

EDITORIAL

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# Globalizing the sociology of the arts and culture: East Asian perspectives

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## Abstract

In this editorial, I argue for a globalized sociology of the arts and culture that transcends West-centered theories and practices. To this end, two interrelated perspectives—global and decentering—are needed. The article commences with a brief overview of the emergence of the sociology of arts in the West, and synthesizes major themes emerging from articles in the thematic series and the existing literature on creative cultures in East Asia. These themes include local–global dynamics (such as flows, legitimacy, and the centrality of the local), regionalization, state support and control, and theorizing beyond the arts. Finally, I highlight several promising directions for future research, and emphasize that East Asian perspectives present distinct opportunities to advance the sociology of the arts and culture.

## Introduction

In this article, I urge scholars to expand the sociology of the arts and culture beyond West-centered theories and practices. The goal is not to disregard those classical approaches which have been the foundation of the field. Rather, it is to extend those approaches to the global scale to explicate the new global cultural economy, and explore new possibilities of theory building, enabled by rich empirical cases in non-Western contexts.

In other words, this globalizing agenda argues for two interrelated perspectives. The first is a global/transnational perspective that accounts for the distinctive dynamics of cultural production and consumption beyond national borders. Recent decades have witnessed global and regional flows of capital, talent, content, and technology, as well as the profound effects of transnational institutions (Appadurai 1996; Crane 2016[2002]; Adams 2007; Buchholz 2022). These forces have transformed how cultural objects are imagined, produced, distributed, evaluated, and consumed. This necessitates situating the analysis of culture and the arts in a global context. However, major sociological approaches to the arts are predominantly bound within a national context and based on Western experiences. As such, updates to existing approaches are needed to fine-tune our analysis of local–global dynamics, and especially how the global context shapes creative processes and the properties of cultural objects.

Second, we need a “decentering” perspective which can be used to advocate for empirical research and theory building outside North American and European contexts. Proponents of this perspective may use empirical studies in non-Western contexts to critique or expand “Western/Northern theory” (Connell 2006). More importantly, this perspective may provide opportunities for scholars to develop new conceptual tools and theories of creative cultures rooted in local histories and socio-political realities in the region. The latter attempts often result from prioritizing explanations of data at hand (Benzecry 2023), instead of applying Western-centered theories uncritically.

Of course, many global-minded sociologists have advanced the agenda to transcend West-centric frameworks, from early attempts that included cultural objects in non-Western contexts (Griswold 1987, 1992), to more recent works which extended the existing approaches to a global scale (Bielby and Lee 2008; Buchholz 2016; Benzecry 2022). Still, more work is needed. In this article, I relay their calls to further globalize the field by focusing on the arts and creative cultures in East Asia, a terrain less explored by cultural sociologists. In what follows, I first give an overview of the emergence of the field in the West (especially in the United States), and then explain how East Asian perspectives can create new possibilities for advancing the sociology of the arts and culture.

### **Sociology meets the arts**

In the 1970s, a small cohort of American sociologists began studying the arts, at the time an underdeveloped domain within sociology.<sup>1</sup> White and White’s (1965) *Canvases and Careers* examined how the French painting world had transitioned into a dealer-critic system in the nineteenth century. This was one of the earliest empirical studies within American sociology to address the social and economic conditions of art. Since art objects were considered less “serious,” doing sociology of the arts risked one being seen as not a “real” social scientist. Howard Becker wanted to take up the challenge and try a novel approach. Unsatisfied with European thinkers’ emphasis on philosophical aesthetics and judgments of artistic value,<sup>2</sup> Becker was more interested in understanding the organization of artistic activity. The result was his seminal work *Art Worlds* (1982), which, many would agree, “changed forever how sociologists study art” (Domínguez Rubio 2022). For Becker, art is simply something people do together, so the primary task is understanding cooperative networks among the participants. Studying the art world, in short, is about “who knows what and uses it to act together,” and it carries sociological weight because “art worlds mirror society at large” (Becker 1982). Another “systems” approach, the production of culture perspective (Hirsch 1972; Peterson 1976, 1997), became another major pillar of the emergent field. This approach emphasized how production subsystems shape the symbolic elements of cultural objects. For Peterson and Anand (2004), six facets—technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational career, and market—constitute a field of symbolic production, and collectively shape cultural change. Similarly, in the view of the culture industry system approach, cultural production can be divided into technical, managerial, and

<sup>1</sup> These sociologists included Howard Becker, Herbert Gans, Robert Faulkner, Paul Hirsch, and Paul DiMaggio, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Baxandall’s (1972) *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* was an exception. It illuminated the social history of art and informed the work of Howard Becker.

institutional subsystems that determine how cultural objects are discovered, sponsored, and marketed to targeted audiences (Hirsch 1972). Overall, the “systems” approach draws attention to the complex apparatus between cultural creators and consumers, and the complex network of organizations that transform creativity into mass culture products.

Around the same time, several French sociologists also turned to studying art.<sup>3</sup> Among them, Raymonde Moulin (1967) conducted a large-scale interview study of the Parisian art markets in the mid-twentieth century, which was translated into English two decades after its original publication (Moulin 1987). Becker (1982) believed that Moulin’s work was “more ethnographic and exciting,” than that of Pierre Bourdieu, whose work had already been introduced to American sociology. In *Distinction* and other works, Bourdieu (1984, 1993, 1996) developed his “fields” approach which underlined the objective relations embedded in cultural production and consumption. Seeing fields as social spaces of relations (or sites of physical and symbolic forces), Bourdieu’s theory of the field entails the idea that cultural producers in a specific field occupy different “positions,” embedded in a “hierarchical” relationship based on domination and subordination. In this, actors employ field-specific forms of capital to position themselves relative to other actors in their field, struggling for better positions under the shared “rules of the game.” Since then, Bourdieu’s fields approach has been embraced by many North American and European sociologists, and has become a dominant force in the field of the sociology of culture, and beyond.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a growing body of Western scholars were studying the arts, or culture in general, partly thanks to the high time of the “cultural turn” within sociology. While the list is long, it is worth mentioning a few to demonstrate the array of topics these scholars have covered. For instance, Vera Zolberg (1990) wrote a survey of the emerging field; Janet Wolff (1981, 2021[1983]) bridged cultural studies and the sociology of art; Wendy Griswold (1986, 1987) studied English Renaissance theatre genres and literary interpretation; Diana Crane (1987) explored the rise of abstract expressionism in the New York art world; Gary Alan Fine (1992, 2004) turned to chefs and kitchens to study the culture of production and occupational aesthetics, and later to self-taught artists; David Halle (1993) studied the display of the visual arts in New York homes; Tia DeNora (1995) examined the development of Beethoven’s reputation in the changing musical world of late eighteenth-century Vienna; Lamont and Fournier (1992) co-edited a volume that intersected the arts with symbolic boundaries and inequality; and Pierre-Michel Menger’s (1999, 2014) works on creative work and uncertainty would become influential in both France and the United States. Together, these sociologists of the arts and their major approaches—art worlds, systems, fields—have contributed significantly to the analysis of the social construction of the arts.

Since the early twenty-first century, there has been a burgeoning literature on the “new” sociology of art which has brought meaning and content back into sociological analyses, making aesthetic properties of art and arts-in-action compatible with the lens of social constructionism (DeNora 2000; de la Fuente 2007; Rodríguez Morató and

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<sup>3</sup> See Heinich (2022) for a more detailed review of the three generations of the French sociology of art.

Santana-Acuña 2023). Instead of focusing on the social causes of art, this approach highlights the productive role of art and how it shapes social relations (Hennion 1993, 2001; DeNora 2003). According to this approach, artistic production is not reducible to individual intentions or contextual factors, but emerges from a material engagement between subjects and cultural objects (Hennion 2007; Benzecry 2011). This emphasis on materiality and action aligns with the “materiality turn” in cultural sociology and beyond, which highlights the role of cultural objects as agents of cultural formation (Griswold et al. 2013; McDonnell 2019; Domínguez Rubio 2020).

While a notable “global turn” has not occurred throughout the development of the subfield, many sociologists have tried to globalize existing approaches to the arts. Among them, Wendy Griswold (1987, 1992) was an early proponent of studying cultural objects from non-Western contexts, such as the reception of Barbadian and Nigerian novels. Since then, some sociologists have examined global cultural production and markets (Wherry 2006, 2008; Bielby and Lee 2008; Bandelj and Wherry 2011; Phillips 2013). Others have proposed “global culture worlds” by examining how transnational organizations enable global flows and create a hierarchical system (Crane 2010). Still, others have extended the art worlds approach to the global scale, for example exploring the “craft of the global” in the shoe industry (Benzecry 2022). Many scholars have advanced the Bourdieusian approach by developing “transnational/global cultural fields” in cases of global media and art markets (Kuipers 2011, 2015; Meulemen and Savage 2013; Buchholz 2016, 2022). Still, others have explored how the dynamics between nationalism and transnationalism shape cultural production, display, circulation, evaluation, and consecration (Levitt 2015; Santana-Acuña 2020). Despite these efforts, sociologists in the West have largely neglected creative cultures in East Asia. It is time for scholars to shift their focus to this region.

### **East Asian perspectives**

While social scientists in Western institutions have long delved into the political, economic, and social issues of East Asian societies, scant attention has been paid to the arts and creative industries in the region (Silvio 2018). Nevertheless, the past three decades have witnessed the global diffusion of cultural and media products originating from East Asia, ranging from Japanese animation to K-pop, K-drama, contemporary Chinese art, and most recently, TikTok. On the one hand, these cultural and artistic scenes possess distinct features, given their embeddedness in specific national contexts; on the other hand, local creative industries and cultural markets have been increasingly globalized, partly thanks to technological developments and transnational collaboration. Such regional and global flows, as well as the practices of producers, brokers, intermediaries, consumers, and state agents, offer opportunities for empirical investigation and theory building.

By shifting the spotlight to East Asia, this thematic series has two agendas. First, it seeks to comprehend the processes of production, circulation, and reception of East Asian cultural products in a global context. As cultural imaginations in East Asia are becoming global (Allison 2006; Kelts 2006; Lie 2015; Jin 2016), East Asia can serve as a case to explore broader questions about globalization. For instance, it is crucial to understand what must be in place to facilitate the global production and diffusion of

local cultural products, how legitimacy, status, and hierarchy are constructed and contested in this process, how global forces influence local cultural production, and the role of states and local agents in enabling (or constraining) globalization.

The second agenda echoes Chen's (2010) "Asia as Method," arguing that East Asia can also be used to deviate from West-centric frameworks and develop new theories. In doing so, this would allow scholars to use East Asian societies as reference points for each another, rather than feeling obliged to position them in relation to North American or European contexts—that is, being confined to the center-periphery framework. For instance, it would be fruitful to examine creative cultures *within* East Asia to account for regional exchanges and historical entanglements, seeing East Asia as an "imaginary anchoring point." This decolonized and decentered perspective enables alternative understandings of creative experiences and practices in East Asian societies, which can challenge taken-for-granted concepts such as "creativity" and "copycats" (Chumley 2016; Lindtner 2020), leading to new theories and conceptual tools.

Although articles included in the special issue have advanced both agendas, realizing the second goal requires more effort. By synthesizing the existing literature and the insight offered by these five articles, I highlight several themes which have emerged in the attempts to study and theorize East Asian art worlds.<sup>4</sup>

### **Local–global dynamics: flows, legitimacy & seeing the global in the local**

One theme, also the classical problem of globalization studies, is local–global dynamics. Literature on the interaction between East Asian societies and the West in the sector of the arts and creative cultures is the most robust. Early literature tended to follow the center-periphery model, in which East Asia was seen as the "periphery," and a few European or American countries and cities were regarded as the "center." In this, cultural flows are often unidirectional (from the center to the periphery), and the reverse order is either neglected, or viewed as challenging. However, recent studies have complicated East Asia's role in global creative production and cultural markets, suggesting that culture flows both ways. For example, scholars have shown how Japanese anime (Allison 2006; Kelts 2006), K-pop (Lie 2015; Gong 2022), and contemporary Chinese and Japanese art (Favell 2012; Kharchenkova 2018, 2019; Buchholz 2022) have amassed regional and global popularity.

In this thematic series, Levitt and Shim (2022) direct our attention away from the usual cultural objects when studying South Korea, such as K-pop, K-drama, and Korean film. Instead, they focus on Korean literature, asking how it has reached the center of the "World Republic of Letters," to use Pascale Casanova's (2004) term. Since Korean is one of the "small languages," Korean literature's unlikely ascension to the global top shows alternative mechanisms, i.e., not those produced in the former colonies of Western powers. While previous studies have emphasized the role of cultural intermediaries and the power structure of the global literary world, Levitt and Shim (2022) build on this literature and the concept of "infrastructure" to propose a multifaceted literary infrastructure.

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<sup>4</sup> Given my academic training and background in both China and the United States, the studies included in this review are skewed toward Chinese cases and those published in English-language social scientific journals. Rather than a comprehensive review, it represents a crucial first step. I encourage other scholars to join me in further globalizing the field by conducting additional empirical studies and editing special volumes.

This infrastructure must be in place to enable the “scaling up” of Korean literature. They identify three types of infrastructure. First, the “infrastructure of export and promotion,” facilitated by the state and the private sector, allows for the success of translation, circulation, and promotion. Second, the “infrastructure of discovery and consecration,” which includes book contests, prizes, and curated volumes, provides a pipeline of creators and high-status cultural producers and consecrators. Lastly, the “infrastructure of connection and vernacularization” includes a group of key intermediaries who engage in gate-keeping and connect South Korea to the world through their teaching, critiquing, and other cultural practices.

Moreover, many studies focus on status, valuation, legitimacy, and consecration, examining how contemporary art in South Korea and China is valued in global art markets and in other cultural fields (Pénet and Lee 2014; Shin et al. 2014; Kharchenkova and Velthuis 2018; Lee 2018). Instead of exploring how East Asian cultural objects are vertically integrated into the global cultural field and gain status, Zhu and Braden (2022) examine how a local cultural event can become internationally recognized and obtain legitimacy in the global art world. In their analysis of the historical development of the Shanghai Biennale from 1996 to 2018 (included in this series), the authors trace its three stages—incipience, internationalization, and the expanding period—and how at each stage, cultural producers must attend to organizational legitimacy. This transpires both domestically and internationally, as they negotiate forces from the local art world, the state, and global art markets. The study reveals the processes behind the internationalization of a local cultural event, and how a local site can be legitimized as a new “center” that distinguishes itself from others.

In addition to diffusion and markets, the local–global tension is also salient during the stages of creation/development and production (Martin 2017, 2022). In this vein, Wong’s (2014) ethnography of the oil painting village of Dafen reveals how worker-painters participate in the mass production of Western masterpieces for the world market. Her study challenges the conventional understanding of what “art” is, the relationship between copying and creativity, and what it means to be a Chinese “artist” in a global capitalist system. In his global ethnography of how women’s designer shoes are designed and produced, Benzecry (2022) examines the micro-coordination between designers from the New York office and the technicians and fit models in Chinese factories. While it is undoubtedly a case of the production of a global craft, Benzecry also emphasizes how the “craft of the global” is produced—the infrastructures, peoples, and materials that must be in place for the global scale to function. In my work on China’s engagement with Hollywood, I examine how Hollywood and Chinese studios co-develop “global” movies with Chinese cultural elements in the writers’ room, striking a balance between crafting authenticity and seeking global appeal (Fang 2021). In each of these cases, the local particularities are not simply treated as the “peripheral” or the “other”; instead, they constitute a central role in shaping the global. As such, the local and the global are intertwined, and power dynamics can be reversed, constituting the *centrality* of the local.

In this series, Yu (2022) investigates the complex entanglements between the local and the global in the case of the Chinese traditional music world, where a seemingly traditional art world has long been Westernized. In this study, Yu reveals the aesthetic conflicts between two groups of musicians in the Chinese traditional music world, and their

divergent understandings of normative practices (i.e., composition and performance). While performers favor stability in music creation and idiosyncratic styles of performance, those engaging in composing, conducting, and research prefer innovation and more systematic styles of performance. This disparity can be explained by the fact that the second group's practices have been influenced by Western aesthetics throughout the twentieth century. In this way, we can see the global from the conventions of the most "local" art form.

### **Regionalization: markets, tastes, and challenges**

Despite the political disruptions, the significance of regional connections within East Asian creative industries has grown considerably. This provides an opportunity for scholars to transcend the center-periphery paradigm, and instead, explore new dynamics of encounters and collaborations within the region.

While social scientists have paid less attention to regional cultural production (e.g., film and television co-production among South Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), there is a growing literature on cultural markets and pop culture consumption within the region. Some have written about Japan's cultural presence in Asia (Iwabuchi 2016[2002]), while others have emphasized the contentious nature of transnational cultural reception given historical complexities and the complex geopolitics within East Asian societies. For instance, Wu (2021) examines how Chinese young adults must reconcile their wide-ranging consumption of Japanese cultures and contradictory sentiments toward the Japanese government, given the collective memory of the "War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression." Similarly, Gong (2022) investigates Chinese K-pop fans' dilemma, as they must also reconcile their transnational tastes and national loyalty against the background of escalating nationalism and the political tension between China and South Korea. These studies have shown that cultural tastes within the region are transnationally connected, but also contentious, and channeled by traumatic collective memory and current geopolitics. This may contribute to a dual movement of the *politicization* and the *apoliticization* of the entertainment industry within Asia, and worldwide. While the former may be driven by some cultural receivers with nationalist mentalities, and states that mobilize those mentalities for political purposes, the latter can be pursued by industry players who downplay politics for economic benefit, and fans who follow neoliberal logic.

In this series, Du (2022) explores the diverse cultural tastes in East Asian societies. In his quantitative study of music consumption in China, Japan, and South Korea, Du examines the correlation between global exposure and cultural omnivorousness (CO). Although CO is an established concept in the literature, Du further operationalizes it along two dimensions by attending to the East Asian case: vertical CO (e.g., appreciating both highbrow and lowbrow music) and horizontal CO (e.g., appreciating both transnational and traditional music). His findings reveal that global exposure is significantly correlated with vertical CO in all three societies, but is only correlated with horizontal CO in the Chinese case.

The regional diffusion of cultural objects can be genre-specific, demonstrating that the regionalization of markets and tastes can be fraught with challenges. Some genres have achieved regional diffusion with more success than others. For instance, K-drama,

K-pop, Japanese anime and cosplay culture (Yang 2022) have spread throughout Asia and worldwide, and Chinese TV shows have gained popularity among Southeast Asian fans. However, some genres have proven more resistant to localized tastes and regional identification. The case in point is Korean literature which has not achieved equivalent popularity (Levitt and Shim 2022), although Asian audiences have largely embraced the Korean wave. Thus, historical and political complexities may limit regional flows of the literary genre. Further, a collective regional identification has not coalesced to challenge Western hegemony, in contrast to the collective emergence of the “Latin American Literature” genre (Santana-Acuña 2020).

### States and creative production

Creative practices in East Asia possess characteristics that diverge from Western conventions, including the state’s involvement in creative production. The presence of diverse political systems in the region, spanning from democracy to authoritarianism, offers fertile ground for conducting empirical analyses and developing theories on art and the state from a comparative perspective. While the state’s role in cultural production in democratic societies—e.g., state subsidies, and tax policies—is generally implicit, authoritarian regimes’ involvement in cultural production is explicit and sometimes considered appropriate and necessary. Overall, the state’s role in cultural production is ubiquitous. As Becker (1982: 165–191) summarizes:

*[The state] creates the framework of property rights within which artists get economic support and make reputations. It limits what artists can do when it protects people whose rights may have been infringed by artists intent on producing their work. It gives open support to some forms of art, and to some practitioners of those forms, when they appear to further national purposes. It uses state power to suppress work which seems likely to mobilize citizens for disapproved activities or prevent them from being mobilized for appropriate purposes.*

States enable art making by providing direct or indirect support, while also constraining it through suppression. This includes limiting access to production and distribution.

In terms of state support, the Chinese and South Korean governments have promoted their creative industries on the global stage (Su 2016; Kokas 2017; Silvio 2018; Kim 2018; Levitt and Shim 2022). However, the legitimacy of their state-affiliated practices is perceived differently by Western media and scholars. In contrast, the Japanese government has played a less crucial role in launching the global popularity of Japanese media culture, although local governments tend to capitalize on those cultural products by promoting tourism without fully understanding those subcultures (Choo 2012, 2018; Miller 2011). Since the early twenty-first century, many local governments in East Asia (and Asia at large) have embraced Richard Florida’s (2002) “creative class” model, though with modifications. They have used the creative industries for economic growth and in building global cities (Roy and Ong 2011; Silvio 2018). This is facilitated by policymakers’ belief in teaching creativity in standardized educational systems, which entails mass-scale artistic training and evaluation (Chumley 2016; Fang 2020).

Research on state control has been more robust, especially (but not exclusively) in the Chinese context. For instance, before shifting to active support of internationalizing

Korean culture in the 1990s, for decades the Korean state had utilized a rigorous censorship system to regulate domestic cultural production (Kwon and Kim 2013). And even during the administration of Park Geun-hye (2013–2017), artists on her “blacklist” were excluded from both state and private support (Kim 2018). Censorship in the Chinese context has drawn the most attention from scholars across disciplines (Roberts 2018; Luo and Li 2022; Chen 2022). The state regulates cultural production through various measures, shaping the content and form of cultural objects. The state can control what type of art can be produced and how it is evaluated, such as in the case of Chinese Model Opera during the Cultural Revolution (Zhang and Corse 2019). Moreover, in his study of hip-hop in China, Nie (2021) shows that state intervention can disperse stylistic conventions of a censored genre to neighboring music genres.

When studying state censorship, it is crucial to transcend the top-down model and the direct control trope, and to explore the local negotiations between creatives and state agents. In their study of Chinese TV production, Zeng and Sparks (2019) show that the production team uses various strategies to negotiate with the central broadcasting authorities and local governments. These state-society negotiations are central to many sectors in China, such as the nuanced relationship between the Shanghai government and the Shanghai Biennale (Zhu and Braden 2022) and the “contingent symbiosis” dynamics between the Chinese state and grassroots NGOs (Spires 2011). Additionally, it is fruitful to examine the increasingly blurred boundaries between “state” and “society.” For instance, state-owned cultural enterprises (SOCEs) in the PRC constitute what Morgan and Orloff (2017) call “public–private hybrids”; inevitably, creatives affiliated with SOCEs engage in creative production *for* the state (Lin 2019).

East Asian states’ varied involvement in cultural production, either explicit or implicit, allows us to re-examine the mechanisms and effects of state censorship and intervention. Western scholars should avoid a simplified view of censorship as “a devil term” or “something others [i.e., un-Enlightened (non-Liberal) societies] do” (Jansen 1988: 4). Darnton (1995: 40) criticizes the repression/freedom binary many scholars, journalists, and politicians in the West hold: “The trouble with the history of censorship is that it looks so simple: it pits the children of light against the children of darkness.”

### **Theorizing beyond the arts**

To echo Becker (1982), research on art worlds is not supplementary to other “serious” studies on economic and political structure; instead, art worlds reflect society at large. It is worth noting that studying the arts in the East Asian context to understand *better* those art worlds and societies is not the only end. Instead, art worlds, in East Asia or elsewhere, can serve as a window to reveal general patterns of social behaviors and pressing questions for social scientists.

In this thematic series, Yang (2022) examines an intriguing art world—the cosplay scene in China—and further theorizes how “cosplay” may serve as a conceptual heuristic for analyzing gender performance and social interaction in general. Over the past three decades, cosplay has become a popular subculture in China due to the global diffusion of Japanese ACG (anime, comic, game) fandom. Drawing on the art worlds approach and the production of culture perspective, Yang reveals that gender embodiment in cosplay is a collective activity among the cosplayer and a line of collaborators, such as makeup

artists, photographers, and photo editors. In their pursuit of authenticity, cosplayers craft their presentation and embodied performance of masculinity/femininity according to both gender category and the character's personality—the latter is largely overlooked by the existing literature. Beyond the empirical findings, Yang ambitiously integrates cultural sociology and the performance paradigm in the sociology of gender to propose cosplay as a new heuristic. Instead of seeing gender as “drag,” he argues that the heuristic of cosplay “allows us to reconceptualize gender embodiment as a *collectively manufactured artwork* that requires a division of labor for its production” (Yang 2022: 20). As such, the art world of cosplay reveals the artwork of gender performance, foregrounding the multi-authorship of gender performativity that is often disguised by neoliberal individualism.

Indeed, the sociology of the arts and culture overlaps with many other subfields and domains. In addition to gender, many scholars have used the arts as their cultural objects to advance theories of global studies. It is worth reiterating the contributions of several of the aforementioned studies. Wong's (2014) analysis of the painters in Dafen starts with her critique of Romanticist anxieties over industrialization and its effect on creativity, and she quickly problematizes West-centered cultural hierarchies (e.g., the exaggerated cultural imaginaries of “assembly-line painting” and copying in China) and the exploitative nature of global capitalism. Additionally, Benzecry (2022) creatively reverses the imagination of global infrastructure by situating a group of humble foot models at the center of the global shoe industry; in doing so, he reveals the vulnerability of the global and the significance of local actors in what he calls the “ecology of tastes.” Lastly, in *The Global Rules of Art*, Buchholz (2022) uses the rise of contemporary Chinese art and other cases in the global market to advance Bourdieu's field theory by proposing a “global cultural fields approach.” The emergence of a global cultural field within a cultural domain involves three mechanisms: “global institutional circuits” (the organizational infrastructure that enables global circulation), “field-specific global discourse” (the construction of distinctive meanings that provide the cultural foundation of the field), and “global institutions for consecration and evaluation” (e.g., the institutionalization of reputation and hierarchical status). As such, she argues that this alternative to the globalization of culture framework differs from the political-economy model of cultural imperialism, the cultural flows and networks model, and the global culture/art worlds model (Buchholz 2022).

### **Future directions**

In this article, I outline a theoretical and thematic groundwork for scholars studying arts in East Asian contexts. This thematic series is built upon the attempts of other scholars. Most notably, anthropologists Teri Silvio and Lily H. Chumley guest-coedited a 2018 special issue titled “After Creativity: Labour, Policy, and Ideology in East Asian Creative Industries” for *Culture, Theory and Critique*. Social scientists should pay more attention to the rise of the arts sector in this region. The burgeoning interest in cultural sociology in East Asian societies (Tsang and Lamont 2018; Xu et al. 2019; Ku et al. 2022) may pave the way for the development of the sociology of the arts, and culture in and of East Asia.

I highlight several future directions. Firstly, more comparative studies are needed, both within East Asian societies and beyond. While some studies have explored

cultural flows within the region, few have been comparative, i.e., designed to either draw connective themes across these societies or show divergent patterns of artistic practices and cultural consumption in diverse contexts. A recent example is a comparative study of fashion consumption behaviors in South Korea and China (Tse and Tsang 2021). Similarly, Chew (2007) examines the contemporary re-emergence of the *qipao* in the PRC context; it can be expanded to examine different mechanisms through which the *qipao* has regained popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, among other regions. Despite challenges posed by language barriers, collaborative research among Asian scholars could be a viable solution. Moreover, comparative studies can be conducted between East Asian and global cases. For instance, Martin's (2017) comparative analysis of the Hollywood and Hong Kong media industries sets a good example, illustrating the transnational connections between the two industries and the risk and uncertainty that are central to global media production.

Moreover, we should expand our regional focus to include creative cultures in Asia at large. "Asia as method" (Chen 2010) should not be used only as a decolonizing device in response to Western hegemony, but also to recognize the relative "privilege" of research on creative cultures located in Japan, South Korea, and the PRC (such as its publication and reception in English-language journals). Therefore, more empirical studies on arts and culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other parts of Asia are needed. For research on other parts of Asia, there is a robust literature on Singaporean media and pop culture (e.g., the works of Audrey Yue and Beng Huat Chua) and, more recently, in Malaysian beauty culture (Menon 2023).

Additionally, sociologists must keep up with technological advancements to study creative production in digital spaces. The proliferation of social media, digital platforms, and AI art generators has reshaped how creative cultures in East Asia and beyond are produced, distributed, consumed, and evaluated. For instance, in his study of online music platforms, Nie (2022) uses computational tools to show how monetization programs added to a Chinese music platform likely restrain artistic novelty among songs released by indie companies, pop musicians, and veteran producers. Additional studies focusing on new media production are more than necessary, as are robust methodologies suitable for addressing these questions.

Finally, we need more empirical studies of the arts and culture beyond North America and Europe. The most effective way to diversify the field would be by flooding it with a wide range of voices and experiences. Many other compelling studies located in the East Asian context direct our attention to themes such as occupational identities among Korean poets, Chinese painters, and Japanese musicians (Shim 2022; Zhang 2015; Kowalczyk 2022); galleries, art markets, and the materiality aspect of exhibitions (Zhang 2020, 2022); emotions in reality TV shows (Wei 2014); naming culture (Obukhova et al. 2014; Fang and Fine 2020); fashion and fast fashion (Zhao 2013; Chu 2018); grassroots branding (Zemanek 2018); the visual arts in the middle-class home (Fang 2018); and local receptions of American television (Gao 2016). As creative cultures continue to emerge and evolve in the region, it is imperative that we expand the scope of empirical studies to incorporate these diverse and exciting experiences.

To reiterate my call, a *globalized* sociology of the arts and culture is crucial in the new global cultural economy. East Asian experiences offer a new window to scrutinize art worlds—and the social world—from a global and decentering perspective.

#### Author contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

#### Declarations

##### Competing interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

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