitions are refined through deliberative reasoning, could resolve tensions, preserving moral objectivity while acknowledging the intuitive roots in practice

Keywords: Moral Intuition; Moral Judgment, Kantian Intuitionism; Social Intuitionist Model

Beyond the Brain: A Material Approach to the Social Dimensions of Mindfulness in Chinese Chan Buddhist Coffee Meditation in Hong Kong

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Mindfulness, derived from the Pali term *sati* and originating in ancient Indian Buddhism, underwent secularization in the United States during the late 1970s. This process led to secular mindfulness, often by removing Buddhist ethics and cultivation. This de-contextualization allows mindfulness to be applied ubiquitously but raises concerns about the lack of ethical guidance, potentially leading to unintended consequences. Nowadays, mindfulness scholarship has been predominant in scientific fields, and critiques from philosophical perspectives point out that this can lead to viewing mindfulness as solely a neural activity in human brains, obscuring the social dimensions of mindfulness. While existing social psychological and anthropological approaches to mindfulness acknowledge human interactions, this paper argues for a broader understanding of the “social” that incorporates material agency, drawing on the “materiality turn” in religious studies and anthropology to challenge anthropocentrism. This paper demonstrates a material perspective on the social dimensions of mindfulness through a study of coffee meditation in Chinese Chan Buddhism at the Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre. As practiced at DDMHK, coffee meditation involves monks and practitioners engaging in the mindful preparation and consumption of hand-drip coffee as a form of meditation. Based on nine months of fieldwork, this research reveals that mindfulness involves a process of recollection, moving from *wang nian* (distracted thoughts) to *zheng nian* (present thoughts). To address the challenge of staying present, often called “monkey mind,” practitioners use *sou yuan jin* as a focal point. *Sou yuan jin* is a Buddhist term that denotes an object to provide a point of focus. Coffee meditation involves two focal points: the human body and the coffee itself. In their interaction, they both possess social agencies that co-create and facilitate mindfulness practice, demonstrating the applicability of Alfred Gell’s theory of material agency, which offers an understanding of mindfulness beyond purely human-centric perspectives.

Keywords: Agency; Anthropocentrism; Anthropology; Interdisciplinary; Materiality Turn

Towards a New Generation of Bionic Prostheses: The Intersection of Biomechanics, Neural Engineering, and Transdisciplinary Approaches

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Bionic prostheses represent an important milestone in the medical field, combining biomechanics and neural engineering to restore lost motor and sensory functions. This analysis examines how a transdisciplinary approach, bringing together engineering, medicine, and neuroscience, enables the creation of more efficient and user-adapted prosthetic devices. The central introductory question of this work is: How can the integration of neural signals, smart materials, and artificial intelligence improve the design of bionic prostheses that are more intuitive, responsive, and suited to users' needs? This research draws on a thesis entitled *Design and Manufacture of a Biofidelic Myoelectric Prosthesis for Humeral Amputees*, completed in 2018 by student Mathieu Ramanarivo at Polytechnique Montréal. However, major challenges remain, including signal reliability, mental fatigue, production cost, and accessibility. Addressing these issues requires strengthened collaboration between disciplines in order to propose solutions that are not only technologically advanced but also ethical and sustainable. Ultimately, bionic prostheses symbolize the alliance between medicine and engineering, offering new hope to amputees. Their evolution demands a firm commitment to transdisciplinarity and innovation.

Keywords: Medical prostheses; Biomechanics; Neural Engineering

The Chemistry and Craft of Oil Painting Durability

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Painting, though ontologically anchored in the present, is profoundly marked by the passage of time. It is an image that offers a fleeting illusion of light and shadow and is fundamentally a physical entity, which resists, ages, and decays alongside all material things. This paper examines how paintings, with a focus on oil paintings, survive or succumb to time, and investigates the complex interplay between artistic intent, understood not only as expressive aim but as an engagement with the material, shaped by theories of mimesis, perception, and materiality as explored by Gombrich and Merleau-Ponty, and the vulnerabilities of the painted surface.

Drawing upon art historical scholarship and materials science, it highlights how painting is not merely representation but a dynamic material process involving layered pigments, binders, varnishes, and supports. These elements interact chemically, influencing a painting's longevity or deterioration. Through comparative case studies, from Van Eyck and Rembrandt to Monet and Renoir, the research analyzes why some masterpieces remain stable for centuries, while many modern works degrade more rapidly. It argues that durability depends not only on technique but also on material chemistry: pigment composition, binder quality, and ground preparation are as crucial as the image itself. Decay—seen in cracks, yellowing, or varnish darkening—results from both environmental factors and chemical as well as gestural adjustments during the work process. This paper takes a transdisciplinary approach, combining insights from visual arts and conservation science. It suggests that the future of oil painting lies in merging traditional methods with scientific advances. By refining historical recipes using modern materials like synthetic pigments and durable varnishes, artists and conservators can ensure that new works endure. In this way, the tension between illusion and materiality becomes a creative force—not a vulnerability.

Keywords: Conservation Science; Materiality; Mimesis; Pigment Degradation; Visual Perception

Relationships Between Natural and Synthetic Matrix and Reinforcement for Fibre Composites

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This research explored the relationship between natural fibres, synthetic fibres, natural resins, and synthetic resins as fibre composites, investigating alternatives to synthetic fibres composites for multiple industries, due to the lack of sustainability of that material. Automotive, aerospace, and marine industries use synthetic fibre composites quite extensively, and a more sustainable alternative would be helping those industries to become more sustainable. Previous research had suggested that the use of natural resin with natural fibre might result in superior mechanical performance compared to using a synthetic resin as the matrix. By using Hemp fibres, Glass fibres, Epoxy Resin and Bio Epoxy Resin to represent natural and the synthetic materials, combinations of synthetic and natural materials were tested using tensile and flexural testing and their mechanical properties were compared under high or low moisture conditions to understand the potential benefits of using natural materials in fibre composites.

This research involved both the discipline of material science and engineering. It has used the methods of material science to understand the properties of the fibre composites and used the technical knowledge of engineering to understand the context for this research, as well as the facilitation of the experiments. Transdisciplinary thinking has been the core of this research and helped with using the techniques of two different fields of study to be combined into this piece of research, to gain better understanding of the fibre composites it examines. This research will also benefit many different industries, as listed before, like automotive, aerospace, marine, etc. as a result of transdisciplinary thinking, to feed the knowledge gained from this research back to multiple fields.

The results show that there are significant differences in the performance of the materials, only between the synthetic glass fibre samples and the natural hemp fibre samples. The resin of the composite and the moisture level did not significantly affect the mechanical performance of the composite samples. This means that natural fibre composites will not have superior mechanical performance using a bio epoxy resin compared to using a synthetic resin as the matrix. More testing with greater number of samples should be done to increase the confidence interval of the results of the testing, and to better understand the relationship between the natural and synthetic, matrix and reinforcement for the composite materials.

Keywords: Material science; Fibre Composites; Natural Fibres; Sustainability; Transdisciplinarity

Moral Philosophy Coding: An Agent-Based Computational Experiment on AI Ethics

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The development and application of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has raised ethical challenges such as technological unemployment while enhancing efficiency. This study presents a computational experiment-based ethical analysis method by encoding the ethical principles of utilitarianism and deontology into computable parameters through agent-based modeling (ABM), constructing an ethical evaluation framework regarding the diffusion and application of AI, and providing decision-making recommendations for technology governance that balance efficiency and equity after comparing the results of simulations based on different ethical principles. Preliminary results show that policy schemes that introduce compensation mechanisms based on the Kaldor-Hicks improvement and integrate utilitarian and deontological principles to some extent outperform those based on purely utilitarian or deontological approaches in terms of balancing efficiency gains with social equity. The model simplifies the complexity of reality while quantitatively demonstrating the real-world application of different ethical theories, promoting the advancement of responsible AI whilst providing methodological innovation for applied ethics research as well as practicing a path for the transdisciplinary integration of humanities, social sciences and computer science.

Keywords: Applied Ethics; Agent-Based Model; Technological Unemployment; Utilitarianism; Deontology

The Value of Experiential Construction in Modern Society Through the Lens of the Project Mingde Underground House Project

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Over the past 22 years, Project Mingde has leveraged charity-driven construction initiatives to educate university students whilst addressing the needs of underserved impoverished rural communities across China and Southeast Asia. By integrating hands-on experiential learning with academic knowledge in design and construction, the project effectively bridges the gap between theory and practice, enhancing students' technical intuition, problem-solving skills, and adaptability in real-world scenarios. Beyond academic growth, the project also fosters a deeper sense of cultural awareness and social responsibility, qualities that cannot be taught conventionally. A key example is the Underground House Project in Sanmenxia, Henan, where students actively engaged in scaled modeling, prototyping, and structural testing, confronting real-world construction challenges to solidify their understanding and generate ideas whilst engaging with the local community. This paper intends to showcase the broader significance of such initiatives through real-life student-intensive construction cases based on an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and experimental approach. These initiatives have impactful contributions to construction development, educational quality, and cultural preservation. Furthermore, they provide students with an experiential platform to engage with a practical and dynamic construction environment alongside complex societal contexts to foster academic growth, adaptability and a heightened sense of social responsibility. Overall, the results affirm that such initiatives enable substantial growth of students' social awareness and academic development, equipping them with stronger critical and practical skills, and interdisciplinary sensitivity to navigate the increasingly complex and dynamic built environment.

Keywords: Charity-driven Construction; Experiential Learning; Interdisciplinary Collaboration; Rural Development; Social Responsibility

Can AI Companions Mitigate Feelings of Loneliness?

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Loneliness, encompassing physical loneliness (chronic social isolation, reduced real-world interactions) and mental loneliness (emotional disconnection, lack of meaningful relationships despite social contact), affects 1 billion adults globally. This study investigates whether AI companions like Character.AI and LoveyDovey can effectively address loneliness or risk worsening emotional dependency. The research employed three key methods: (1) a survey (n=537) measuring usage patterns and perceived emotional support, (2) in-depth interviews with 10 active users about their psychological experiences, and (3) a large-scale survey (n=1,200) incorporating a novel attachment-style assessment scale to evaluate both user experiences and general public perceptions of AI companionship.

Younger users (14–28 years) engaged AI companions due to curiosity and stress relief, using role-playing or casual interactions to alleviate real-world social pressures. Most experienced temporary emotional relief through accessible, non-judgmental communication, with some reporting support in processing complex emotions like grief. However, formulaic responses prompted disengagement. Perceived authenticity, rated 4.5/10, was limited by mechanical delivery, hindering mental loneliness relief. It is also found that heavy use of AI companions has led to weaker real-world conversation skills and unrealistic relationship expectations, worsening physical loneliness by limiting offline interactions. Although primarily used for academic assistance or entertainment, 60% of users sought companionship, indicating unmet emotional needs. Cultural pressures also contributed to low social acceptance of AI relationships (mean score: 3.5/10), potentially influencing users' reluctance to view AI as a relational substitute.

These results suggest that while AI companions can provide temporary relief from loneliness, they come with significant risks if used too much or in the wrong ways. The study concludes with recommendations for making AI companions safer, especially for young users, and reminds us that real human connections still matter most. Developers should focus on improving AI companions while also being honest about their limitations, and users should be careful not to rely on them too much for emotional support.

Keywords: AI Companions, Emotional Dependency, Human-AI Interaction, Mental Health, Technology Effect

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Closing Remarks

As our conference draws to a close, it is time to reflect on this remarkable journey we have shared. Our voyage began with Professor Cha's inspiring keynote speech on AI-assisted research and was enriched by the brilliant presentations and thought-provoking discussions that followed. From innovative perspectives in linguistics and literature to fascinating discoveries in psychology and engineering, your dedication, passion, and intellectual rigor have truly shone through. This, at its heart, is what TRACES has always been about — empowering emerging scholars, fostering transdisciplinary research and creating a space where innovative ideas can flourish. We hope that every presenter, attendee, and guest who entered this conference with curiosity — and perhaps a bit of confusion — now leaves with confidence, clarity, and a renewed belief in the transformative power of undergraduate academia.

None of this would have been possible through our efforts alone. In truth, without the unwavering support of seasoned academics, dedicated students, and invaluable partners, TRACES would never have moved beyond the drawing board. Therefore, we extend our deepest gratitude to our advisory board members, all of whom are enthusiastic and kind; our student collaborators and supporting institutions, each of whom is encouraging and thoughtful; and our exceptional participants, every one of whom is inspiring and talented. Together, your efforts have not only deepened our understanding of transdisciplinary research, but it has also kindled the inquisitive spirit pivotal to every emerging scholar. This conference also lays the foundation for TRACES — a group of young scholars eager to promote their passion for research and the value of academic transdisciplinarity.

As we depart today, let us carry forward our confidence and embody the spirit of innovation. The ideas exchanged here are certain to ignite new collaborations, inspire bold research, and drive transdisciplinary innovation. Most importantly, thank you once again for your participation, and until we meet again — keep questioning, keep trying and keep pushing the boundaries of knowledge!

Goodbye, and may these traces guide you onwards.

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Appendix

The below tables are provided by *WONG Seng Ying Amber, GUO Ziqiu, TONG Sau Chai Henry, LAI Wai Yin Vienna, and WANG Man Ping* for the presentation *Social Support is Associated with More Abstinence in a Community Smoking Cessation Program in Hong Kong*.

Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of participants (n=1416)

	N (%)
Sex	
Male	1131 (80.0)
Female	282 (19.9)
Age group	
≤39	601 (42.8)
40-59	544 (38.8)
≥ 60	259 (18.5)
Marital status	
Single	515 (36.4)
Married/ Cohabited	765 (54.0)
Divorced/ Separated/ Widowed	107 (7.6)
Education	
Primary or below	88 (6.2)
Secondary	888 (62.7)
Tertiary	406 (28.7)
Monthly household income (HK\$) ^a	
< 25000	666 (47.0)
25000 – 60000	547 (38.6)
> 60000	142 (10.0)
Employment ^b	
Economic active	1106 (78.1)

Economic inactive	283 (20.0)
Daily use of tobacco products	
Cigarette only	1281 (90.5)
Heated tobacco product only	28 (2.0)
E-cigarette only	27 (1.9)
≥ 2 tobacco products	80 (5.7)
Daily cigarette consumption (mean $\pm$ SD)	12.68 $\pm$ 8.46
Nicotine dependence level ^c	
Light	735 (52.3)
Moderate	589 (41.9)
Heavy	82 (5.8)
Age at smoking initiation (years, mean $\pm$ SD)	18.68 $\pm$ 5.55
Past quit attempt(s)	
Never	358 (25.4)
Ever	1050 (74.6)
Readiness to quit, days	
≤ 30	814 (58.6)
> 30	575 (41.4)
Perception of quitting (mean $\pm$ SD) ^d	
Importance	6.71 $\pm$ 2.61
Confidence	5.76 $\pm$ 2.56
Difficulty	6.98 $\pm$ 2.98

Missing was not included in the analysis

^a HK\$7.8=US\$1.0

^b Economic active: employed/ self-employed; economic inactive: unemployed/ student/ housekeeper/ retired.

^c Measured by the Heaviness of Smoking Index (HSI): HSI score ≤ 2 =light; HSI score 3-4 =moderate; HSI score ≥ 5 =heavy.

^d Score: 0-10; higher scores indicate more.

Table 2*The social support gained during the contest ^a*

	N (%)
Social support	
No	666 (47.0)
Any	750 (53.0)
Partner	306 (40.8)
Children	157 (20.9)
Parents	188 (25.1)
Siblings	58 (7.7)
Relatives	41 (5.5)
Medical staff	8 (1.1)
Colleagues	248 (33.1)
Friends	484 (64.5)
Others	4 (0.5)

^a Multiple choice**Table 3***Smoking cessation outcomes by whether they have ever gained support*

	No support	Any support	P value	Adjusted OR (95% CI) ^a
Primary outcome				
Validated abstinence at 6-month	19 (2.9)	132 (17.6)	<0.001	5.47 (3.29, 9.10)***
Secondary outcomes				
Validated abstinence at 3-month	14 (2.1)	139 (18.5)	<0.001	8.18 (4.60, 14.55)***
Self-reported 7-day PPA				
3-month	50 (7.5)	207 (27.6)	<0.001	3.85 (2.72, 5.45)***

6-month	57 (8.6)	224 (29.9)	<0.001	3.60 (2.59, 5.00)***
Smoking reduction				
3-month	61 (9.2)	211 (28.1)	<0.001	3.59 (2.59, 4.97)***
6-month	55 (8.3)	224 (29.9)	<0.001	4.72 (3.37, 6.61)***
Quit attempts				
3-month (cumulative)	241 (36.2)	520 (69.3)	<0.001	4.06 (3.17, 5.21)***
6-month (cumulative)	259 (38.9)	572 (76.3)	<0.001	4.89 (3.80, 6.30)***
Use of smoking cessation services				
3-month (cumulative)	34 (5.1)	116 (15.5)	<0.001	3.43 (2.23, 5.29)***
6-month (cumulative)	42 (6.3)	147 (19.6)	<0.001	3.56 (2.41, 5.26)***

^a Adjusted for groups, sex, age, education, nicotine dependence level, quit attempts, readiness to quit.

*P<0.05; **P<0.01; ***P<0.001

~ May these traces guide you onwards ~

Of students, by students, and for students – Transdisciplinary Academic Conference for Emerging Scholars 2025 is an academic conference held on 28.06.2025 at The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR. The conference is a student-initiated project by a group of HKU undergraduate students who share a great passion for learning and research – a vision supported by esteemed academics and scholars across multiple disciplines. With transdisciplinarity as the primary agenda of the conference, twenty-four undergraduates all over the world, from Hong Kong to New Zealand, and from France to Korea, present research of their own choosing and interest. This year, to facilitate panel discussions, we have grouped them into three themes – Discourse and Humanity, Saga and Statecraft, Mind and Innovation. The abstract of each presenter is documented in this book for your discovery. May this be your trace to new knowledge.

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