

*A Curator(ial) Collaborative: Curating Contemporary Asian Art in an Australian Context*

Wilson Yeung Chun Wai, RMIT University, Australia

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**Abstract**

This research starts from an examination of the historical relationship in cultural shifts in Australia, which reflects the re-orientation towards the Asia-Pacific region and the development of Asian contemporary art over the last two decades. This research reflects my cultural and artistic position on the imposition of Australian culture on Asian culture and vice versa. In 2011, the Australian Government launched an Australian Multicultural Policy titled “The People of Australia”. This policy inspired me to reflect on the cultural impact of multiethnic immigrants on Australian arts, culture and society. I have been traveling and researching between Australia and Asia for ten years. My experience of Australian multiculturalism has influenced my artistic practices and inter-cultural cognition. I have witnessed the influences of Australian multicultural society, the effects of geopolitics in Asia-Pacific area and the impacts of globalization. All of these issues remind me that it is important to examine the development of Asian Australian contemporary arts and to analyze the “Asianisation” of Australia. The goal of the historical investigation is to understand how socially and culturally engaged Asian art practices and exhibition makings have been used in the field of Australian and global contemporary art. Integrating research methodology with curatorial practice, this research consists of case studies and staging of experimental art projects. Each of these projects will investigate the relationship between artists and creative practitioners using social and cultural analysis. It aims to establish a new curating approach to advocating collaborative curatorial practices.

Keywords: Cultural and Social Change, Asianisation, City Transformations, Australia Asia Pacific Region, Multicultural Identity, Creative Practice, Curatorial Discourse

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## **Introduction**

This practice-led research begins with an examination of the historical relationship between Australia and Asia in cultural shifts over the last two decades, which reflects the development of contemporary Asian art in Australia. In the past twenty years, Asian contemporary art has developed quickly in Australia due to globalization, economic change and changed politics in multiculturalism in Australia. This period of history is important because it sets an example for future development in Asian and Australian contemporary art. The goal of the historical investigation is to better understand how socially and culturally engaged curating contemporary Asian art and exhibition making have been used in Australian and Western contemporary art. Combining the research methodology with the collaborative curating, this research consists of case studies, staging of experimental arts and cultural projects. Each of these projects will explore the relationship between Asian and Australian creative practitioners using artistic, cultural and social policy analyses.

## **The purposes of the study**

How can I use the concept 'curator as cultural collaborator' to create contemporary arts projects to examine the relationship between artists and curators within an Asian Australian context? What are the difficulties and constraints in the curator collaboration?

This research reflects my cultural and artistic position as an Asian artist-curator working in an Australian context and interacting between shifting relationship Australian and Asian contexts. In 2011, the Australian Government launched an Australian Multicultural Policy titled 'The People of Australia'. I was inspired by this policy to reflect on the cultural impacts of multiethnic immigrants on contemporary Australian arts, culture and society. This research would discover cultural position of my curatorial practice through social and cultural reflection of my cross-cultural identities. It aims to set up a new curatorial approach to promoting collaborative curating and providing Asian and Australia communities with a unique insight into other cultures in terms of both artistic creation and cultural production.

## **Background**

According to the Spring Institute of Intercultural Learning, there are differences between multicultural, intercultural, and cross-cultural communication. Multicultural is defined as a society containing several social cultures or ethnic groups. People live with each other, but each cultural group does not necessarily interact with others. For example, in a multicultural community, people often go to grocery stores and restaurants without really communicating with their neighbors from other countries. Cross-cultural refers to the comparison between different cultures. In the circumstance of cross-cultural communication, differences are understood and acknowledged by people and individual change rather than collective transformations can be brought about. One culture is often regarded as 'the norm' in cross-cultural societies where all other cultures are contrasted to the dominant culture. Intercultural outlines communities in which all the cultures are deeply understood and respected. Intercultural communication mainly targets the mutual exchange and development of

ideas, cultural norms and deep relationships, no one is left unchanged in the intercultural society because everyone learns and grows from one another together.

I was informed by a Palestinian American philosopher and cultural critic, Edward Said that the understanding of West and East culture's influence behaviors. The differences between cross-cultural, intercultural and multicultural art projects will be investigated using collaborative curating and the relationship between internal national and cross-national external cultural communication will be examined. This research outcome will consist of a series of curatorial research projects developed by me accompanied with Asian and Australian artists.

This research would discover cultural position of my curatorial practice through social and cultural reflection of my cross-cultural identity. It aims to set up a new curatorial approach to promoting collaborative curating and providing Asian and Australia communities with a unique insight into other cultures both in terms of the artistic creation and cultural production. This research is a journey of self-discovery that explores the relationship between personal and cultural identity. My family history involves the Cambodian Civil War, the migration of overseas Chinese aboard in Macau, France, Hong Kong and Australia.

As an Asian artist, curator and researcher, I am interested in multicultural identities. I was born in British Hong Kong and have studied in Australia for over four years. The impact of living in a different culture has changed my perspectives, values and personal identity. I have been fascinated by complicated and layered space between Asia-Australia interaction and my Asian cultural identity. Through my training as a practicing artist and trained curator, I aim to establish a new curatorial approach to exploring collaborative curating projects. Since my role as a visual artist has transformed into the curator and researcher during my postgraduate study, I am now seeking ways of modeling blended practices. In this research, I have a particular focus on collaborative curatorial practice and exhibition making between Asian and Australian creative practitioners.

This research is driven by my personal and cultural identity through collaborative curating in Asia and Australia. A series of new arts and cultural projects will be created with the attempt to generate insights into cross-cultural, intercultural and multicultural communication through the concept of 'curator as cultural collaborator'. This idea was inspired by book of Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012). O'Neill shows how the role of curator in making exhibitions had changed from 1987 to 2011. With the development of group exhibitions and biennials in terms of their modes of presenting contemporary art to the public, curatorship has begun to be seen as part of creative activities. The role of curator has transferred from a behind-the-scenes organizer to a significant cultural producer. Also, another art curator and critic, Hans Ulrich Obrist, also states the curator is not only about filling the space with objects, but also a person who 'brings different cultural spheres into contact'.

Collaborative curating will be explored through co-curating, curatorial panel curating and joint curating between Australian and Asian creative practitioners. Multiple arts and cultural exhibitions or festivals will be presented in institutions, galleries, public spaces and alternative exhibition spaces using collaborative curating to highlight the

concept of multicultural identities through collaboration between Australia and Asian communities.

## **Methodology**

The theoretical framework of my dissertation will be based on theories on curating contemporary art (suggested by Hou Hanru, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann, Terry Smith and O'Neill, Paul). It will be examined by Australian scholars, such as Ien Ang, Melissa Chiu, John Clark, Caroline Turner and others who are familiar with Asian modern and contemporary art and cultural theories. After analyzing the research of collective curating and cultural studies, the future of art curating in the Asian Australian art scene will be explored. In particular, influences of rising Asian contemporary art market and industry in Australia would be investigated. All these studies will be analyzed using examples of participatory curating Asian contemporary art and exhibition making in an Australian context from the mid of 1990s. Also, the international curatorial art projects will be examined. For example, the *Cities on the Move* (1997-1998), *Some Rooms: The Curator as Collaborator* (2009), *Manifesta 8* (2010) and *COLLECTIVE MAKING 02 PART 1 / DO IT* (2015-2016) as examples of collective curating for my research projects.

As illustrated in the figure below, I am planning to develop a series of practice-led research projects including: 1) The 21st Century Printmaking at Melbourne and Hong Kong, China (2018-2019) will examine cross-cultural communication and the model of co-curating between Melbourne and Hong Kong curators regarding collaborating or curating an exchange exhibition in public institutional (Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre Hong Kong) settings. 2) Public Art Project in between Melbourne and Nanjing, China (2018-2019) will explore differences between Australian and Nanjing curators and researchers regarding intercultural communication and the model of panel curating so as to collaborate or curate an exchange exhibition in public space. 3) Chinese-Australian Identity / Cultural Identities in the Chinese Diaspora (2020) will discover the multicultural communication and the joint curating between artists and curators when collaborating or curating a local exhibition in non-profit organizations or art museums settings. 4) Contemporary Asian Art Projects (CAAP) (2020) Explore differences between Asian and Australian creative practitioners in terms of artist's regional exchange in Asian and Australian and the model of collective cultural curating in order to co-create a platform in creative collective settings.

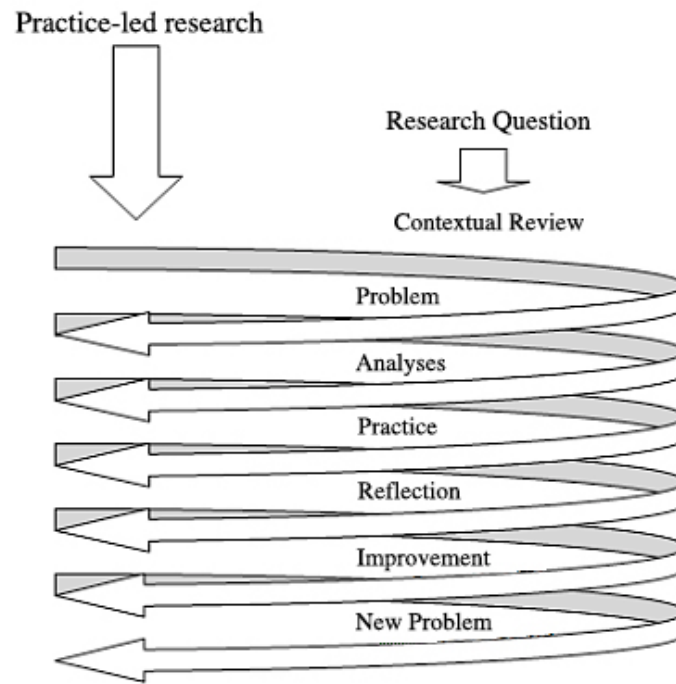


Figure 1: The Research Method (W. Yeung, 2017).

### **The cooperation opportunities instead of the conclusion**

This practice-led research is an innovative discovery, which aims to find potential partners and organizations through different channels and platforms. This research is proposed to be a collective creation. The research group is based in Melbourne, Australia, which will explore emerging contemporary Asian Arts and Culture within the Asia and Australia region. In this research, a platform for Asian and Australian creative practitioners and researchers will be created through collaborative exposure of Asian contemporary arts through educational.

Overall, art is a universal language that can be used as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures. My research projects aims to initiate an up-close conversation between the East and the West through the art and help to bring these converging cultures together.

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“What’s the difference between multicultural, intercultural, and cross-cultural communication?” by The Spring Institute:

<https://www.springinstitute.org/whats-difference-multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication/>

**Contact email:** [s3371643@student.rmit.edu.au](mailto:s3371643@student.rmit.edu.au)

**Website:** <http://wilsonyeung.weebly.com/>