

Cultural Games in the Asian Field: Multiculturalism and Contemporary Art Practice: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review explores the conceptual frameworks and strategic practices employed by contemporary Asian artists between 2019 and 2024 to navigate or resist the dominant norms of multiculturalism within the global art field. Adhering rigorously to the PRISMA 2020 protocol and integrating both thematic synthesis and bibliometric methods, this study meticulously screened and analysed 50 peer-reviewed academic publications. The review introduces the concept of “cultural games” as an illuminating heuristic to understand artists’ strategic negotiations within systems of multiculturalism, institutional power, and the global art economy. It identifies three recurring conceptual strategies: technological critique, body politics, and traditional transformation, which are often interwoven with structural forces such as neoliberalism, digital surveillance, and colonial legacies. Significant regional specificities emerge, with East Asia emphasising technological dialectics, Southeast Asia focusing on embodied pluralism, and South Asia dedicating itself to institutional critique. The findings reveal strategic hybridity as a common regional thread while also pointing to theoretical asymmetries in global art historiography. This review aims to provide a more precise and critical lens for understanding contemporary Asian art practices, identifying key gaps for future research, particularly regarding underrepresented regions and interdisciplinary methodologies.

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Contribution/Originality: The paper's primary contribution is revealing that strategic hybridity acts as a common regional thread while also highlighting theoretical asymmetries in global art historiography.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly globalising world of contemporary art, Asia has transcended its traditional role as merely a source of aesthetic inspiration or an exotic "Other," emerging instead as a dynamic centre for artistic innovation and profound cultural negotiation (Albar, 2020). This shift is not merely geographical but reflects the deep engagement of artists from diverse regions across Asia with complex global and local realities (Turner, 2023). A vibrant interplay of pluralist values characterises the contemporary art scene in Asia, marked by the persistent impact of postcolonial memory and the accelerated integration of digital aesthetics (Al-Abbas, 2023; Juneja, 2024; Moraru, 2022). Crucially, these artistic expressions and discourses often unfold within conceptual frameworks that extend beyond, or actively challenge, the dominant Western theoretical paradigms that have historically shaped global art discourse.

Despite the increasing volume of scholarship on Asian contemporary art, a significant gap remains: few systematic literature reviews attempt to structure and synthesise this diverse field through a rigorous, systematic methodology and a comparative lens (Aljared, 2022). Simply put, no researcher has reviewed the research topics, conceptual frameworks, and research methods of previous articles on the multicultural characteristics of Asian contemporary art, and used them to deeply analyse the profound impact of multiculturalism on the field of Asian contemporary art. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a systematic approach to the multicultural characteristics of contemporary art and to pinpoint areas that require further theoretical or empirical research.

This article aims to address this gap by systematically reviewing recent academic literature published between 2019 and 2024, designed to capture the most contemporary theoretical debates and artistic interventions in current art practices. This review conceptualizes these complex interactions as "cultural games"—a term intended to denote the deliberate, strategic negotiations, and often subtle yet potent acts of resistance that artists undertake within the frameworks of multiculturalism, entrenched institutional power structures, and the broader, usually unequal, global art economy (Turner, 2023). Here, the concept of "games" implies a strategic engagement with rules and players, where artists deploy specific tactics to gain agency, assert narratives, and challenge existing hierarchies rather than merely conforming or submitting.

The following questions were considered for this paper:

- i. RQ1-Which strategies recur across regions (East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia)?
- ii. RQ2-How are concepts such as 'dynamic pluralism' and 'technical dialectics' defined and deployed within the selected literature?
- iii. RQ3-What gaps remain in the theorization of Asia's cultural agency within global art circuits, particularly concerning underrepresented regions such as Central Asia and Pacific Art?

The rest of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides the research background and related concepts of this paper. The methodology of the research is discussed in section 3. Section 4 gives information about the results of the study. In section 5, the discussion is provided and finally, the conclusion is illustrated in section 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Contemporary Art

Contemporary art refers to the art of today, generally encompassing works produced from the 1970s or 1980s onward, though some institutions and experts may date its origins as early as the post-World War II era or as late as the 1980s (Smith, 2009). It is typically created by living artists and reflects the rapidly changing, globalized, and technologically advanced world in which we live (Rebentisch, 2005; Smith, 2009). Unlike earlier art movements, contemporary art is not defined by a single style, ideology, or medium; instead, it is marked by its diversity, innovation, and openness to new materials, methods, and ideas (Buskirk, 1999; Leduc, 2005).

The main characteristics of contemporary art are: diversity of styles and media (Buskirk, 1999; Leduc, 2005), engagement with global culture (Rebentisch, 2005; Smith, 2009), conceptual focus (Buskirk, 1999), audience participation (Smith, 2009), and lack of uniformity (Rebentisch, 2005). It is distinct from modern art, although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably by non-specialists. Modern art typically refers to works created between the 1860s and 1970s, characterised by a shift from realism to abstraction and experimentation. Contemporary art, on the other hand, refers to art made from the late 20th century to the present, and is generally more concerned with current events, diversity, and the use of new media (Chilvers & Graves-Smith, 2009; Rebentisch, 2005).

Contemporary art takes many forms, including public installations, street art, digital works, and large-scale sculptures. For example, Issa Genzken's *Rose* is an outstanding contemporary sculpture that cleverly combines traditional floral themes with monumental scale and modern materials (Buskirk, 1999). The *We Are Arabs, We Are Human* installation in Irbid, Jordan, exemplifies how contemporary art engages with community and global themes (Smith, 2009), often extending beyond the traditional gallery space.

2.2. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a term widely used in academic, political, and social contexts to describe the presence and co-existence of diverse cultural groups within a society. According to scholars such as Kymlicka (2011) and Parekh (1996), multiculturalism refers both to a demographic reality (the existence of multiple cultures) and to a set of policies or normative ideals that recognize, accommodate, and promote cultural diversity (Kymlicka, 2011; Parekh, 1996).

Multiculturalism recognises the existence of different cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups within a single society, advocates the protection of minority rights, equal treatment of all cultural groups, and the prevention of discrimination and marginalisation (Saari, 2025). In practice, multiculturalism is often reflected in government policies that support cultural expression, including bilingual education, religious accommodations, and anti-discrimination laws (Dupont, 2021). Multiculturalism does not require assimilation into the mainstream culture, but rather encourages integration, where individuals maintain their own cultural identity while fully participating in civic life (Bhabha, 2012).

2.3. Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a critical academic field that examines the cultural, political, economic, and social consequences of colonialism and imperialism, with a particular focus on the impact of European colonial rule on colonised peoples and their lands (Herman, 2024). Emerging as a significant area of study in the late 20th century, especially after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, postcolonialism analyses not only the historical period following the end of colonial rule but also the enduring legacies and structures of power established during colonial times (Chen, 2010).

Postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with both the historical experience of colonialism and its ongoing effects, addressing issues such as migration, slavery, resistance, race, gender, and identity (Herman, 2024). Postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct and challenge how colonial powers justified domination, often through literature, history, anthropology, and other discourses that depicted colonised peoples as inferior (Chen, 2010). A central concern is how formerly colonised societies articulate and celebrate their own cultural identities, resisting assimilation and reclaiming agency in the face of colonial narratives. Postcolonialism is characterised by a political and moral orientation that is vigilant against forms of domination and oppression, often drawing on Marxist and other critical traditions (Juneja, 2024).

Key figures in postcolonial theory include Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, whose works have shaped the field's focus on discourse, hybridity, and the complexities of cultural identity (Herman, 2024).

2.4. Cultural Games

Cultural games refer to games that are deeply embedded in and expressive of the cultural values, practices, and identities of a community or society. Academic literature recognises them as both traditional and contemporary forms of play that serve as vehicles for cultural transmission, socialisation, and the reinforcement of collective identity (Querol, 2022).

Traditional cultural games are rooted in local customs and are often passed down orally from one generation to the next (Bontchev et al., 2024). They are seen as a form of intangible cultural heritage, reflecting the beliefs, values, and social structures of a community. Modern and digital cultural games have also become sites of cultural production and negotiation in a globalised context (Hetrick, 2022). Academic studies highlight how digital games can mediate cultural identity, foster community, and reflect both local and transnational influences. These games are not just entertainment but are woven into webs of cultural meaning, social connection, and even political and economic change (Querol, 2022).

Cultural games are not merely forms of play but are vital cultural practices that transmit values, foster identity, and adapt to both local traditions and global influences. They are studied as dynamic sites of meaning-making, community building, and cultural heritage in both traditional and modern contexts (Hetrick, 2022).

3. Research Methods

This review was meticulously conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to ensure maximum transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigour. This systematic approach is crucial for minimising bias and providing a comprehensive overview of the field.

3.1. Search Strategy and Information Sources

A systematic search for relevant literature was meticulously conducted across three major, multidisciplinary academic databases renowned for their comprehensive coverage of art, humanities, and social sciences scholarship: Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR. The authors had institutional access to these databases. Additionally, other databases were deemed inappropriate or too time-consuming to conduct a systematic review. For example, some databases may only cover specific areas, or they may lack search operations, such as Boolean operations. These databases were chosen because their combined search results provide a high level of coverage of articles related to the topic of this study. By considering both databases simultaneously, the chance of missing any relevant papers can be reduced. The selection of these databases was designed to ensure broad yet focused access to peer-reviewed publications.

The search strategy employed carefully constructed Boolean operators and keyword combinations, designed to maximise both the precision and recall of the search. Preliminary pilot searches were conducted before the formal search to optimise keyword combinations and ensure their efficacy. Ultimately, the comprehensive search strings utilised are:

- i. Web of Science: ALL=Contemporary Art AND AB=(Asian Art OR Multiculturalism OR Postcolonialism OR Cultural Games OR Cultural Politics) AND PY=(2019-2025) and English (Languages)
- ii. Scopus: ALL ("Contemporary Art") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Asian Art" OR "Multiculturalism" OR "Postcolonialism" OR "Cultural Games" OR "Cultural Politics") AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))
- iii. JSTOR: ((Contemporary Art) AND ("Asian Art" OR "Multiculturalism" OR "Postcolonialism" OR "Cultural Games" OR "Cultural Politics")) AND la:(eng OR en)

The initial search was conducted on May 20, 2025, to establish a baseline dataset. A final updated search was performed on June 15, 2025, prior to the analysis phase, to capture any newly published articles within the specified timeframe and ensure the currency of the review. All retrieved records were imported into Zotero reference management software for efficient de-duplication and organization.

3.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the high quality and direct relevance of the included studies, a stringent set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied. These criteria were pre-defined and rigorously adhered to throughout the screening process.

Inclusion Criteria:

- i. Publication Date: Studies must have been published between 2019 and 2025.
- ii. Language: Only English-language, peer-reviewed studies were included.

- iii. **Content Relevance:** Studies must explicitly engage with conceptual frameworks or empirical analyses relevant to contemporary Asian art. Specifically, the core content of the study needed to explore how Asian artists (from East Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia) navigate or resist dominant multicultural norms, institutional power, or the global art economy through their strategic practices or underlying theoretical positions.
- iv. **Publication Type:** Preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic book chapters from reputable university presses or scholarly publishers, and successfully defended academic dissertations/theses. A specific exhibition catalog or press release within its own scholarly argument as a primary source, that academic article would still be included.

Exclusion Criteria:

- i. **Non-Peer-Reviewed Publications:** Exhibition reviews, art magazine articles, general interest features, news reports, and non-peer-reviewed exhibition catalogues were systematically excluded.
- ii. **Historical Focus:** Studies primarily focusing on pre-20th-century art history or those that did not engage with contemporary art practices were excluded.
- iii. **Geographical Scope:** Studies that did not specifically focus on an "Asian" context or perspective (i.e., geographically outside East Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia, or general global art studies without a clear Asian focus) were excluded to maintain the regional specificity of the review.
- iv. **Conceptual Irrelevance:** Studies that, while mentioning Asian art, did not delve into conceptual frameworks or strategic practices related to navigating multiculturalism, power structures, or the global art economy were excluded.

3.3. Study Selection Process

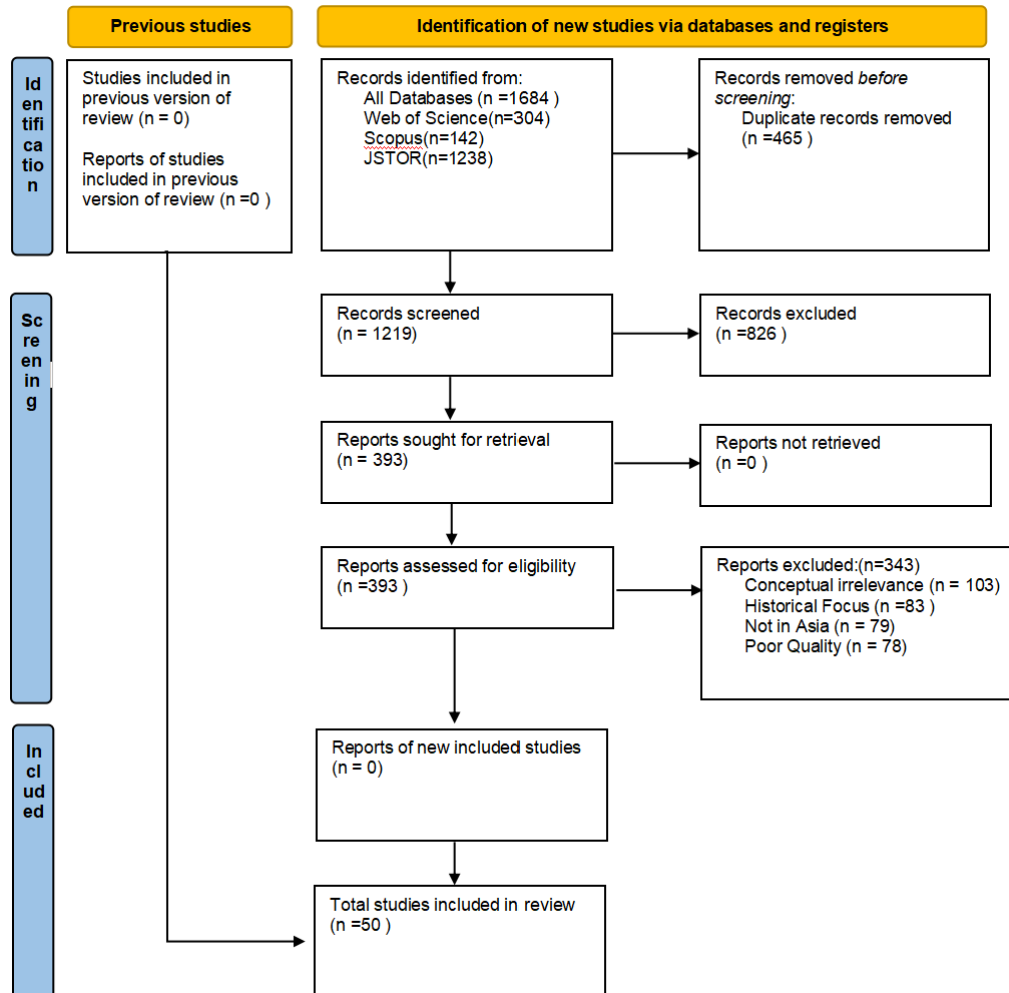
The study selection process was systematically documented according to the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1). This iterative process involved multiple stages of screening and evaluation, with each step meticulously recorded. An initial database search yielded 1684 records, comprising 304 documents from Web of Science, 142 papers from Scopus, and 1,238 from JSTOR. After importing all records into Zotero, 465 duplicate entries were automatically identified and removed. This resulted in 1219 unique records for subsequent screening.

During this initial screening phase, Two independent reviewers (Reviewer A and Reviewer B) meticulously screened the titles and abstracts of the 1882 unique records. Reviewers were blinded to each other's decisions. A standardised screening protocol was used, marking records as "include," "exclude," or "uncertain." Based on title and abstract screening, 826 records were excluded. Common reasons for exclusion at this stage primarily included: clear irrelevance to the publication date range, non-English language, non-peer-reviewed status, or obvious irrelevance to Asian contemporary art or the research question.

The remaining 393 articles were retrieved in full text for a more detailed eligibility assessment. After full-text review, 343 articles were excluded. Detailed reasons for exclusion at this stage were recorded for each article, providing a robust audit trail. Common exclusion reasons included insufficient depth in conceptual framework discussions, a primary focus on historical rather than contemporary art, a lack of explicit

engagement with multiculturalism and power dynamics, or failure to meet quality assessment thresholds. A final count of 50 peer-reviewed studies met all inclusion criteria and passed the quality assessment, thus being included in the qualitative synthesis of this systematic review.

Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



3.4. Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

For each of the 50 included studies, a standardized data extraction form was utilized to systematically collect relevant information, included full bibliographic information, geographical focus, research questions, key conceptual frameworks, specific strategic, key findings and conclusions. To ensure the methodological and conceptual rigour of the included studies, a Quality Assessment (AARD – Authoritativeness, Argumentation, Relevance, and Data) score was adapted from established systematic review guidelines. This metric provided a systematic approach to evaluating the quality of each study. The scoring rubric was developed to ensure consistency and transparency, focusing on Authoritativeness, Argumentation, Relevance, and Data. All 50 included studies were independently scored by two reviewers (Reviewer A and Reviewer B) using this AARD scoring rubric. Any discrepancies in scoring (differences of more than 2 points in any criterion) were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached with a third reviewer. Studies with a total score of less than 12 out of 20 were excluded from the final synthesis, thereby reinforcing quality control. A detailed table (Table 1) lists all 50 included studies, along with their respective AARD scores.

Table 1: AARD Scoring Table for Literature

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
1	Fashion Dispatch Beyond Memory and Post-Modernization: Tracing Politics in Contemporary Art Through Paradoxical Social Reality	Al-Abbas (2023)	3	5	3	3	14
2	The Visual Culture of Tolerance in Three Bali's Artworks of Balinese Artist: Putu Sutawijaya, 1998-2010	Al-Abbas (2023) ; Albar (2020)	3	3	5	3	14
3	Black Skin White Mask: Hybrid Identity of the Main Character as Depicted in Tagore's The Home and The World	Mertania and Amelia (2020)	5	3	3	3	14
4	The Visual Culture of Sinophone Modernism: Aw Boon Haw's Cultural Entrepreneurialism and Early Twentieth-Century's Architectural Eclecticism	Chang (2021)	5	3	5	3	16
5	In search of "Asian perspectives" in the field of adult education: From Asian perspectives to deimperialization	Hye-Su Kuk (2024)	5	3	3	1	12
6	Painterly Hybridisation: Re-presenting Oriental Painting as an Intercultural Hybrid	Cho (2023)	3	1	5	1	10

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
7	We Promise to Decolonise the Museum: A Critical View of Contemporary Museum Policies	Cocotle (2019)	3	3	1	1	8
8	The City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia	Corey (2021)	3	3	3	1	10
9	Global Contemporary Art in the Philippines: A Vantage Point	del Mundo-Angeles (2022)	5	3	3	3	14
10	The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Art in Global Asia	Gras et al. (2022)	5	3	3	1	12
11	The Perception of Multiculturalism in Malaysian Visual Art University Students' Paintings	Hajianfard et al. (2024)	5	3	5	1	14
12	Cultural Diplomacy in Arts Education and Oil Painting: A Systematic Review of East-West Fusion Artistic Expressions	He et al. (2024)	3	1	5	1	10
13	Between Hybridity and Identity: Chineseness as a Cultural Resource in Indonesia	Hoon (2021)	5	3	5	3	16
14	Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai in 2000	Hu (2022)	3	3	3	1	10
15	Global, Postcolonial, or Transcultural? Perspectives for a Critical Art History	Juneja (2024)	3	3	5	1	12

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
16	Art Across Cultures: Bridging Divides and Building Connections	Khan (2023)	5	3	5	3	16
17	Parallelotopia: Ottoman Transcultural Memory Assemblages in Contemporary Art Practices from the Middle East	Koureas (2019)	3	3	5	1	12
18	Piriya Krairiksh: Untying Thai Art History from Convention	Krairiksh (2022)	3	1	3	1	8
19	Recasting Tradition: Heritage and the Everyday as Critical Devices of Contemporary Southeast Asian Art	Lenz (2020)	5	1	5	1	12
20	Afterall at 25	Mey (2024)	5	3	1	3	12
21	Post-politics and contemporary art in the era of global capitalist crisis	Moraru (2022)	5	3	3	1	12
22	Interplay of tradition and modernity in contemporary art practices	Pavliv et al. (2024)	5	1	3	1	10
23	The Development of Thai Contemporary Art and Its Influences: Overlay Memories, Overlay Imaging and Individual Spiritual Identity	Pattanachoti (2019)	5	1	3	1	10
24	Debbie Han's Graces: Hybridity and Universality	Pyun (2019)	5	3	1	3	12
25			5	3	5	1	14

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
	Transcultural Curation and the Post-COVID World	Querol (2022)					
26	Artists in the Field: Between Art and Anthropology	Calzadilla and Marcus (2020)	5	1	3	1	10
27	The Routledge Companion to Decolonising Art, Craft, and Visual Culture Education	Sharma and Alexander (2023)	5	1	3	1	10
28	The roads of rage and ruin: contemporary art and its publics after the global	Sheikh (2021)	5	3	3	3	14
29	Globalism and the Organic Multicultural Ecosystem of the Art Community in Yogyakarta	Sucitra (2021)	3	3	5	1	12
30	Art of the Global Asias: From Identity to Intervention	Tan (2021)	5	1	3	3	12
31	Talking Over Each Other: Diasporic Punjabi Artists and the Ideologies of Public Arts in Multicultural Canada	VanderBeek (2024)	1	3	5	1	10
32	Power, capital, and artistic freedom: contemporary Chinese art communities and the city	Wang (2019)	3	3	3	1	10
33	Discoursing Asia: The Regional Contemporary	Wee (2023)	5	3	5	3	16

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
	and Historical Fracture in Asian Contemporary Art Symposia, 1997						
34	Artistic Hybridity and Local Environmental Awareness: Modern ink painting by Nanyang pioneer artists	Yi and Abdullah (2024)	5	1	3	1	10
35	Multiculturalism through a lens: migrants' voices in Taiwanese documentaries	Zemanek and Momesso (2023)	3	1	5	1	10
36	Mixed-Race Asian Americans and Contemporary Visual Culture: Merle Oberon and the Reinterpretation of Mixed Race	Nishime (2020)	5	3	3	3	14
37	Redefining the Contemporary in a Global Context: Indonesian Art in the 1990s	Turner (2023)	3	3	3	3	12
38	Shaping Geographies: Art, Woman, and South-East Asia	Antoinette and Dirgantoro (2020)	1	3	3	3	10
39	We Sinful Women): Urban Feminist Visuality in Contemporary Art and Feminist Movements in Pakistan After 9	Syed (2022)	3	3	5	3	14
40	Performing queerness: Singapore Global City for the Arts and the politics of invisibility	Low (2020)	3	1	3	1	8
41	Artistic Ideologies: Individual and Society in	Kent (2022)	3	3	3	3	12

No.	Title	Author/Year	Authoritative	Argumentation	Relevance	Data	AARD Total
	Indonesian Art						
42	Muslim women in contemporary visual arts: the veil as a trope	Aljared, R. (2022).	5	3	5	1	14
43	Culturally Responsible Approach to Teaching East Asian Art in the Classroom	Shin and Yang (2021)	5	1	5	3	14
44	Roundtable on Collective Work	Curtin et al. (2021)	3	3	1	1	8
45	Resistivity in Contemporary Art Biennials: A Synchronic Analysis	Bruce (2022)	3	3	3	1	10
46	Machinic Animism in Japanese Contemporary Art	Hetrick (2022)	3	3	3	3	12
47	A Show of Hands: Crafting Concepts in Contemporary Art	Parvu (2024)	3	1	3	1	8
48	Representation of Diasporic Identity in Nadeem Aslam's Maps for Lost Lovers and Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire	Saqib et al. (2022)	3	3	5	3	14
49	Indian Myth, Korean Wave, and Thainess Politics of Hybridity in Thai Literature in the 21st Century	Boonhok (2024)	3	3	5	3	14
50	A Working Paper on For Whom the Bell Tolls	Khairuddin (2022)	3	1	1	3	8

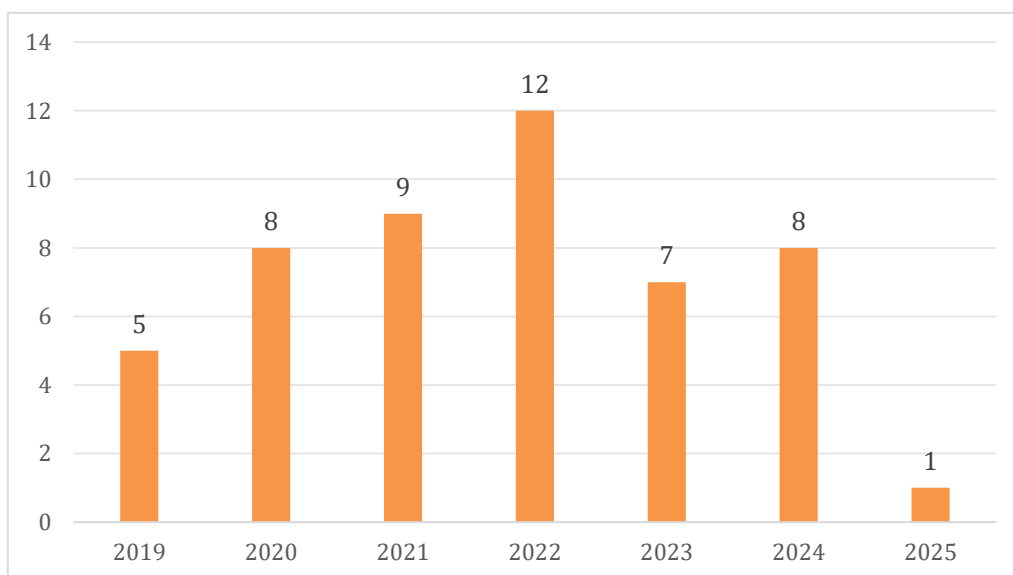
4. Results

The systematic analysis of the 50 included studies provides robust insights into the conceptual frameworks and strategic practices employed by contemporary Asian artists between 2019 and 2024. The results are presented in three main sections: keyword trends, regional strategy mapping, and conceptual strategy-power relations.

4.1. Article Per Year

Figure 2 shows the dynamic changes in the number of literature citations on "Cultural Games in Asian Fields: Multiculturalism and Contemporary Art Practice" from 2019 to 2025. By examining the data from the seven observation years in Worksheet 1 ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 3.44$), it can be seen that the number of literature citations exhibits a significant fluctuation ($F = 3.43$, $p < 0.05$). It is worth noting that the peak of literature citations was reached in 2022 ($n = 12$), which is temporally coupled with the increased attention to technology critical theory in the field of global art research, coinciding with the regional characteristics of "technological dialectics" identified in this study. Finally, it should be noted that after 2022, the number of papers has decreased slightly, which may be due to the previous increase that made it somewhat challenging to explore the field and maintain sufficient innovation.

Figure 2: The Number of Included Articles ($n = 50$) Published Per Year.



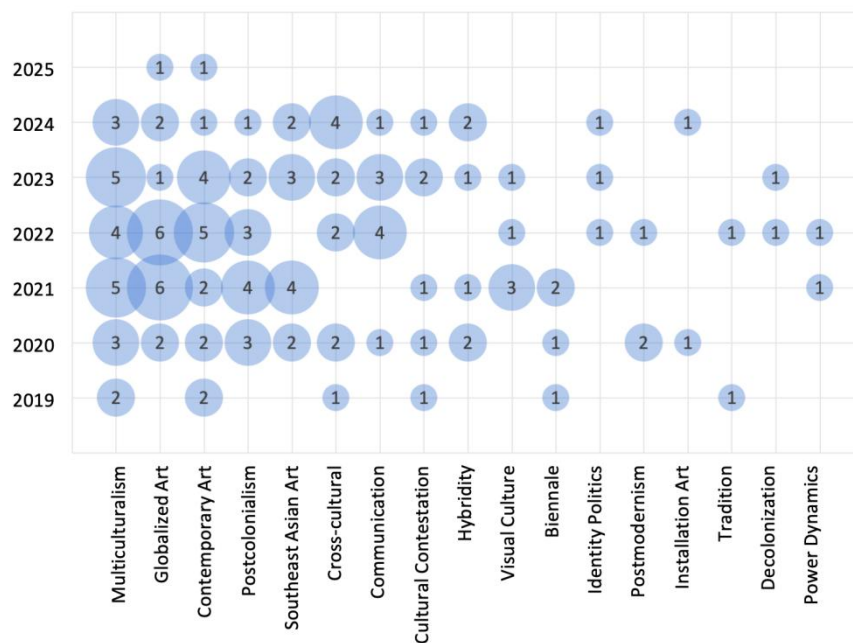
4.2. Research Topic

Figure 3 visually summarises the most frequently discussed themes within the selected literature. The prominence of specific terms indicates the dominant academic interests and artistic concerns during the 2019-2024 period.

Figure 3 reveals a strong and sustained scholarly focus on multiculturalism (22 papers) as a central theme shaping contemporary art, particularly in Asia, from 2019 to 2025.

Closely linked is the concept of globalized art (18 papers), reflecting the growing influence of transnational cultural flows on artistic production. These trends are reinforced by consistent attention to contemporary art (17 papers) as a broad category. In contrast, related themes, such as postcolonialism (13) and Southeast Asian art (11), highlight the historical and regional dimensions of cultural exchange. The rise of cross-cultural exchange (11) and cultural games (9) further underscores the dynamic interplay between cultures, with emerging concepts like hybridity (6) and visual culture (6) indicating a shift toward theoretical frameworks that emphasise cultural blending and mediation.

Figure 3: Research Topic Bubble Chart from 2019 to 2025.



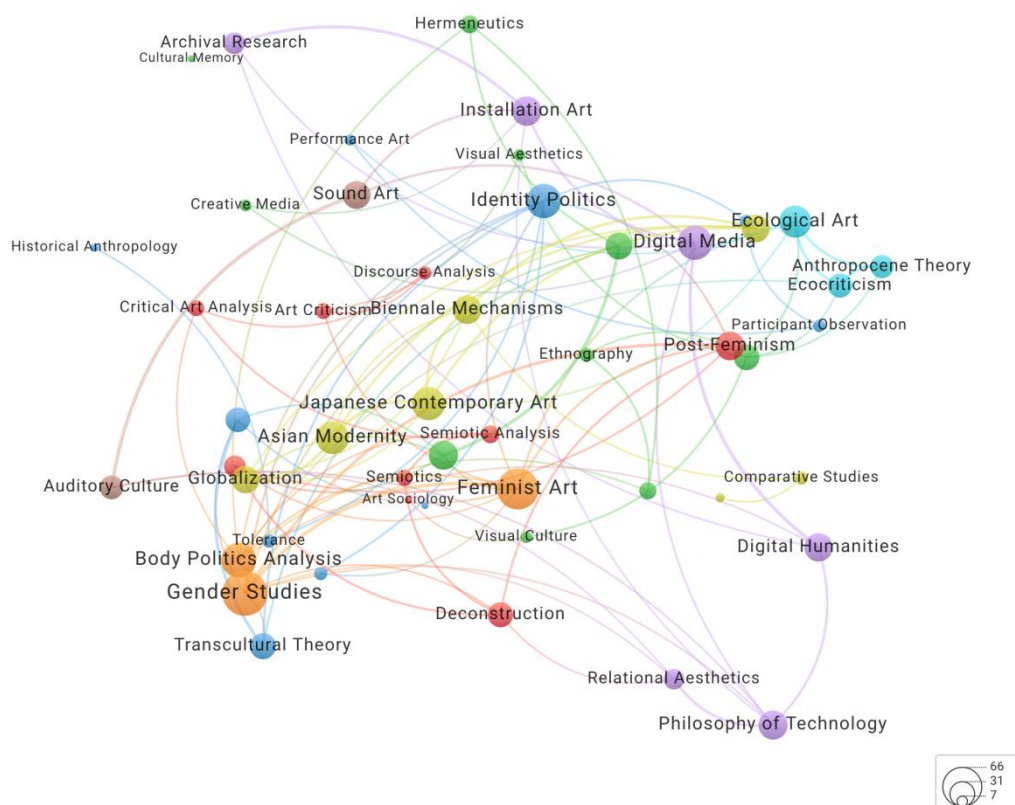
Recent years have seen a growing interest in critical perspectives, including power dynamics (2), suggesting a future trajectory that interrogates structural inequalities in art institutions. The decline of specific themes, such as postcolonialism after 2022, may signal a transition toward more localised or contemporary issues, while the sustained presence of key topics confirms multiculturalism's enduring relevance in academic discourse. Overall, the data illustrate an evolving field that increasingly integrates theoretical rigour with empirical case studies to examine the complex cultural negotiations influencing contemporary art in Asia and beyond.

The topic analysis reveals several dominant thematic clusters that define current scholarly approaches to Asian contemporary art. Central concepts such as postcolonialism and multiculturalism underscore the field's enduring engagement with the legacies of colonial histories and the complex dynamics of cultural coexistence within both national and global frameworks. These themes are closely linked to the recurring emphasis on resistance, which highlights the critical role of artistic agency in contesting dominant ideologies and power structures. Meanwhile, technological critique and body politics have emerged as significant areas of inquiry, reflecting artists' nuanced negotiations with digital innovation, embodied identity, and socio-political subjectivities (Hu, 2022). The prominence of biennale as a keyword further signals the institutional significance of large-scale international exhibitions as platforms for cultural negotiation,

artistic experimentation, and critical discourse within the Asian art world (Sheikh, 2021).

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship cluster diagram of keywords, theoretical framework, and research methods for 50 papers. The dataset also points to a pronounced shift toward digital and theoretical innovations. Emerging terms such as algorithmic surveillance, blockchain, and NFT art exemplify the growing scholarly interest in the intersections between contemporary art practices and rapidly evolving digital technologies, particularly within the context of Web3 and surveillance capitalism. Conceptually, terms like dynamic pluralism and institutional experiment demonstrate efforts to reconceptualise cultural interaction beyond static frameworks, emphasising instead the fluid, contested, and evolving nature of identity and artistic expression. The inclusion of technical dialectics suggests an analytical lens that examines the synthesis between traditional artistic methodologies and cutting-edge technological tools. At the same time, Asian aesthetics points to an ongoing project of articulating region-specific artistic principles that resist Western theoretical hegemony (Moraru, 2022). Collectively, these keywords affirm that contemporary scholarship in this field is deeply invested in critical theory, socio-political critique, and the transformative potential of technology, all situated within the expanding infrastructures of global art.

Figure 4: Literature Clustering Diagram

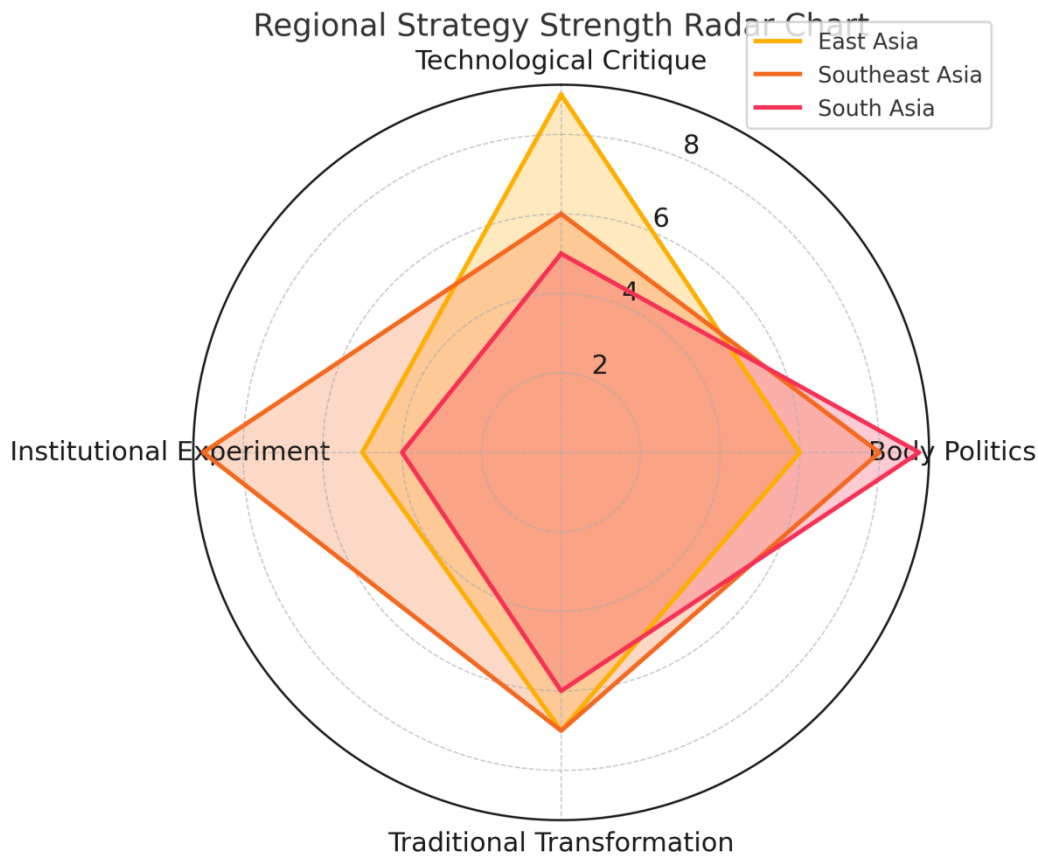


4.3. Regional Strategy Mapping

The analysis identifies three primary conceptual strategies—technological critique, body politics, and traditional transformation—supplemented by a significant engagement with institutional experimentation. These strategies do not operate in isolation but frequently intersect as strategic responses to structural forces such as neoliberalism, digital surveillance, and colonial legacies (VanderBeek, 2024). The

Regional Strategy Strength Radar Chart (Figure 5) provides a quantitative visualisation of their relative prevalence across East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, with normalised scores derived from the frequency of discussions within the regional literature.

Figure 5: Regional Strategy Strength Radar Chart



East Asia exhibits the strongest emphasis on technological critique, characterised by the concept of "technical dialectics," where artists strategically repurpose traditional methods—such as ink painting and calligraphy—within dialogues with digital aesthetics, AI-generated art, and machinic animism. This prominence reflects East Asia's advanced technological infrastructure and historical engagement with innovation, as seen in studies exploring the philosophical implications of AI, virtual reality, and robotics in countries like South Korea and Japan, often informed by indigenous spiritual or philosophical traditions (Hetrick, 2022; Parvu, 2024; Shin & Yang, 2021; Zemanek & Momesso, 2023). Traditional transformation is equally prevalent, with scholarship focusing on the dynamic reinterpretation of classical aesthetics within contemporary contexts, often through hybridisation to redefine national or regional identities in a globalised world (Chang, 2021; Parvu, 2024; Turner, 2023; Yi & Abdullah, 2024). Institutional experimentation, while less dominant than in Southeast Asia, centers on the evolving role of art institutions within rapidly developing markets and state-led cultural initiatives (Wang, 2019). Body politics receives comparatively less attention, though discussions of hybridity and diasporic identity persist (Cho, 2023; Nishime, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, body politics emerges as a dominant strategy, with "embodied pluralism" serving as a critical framework for artists to address postcolonial trauma, gender oppression, and political resistance through performance, corporeal expression,

and feminist symbolism (Mey, 2024). This is evident in studies exploring queer performance in Singapore (Low, 2020), urban memory (Corey, 2021), and feminist art practices (Albar, 2020). Institutional experimentation is equally pronounced, with scholars highlighting critiques of established art institutions, curatorial paradigms, and biennale structures, often advocating for decentralised, community-based alternatives (Cocotle, 2019; Curtin et al., 2021; Khairuddin, 2022). Traditional transformation appears less frequently but remains significant, particularly when questioning the commodification or authenticity of heritage in globalised contexts (Lenz, 2020). Technological critique, while present, is comparatively underdeveloped, with only sporadic explorations of digital art within postcolonial narratives (Juneja, 2024).

South Asia demonstrates a strong focus on institutional experimentation, with scholars directly challenging elite curatorial practices, global art market hierarchies, and the "post-national" rhetoric of biennales to advocate for more inclusive platforms (Bruce, 2022; del Mundo-Angeles, 2022; Sheikh, 2021). Body politics is equally significant, often addressing identity, religion, diaspora, and social justice through performative and visual interventions (Gras, Harris, & Makhoul, 2022; Saqib, Ahmad, & Rahat, 2022; Syed, 2022). Traditional transformation appears moderately, typically involving critical reinterpretations of religious or folk art traditions and hybrid identities shaped by indigenous and global influences (Boonhok, 2024; Krairiksh, 2022). Technological critique is the least prevalent, suggesting limited academic engagement with digital art within the reviewed literature.

These regional variations, while not absolute, reveal distinct geopolitical and cultural priorities in artistic strategies for understanding how artists and scholars across Asia respond to shared challenges through regionally specific lenses (VanderBeek, 2024).

4.4. Conceptual Strategies-Power Structures Relationships

The analysis further demonstrates that these artistic strategies are deeply embedded within—and often actively confront—broader structural forces and power dynamics. The Cultural Games Strategies-Power Structures Sankey Diagram (Figure 6) provides a compelling visual representation of these intricate relationships, with the thickness of connecting bands reflecting the frequency and intensity of associations identified through qualitative coding between specific artistic approaches and their corresponding power structures.

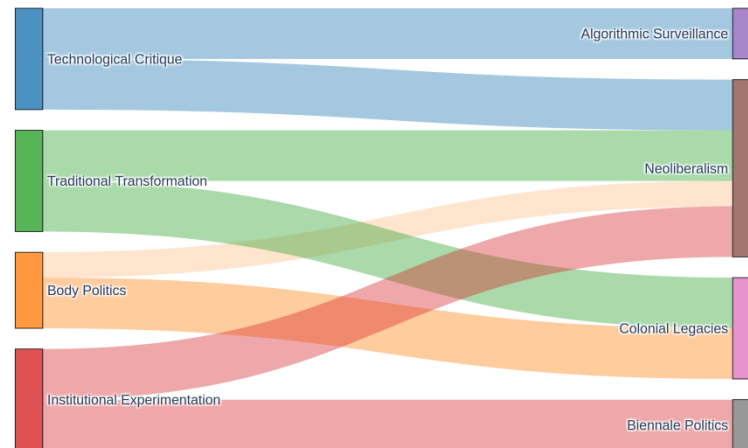
A particularly salient observation is the strong correlation between technological critique and the forces of algorithmic surveillance and neoliberalism. Artists employing this strategy often expose the invasive reach of digital surveillance, the commodification of personal data, and how neoliberal policies shape technological development. Their works consistently interrogate the illusion of progress and autonomy in an increasingly digitised world, as evidenced by critical discussions surrounding blockchain technology and NFT art, which often reveal their speculative and exploitative dimensions within neoliberal economic systems (Pavliv, Mosendz, Rybchenko, Avula, & Fryz, 2024).

Similarly, body politics emerges as a potent counterforce to both colonial legacies and, to a lesser extent, neoliberalism. Through corporeal expression and performance, artists reclaim agency over narratives that have historically been shaped by colonialism, challenging its enduring impact on identity, gender, and nationhood. This is particularly evident in the concept of "embodied pluralism," which directly resists colonial

essentialism while simultaneously resisting the commodification of cultural identities within neoliberal frameworks (Antonette & Dirgantoro, 2019; Low, 2020; Nishime, 2020; Syed, 2022).

Figure 6: Cultural Games Strategies-Power Structures Sankey Diagram

Cultural Games in Asian Field: A Sankey Diagram of Critical Artistic Strategies



Traditional transformation also demonstrates significant ties to both colonial legacies and neoliberalism, as artists reinterpret traditional forms to assert indigenous knowledge systems, resist cultural homogenization, and critically engage with the commercialisation of heritage in global markets. This strategy operates on multiple registers—simultaneously celebrating cultural resilience and critiquing appropriation—making it a multifaceted response to historical and contemporary forces (Chang, 2021; Lenz, 2021; Pavliv et al., 2024; Yi & Abdullah, 2024).

Finally, institutional experimentation is strongly linked to neoliberalism and the politics of biennale culture. This strategy involves direct critiques of the commercial pressures, curatorial biases, and hierarchical structures that define global art institutions and large-scale events, such as biennales. Scholars and artists alike question how these institutions shape artistic narratives and economic hierarchies, often proposing alternative models of exhibition and dissemination that prioritize equity and inclusivity (Bruce, 2022; Cocotle, 2019; Curtin et al., 2021; Wang, 2019).

In summary, the Sankey diagram effectively illustrates that Asian artists are not engaged in purely aesthetic pursuits; rather, their practices serve as strategic interventions within complex socio-economic and historical contexts. The "cultural games" they enact represent deliberate attempts to navigate, contest, or reconfigure these structural forces, revealing art as a powerful medium for critical engagement and transformative possibility.

5. Conclusion

This section critically synthesises findings from the 50 selected studies to explore the conceptual and strategic practices employed by contemporary Asian artists from 2019 to 2024. Structured around the study's three guiding research questions, the discussion identifies cross-regional strategy patterns (RQ1), defines and contextualises key

theoretical constructs such as dynamic pluralism and technical dialectics (RQ2), and highlights representational asymmetries in the theorisation of Asia's cultural agency within global art circuits (RQ3).

5.1. RQ1: Recurring Strategies Across East, Southeast, and South Asia

The review identifies four main strategic categories consistently employed by artists across the three regions: technological critique, body politics, traditional transformation, and institutional experimentation.

5.1.1. Technological Critique

This strategy is particularly prominent in East Asia, where artists engage in technical dialectics—practices that connect traditional artistic techniques (e.g., calligraphy, ink painting) with emerging digital tools such as AI, NFTs, and blockchain art (Pavliv et al., 2024; Shin & Yang, 2021). Importantly, this fusion is not merely aesthetic; it functions as a critical interrogation of algorithmic surveillance and digital neoliberalism (He et al., 2024). As Hetrick (2022) discusses through "Machinic Animism," East Asian artists use technology to simultaneously question and spiritualise digital culture, reflecting an indigenous epistemology that resists Western technodeterminism.

While less dominant in Southeast and South Asia, technological critique remains evident, often intersecting with other strategies (e.g., institutional critique, body politics) to emphasise socio-political issues such as digital surveillance and economic exploitation (Hetrick, 2022; Wang, 2019).

5.1.2. Body Politics

Artists from Southeast and South Asia prominently employ body politics, often expressed through performance art, feminist symbolism, and embodied pluralism. They explore themes of gender, urban displacement, queerness, and diasporic identity (Low, 2020; Nishime, 2020; Syed, 2022). These bodily narratives function as "cultural games" that challenge state control, conservative norms, and dominant historical narratives, often transforming the body into a site of political resistance and collective memory (Antoinette & Dirgantoro, 2019; Corey, 2021).

5.1.3. Traditional Transformation

This strategy holds significance across all three regions, although its expression varies. In East Asia, artists draw upon classical aesthetics in dialogue with contemporary issues (Yi & Abdullah, 2024), while in Southeast Asia, tradition is often critically examined for its commodification and colonial entanglements (Kent, 2022; Lenz, 2021). In South Asia, religious iconography and folk art are recontextualised to serve as forms of political critique or identity reclamation (Khairuddin, 2022). Across these regions, tradition is neither passively inherited nor superficially fused; it is strategically re-signified in response to present challenges.

5.1.4. Institutional Experimentation

Although not initially categorised as a core focus, bibliometric analysis reveals its recurrent appearance across Southeast and South Asia. Artists challenge the politics of

exhibition, curatorial authority, and market dominance through decolonising practices, community-based art, and alternative exhibition platforms (Cocotle, 2019; Curtin et al., 2021; Mey, 2024) This strategy also involves critiques of biennial infrastructures and the reproduction of elitist hierarchies (Bruce, 2022), especially in South Asia.

5.2. RQ2: Deployment of 'Dynamic Pluralism' and 'Technical Dialectics'

5.2.1. Defining 'Dynamic Pluralism'

The idea of dynamic pluralism develops as a conceptual opposite to static or market-driven multiculturalism. Instead of merely displaying diversity, it involves an active, evolving negotiation of multiple, often conflicting, cultural identities. Artists from various regions express this through works that contrast incompatible symbols, challenge national narratives, and highlight localised experiences (He et al., 2024; Zemanek & Momesso, 2023). It is a conscious cultural challenge against homogenisation, asserting heterogeneity within and across Asian societies (Hajianfard, Mokhtar, & Rafee, 2024).

5.2.2. Defining 'Technical Dialectics'

As previously noted, technical dialectics are most clearly defined in East Asian contexts. It refers to a strategic fusion of traditional techniques with digital and emerging technologies, not as pastiche, but as a critical intervention (Pavliv et al., 2024; Shin & Yang, 2021). This includes questioning digitisation, surveillance, and post-industrial aesthetics through traditional idioms. Artists utilise this dialectic to resist Western technocentrism, emphasise non-linear temporalities, and reclaim digital space from neoliberal logic (Hetrick, 2022; Moraru, 2022).

Together, dynamic pluralism and technical dialectics help theorise the distinct Asian cultural agency at play, rooted in historical specificity yet engaged in global dialogues. These concepts enable us to move beyond binary logics of East/West or tradition/modernity.

5.3. RQ3: Gaps in Theorising Asia's Cultural Agency

Despite valuable insights, the review reveals notable regional gaps in the literature. Most included studies originate from or focus on China, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia, while Central Asia and Pacific Art are notably underrepresented (Querol, 2022; Tan, 2021). This suggests a theoretical asymmetry in how "Asia" is defined and who is authorised to represent it.

This underrepresentation arises from structural challenges, including language barriers, limited academic infrastructure, and the dominance of Western publishing priorities. As a result, the current conceptualisation of "cultural games" may be insufficient to capture diverse strategies developed in underrepresented regions.

Moreover, the exclusive reliance on peer-reviewed English-language sources, while ensuring academic quality, unintentionally marginalises critical discourses emerging from exhibition catalogues, artist interviews, and curatorial essays. As suggested, future research could adopt methodologically rigorous secondary screening to include such sources without compromising academic standards.

Furthermore, additional empirical research is needed to evaluate the real impact of these strategies on curatorial paradigms, institutional inclusivity, and the global art market. Have "cultural games" led to tangible shifts in the representation and valuation of non-Western art? These questions mark essential next steps beyond this literature review.

6. Conclusion

This systematic literature review critically examined the conceptual frameworks and strategic practices adopted by contemporary Asian artists from 2019 to 2024, with a particular focus on how they negotiate the complex intersections of multiculturalism, institutional power, and global art circuits. By applying the PRISMA 2020 framework and integrating thematic synthesis with bibliometric mapping, this study contributes to the conceptual refinement and empirical structuring of the evolving discourse on "cultural games" in Asian contemporary art.

The review addressed three guiding research questions to offer a multidimensional understanding of cultural strategy and agency in Asian art.

RQ1 explored the recurrence of four key conceptual strategies - technological critique, body politics, traditional transformation, and institutional experimentation - across East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. East Asian artists prominently engage in "technical dialectics," combining traditional techniques with digital technologies to interrogate surveillance, digital capitalism, and spiritual alienation (Hetrick, 2022; Pavliv et al., 2024; Sheikh, 2021). Southeast Asian practices foreground "embodied pluralism" and curatorial resistance (Cocotle, 2019; Corey, 2021; Low, 2020), while South Asian artists combine institutional critique with body-centred interventions to challenge postcolonial hierarchies and patriarchal norms (Bruce, 2022; Syed, 2022).

RQ2 unpacked how key concepts, such as dynamic pluralism and technical dialectics, are defined and deployed across various contexts. Dynamic pluralism resists commodified multiculturalism and instead emphasises the fluid, negotiated coexistence of diverse, and often conflicting, identities within and across Asian societies (Hajianfard et al., 2024; He et al., 2024). Technical dialectics emerged as a distinctly East Asian mode of hybridisation that reclaims tradition as a critical tool for engaging with modernity and resisting Western technocentrism (Moraru, 2022; Shin & Yang, 2021).

RQ3 revealed persistent theoretical and geographic asymmetries. Despite broad regional coverage, scholarship on Central Asia and Pacific Art remains significantly underrepresented (Moraru, 2022; Tan, 2021). Moreover, strict reliance on English-language peer-reviewed sources excluded valuable insights from artist statements, curatorial essays, and exhibition catalogues that shape emerging art discourses in practice.

Multiple visual representations of data further substantiate these findings. The Research Topic Bubble Chart (Figure 2) highlights the prevalence of key themes, including postcolonialism, algorithmic surveillance, and resistance. The Regional Strategy Radar Chart (Figure 4) quantifies the distribution of strategies across regions. The Strategy-Power Sankey Diagram (Figure 5) maps artistic responses to structural forces including neoliberalism, digital surveillance, and colonial legacies, affirming that these strategies

are not isolated gestures but deeply politicised cultural interventions (Pattanachoti, 2019; Wang, 2019).

This review presents a significant theoretical contribution by introducing “cultural games” as a framework for understanding how contemporary Asian artists assert agency within global art circuits. Instead of viewing cultural production as merely reactive, this approach sees it as a process of negotiation where artists adapt and innovate within power structures. By emphasising strategic hybridity (Hoon, 2021), artists are positioned as agents who rewrite the rules of engagement in multicultural contexts, leading to a more nuanced understanding of cultural production that moves beyond simplistic binaries, such as East versus West. Concepts such as dynamic pluralism and technical dialectics further enhance this perspective, highlighting diversity as a site of creativity and tradition as a resource in navigating contemporary challenges. This review contributes to postcolonial discourse in art historiography and broader conversations about knowledge production in the arts.

This review has limitations, primarily its reliance on English-language, peer-reviewed articles, which may overlook significant contributions from underrepresented regions with limited publishing infrastructures. This focus reinforces inequalities in knowledge visibility and may not reflect the diversity of strategies from areas like Central Asia and the Pacific. Additionally, by relying solely on secondary published sources, the review overlooks insights gained from direct engagement with artists and institutions, which could reveal the impacts of “cultural games” on curatorial practices and local art ecosystems. Furthermore, while excluding non-peer-reviewed material for consistency, it recognises that innovative practices are often first articulated through artist statements and exhibition documentation, which could expand future analyses.

Future research should broaden the geographical and methodological scope of Asian contemporary art scholarship, with a primary focus on Central Asia and the Pacific, to uncover previously absent epistemologies. A commitment to multilingual inquiry and partnerships with regional scholars is essential. Interdisciplinary approaches, such as machine learning for visual analysis, could enhance qualitative insights with data-driven perspectives. Empirical studies are needed to assess the impact of cultural games on institutional change, including their influence on curatorial practices and art spaces. Longitudinal research tracking specific strategies over time could provide valuable insights into the sustainability and evolution of Asian artistic agency in a dynamic global landscape.

This review highlights that contemporary Asian artists are not peripheral contributors to global art, but rather critical agents shaping its future. Their “cultural games” reflect both resistance to dominant systems and constructive re-imaginings of cultural coexistence, aesthetic hybridity, and institutional structure. By mapping these strategies and theorising their implications, this study contributes to a more plural, critical, and contextually grounded understanding of Asia’s cultural agency in the 21st century.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is a literature review paper; it does not involve human subjects and does not involve any ethical review content.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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