A Global Platform for Youth Journalism

May 2026

INSPIRE YOUTH JOURNAL

The 28th Edition

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WOMEN: RIDING THE BICYCLE TO FREEDOM

Hu Suri Trinh

The 1890s were a turning point in history.

This was due to the creation of a rather technological invention, one that would reshape society in many unexpected ways. The bicycle, which was cheap, accessible, and increasingly popular, provided mobility to millions. But for women, it provided something more radical: independence.

At that time, women's lives were tightly controlled by social norms that limited where they could go, how they behaved, and even what they could wear. The movement extended to the political system; moving freely was to challenge a system built on women staying still.
The bicycle disrupted that system.

For the first time in history, women could travel without supervision. They could visit their friends, attend work, and explore beyond the boundaries imposed on them. Those who utilized this new capability were known as "the new women". That was a small difference, but it had a big impact; it gave women autonomy and power, eventually leading to the rise of the feminist movement.

There was, however, an immediate cultural backlash; people believed that cycling was dangerous, harmful, and even immoral. Social commentators, whose opinions were shaped by traditional social norms that had pre-existed for centuries, feared that independence would erode traditional gender roles. Because of the widespread bicycle craze, clothing became an issue. Long skirts made cycling impractical, thus prompting women to adopt bloomers; those were heavily criticised but revolutionary.

As women gained confidence and took to the streets, the bicycle became intertwined with the growing movement for women's rights - activists understood the symbolic and practical importance of it, and adopted it. Susan B. Anthony famously said that the bicycle had "done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world." It is undeniable that other forces - activism, education, systemic change - were undoubtedly necessary, but the bicycle provided something unique: immediate, tangible freedom, that gave women the feeling of self - reliance.

The invention of the bicycle shaped the movement for women's rights

The biggest benefit was how women had more mobility than ever. This meant that they had wider access to public life, and with that access came visibility. Women were no longer confined to public spaces; they were active on the streets, in workplaces, and in social networks that had previously excluded them. Visibility strengthened how women were perceived; it was difficult to argue that women were unfit for public or political positions when they had already influenced public opinion and taken up leadership roles independently.

Following the bicycle's invention, the feminist movement had witnessed more meaningful changes. For instance, the suffrage movement began to receive unprecedented momentum. The bicycle broke down moral barriers of "proper" female behavior; after all, women were capable of self-reliance. Women were more visible in public spaces and active in their communities, so the demand for political representation became harder to ignore. The right to vote was no longer a distant goal, but it was an equal extension of women's participation in society.

We have already witnessed some success stories. In 1893, New Zealand granted women the right to vote, followed by America in 1920. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed, continuing equality.

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Notice how these changes could only be made through continuous efforts from women activists. The visibility created by everyday acts, such as cycling, working, and organising, was small but important. It normalised women's presence in public life. In this sense, the suffrage movement was not only influenced by internal changes, but it was also reinforced by broader social changes that made its needs seem more credible and more urgent.

How the feminist movement currently operates

There has, undeniably, been significant progress in the movement for women's rights over the past century. The feminist movement began as a struggle for basic political recognition and has evolved into a global effort to achieve equality across all around the globe.

What we have witnessed throughout the years is political inclusion. Today, women have the right to vote in almost every country in the world— this is notably a huge difference compared to the late 19th century, when such rights were virtually nonexistent. This change has not only allowed women to participate in democratic processes but also to influence policy, governance, and national priorities.

Progress is also seen in education. In many regions, gender gaps in primary and secondary schooling have reduced significantly, with girls now matching or even surpassing boys in enrollment rates. Access to education has, in turn, expanded opportunities for women in professional fields once considered inaccessible, from law and medicine to science and technology.

Economic participation has also improved. Women are increasingly present in the global workforce, contributing to industries at every level. Still, inequality remains, particularly in wages and leadership representation, but we still see that women are no longer excluded from economic systems, but are central to them.

Looking from this context, the bicycle still retains its relevance. Sure, it is no longer at the centre of feminist discourse, but it remains a useful lens through which to understand the relationship between infrastructure, culture, and rights. Where women can move freely and safely, broader forms of participation tend to follow. Where they are not, limitations persist in the status quo.

The interconnection between cycling and the feminist movement itself shows a broader principle. Structura, systemic change is rarely driven by a single factor; rather, it emerges from the interaction between material conditions and political demands. The bicycle did not create feminism, but it changed the environment in which feminist ideas could take hold and expand.

The bicycle's significance is not confined to the past. It proves that seemingly small changes in access, such as transport, education, or technology, can have disproportionate effects on social and political outcomes. The question is not simply whether movement is possible, but who can move, under what conditions, and to what end.

When those questions are answered unequally or partially, the work of the feminist movement remains unfinished.

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Conclusion

The story of the bicycle and women's rights shows that social change is often driven not only by laws and institutions, but by shifts in everyday experience. When individuals gain the ability to move freely, they also gain the ability to think, act, and demand differently.

And in the case of women in the 1890s, that movement began on two wheels.

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GENDERED PRICING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Nhu Ngoc Bui

A Hidden Pattern in Everyday Consumption

The pink tax, the practice of charging women more for similar products and services offered to men, is more than just a catchy name. The term does not denote an actual tax. It refers instead to an identifiable trend of gendered pricing in the average consumption pattern. Evidence indicates that this difference is deeply rooted and prevalent. In 2015, the pink tax was calculated at a 7% price markup over similar male products, according to the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs. This spread even wider in other sectors, with the personal care sector charging 13% more for products directed toward women than for products for men. This practice is rampant with consumer products varying from razors, hygiene products, clothing, and toys marketed toward children.

The noticeable aspect of the pink tax is its constant and disguised nature. The price differences are usually minimal and spread across various purchases. For these reasons, they are readily disregarded. However, the presence of these differentials across a range of different sectors implies that the phenomena in question are not just coincidental but rather a form of systematic disparity. Over time, the accumulation of these slight discrepancies is reflected as a concrete gap in everyday expenditure.

Why the Pink Tax Exists: Gender Norms and Structural Discrimination

Gender norms and structural discrimination can be identified as key drivers of the pink tax's enduring presence. Gendered marketing, whereby products are differentiated based on brand image and packaging rather than their respective functionality, has become a standard for product distinction in industries. These distinctions enable marketers to justify higher pricing for women's products as more 'specialized.'

In addition, it is important to note that the pink tax is intricately linked to gender inequality in general, since according to the ILO, women are paid on average 20% less than men. Although the relevance of genderism has been debated, the pink tax is only one piece of a bigger picture. Within this context, consumers' elevated prices are not viewed as separate phenomena. Instead, they contribute to a pre-existing financial inequality that has long been neglected. Gender stereotypes play a significant role in maintaining the status quo: individuals have been socialized to accept and expect higher spending levels by women. This reasoning, though fundamentally flawed, may lead some to conclude that women can be demanding or finicky, as they may believe this trait would make them willing to tolerate higher prices. As a consequence, gendered pricing becomes a social norm, making resistance less probable and increasing women's acceptance of this unjust practice out of mere resignation. This tacit compliance exacerbates the problem.

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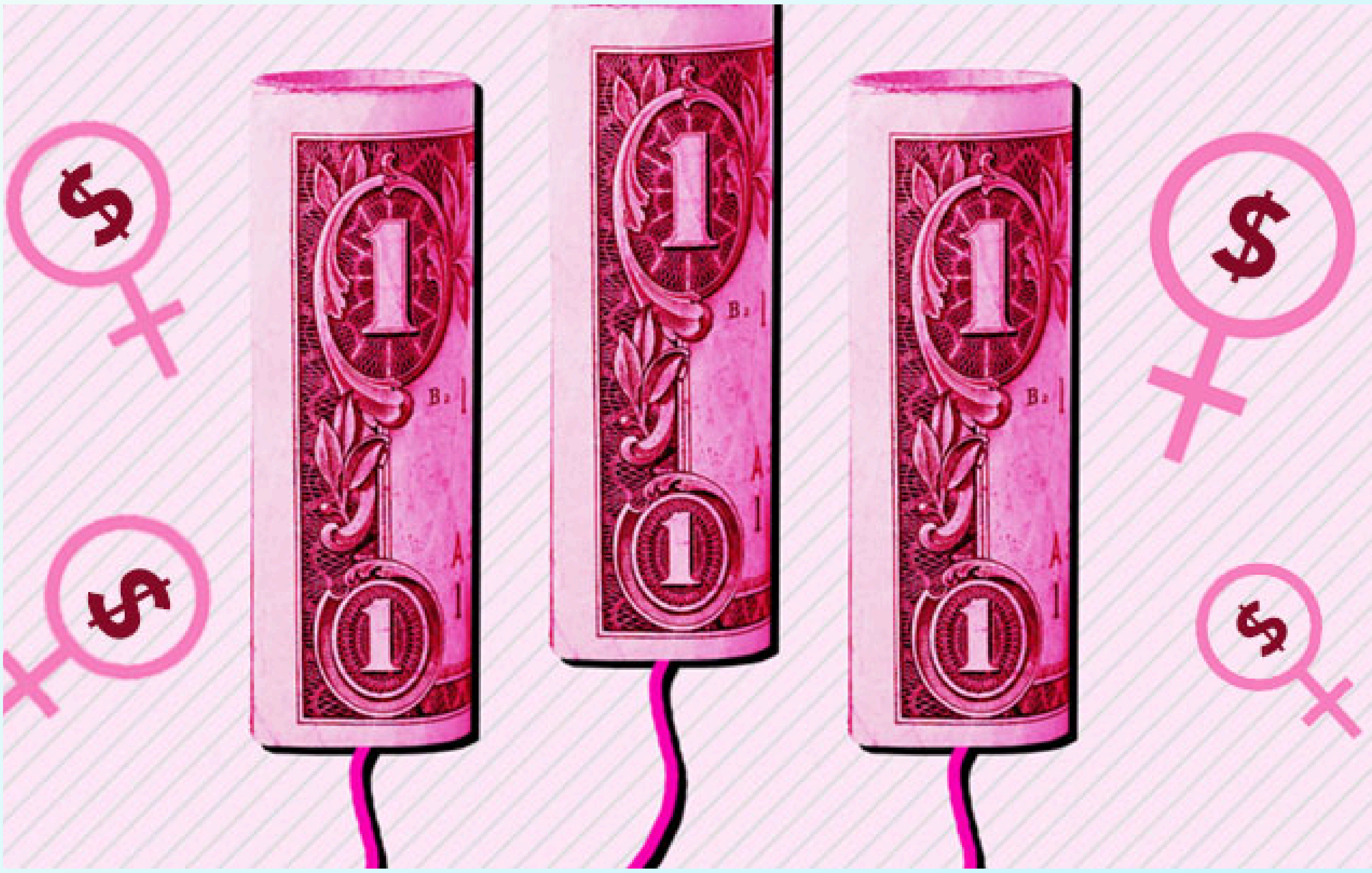
The Consequences of the Pink Tax: Financial Burden and Reinforced Inequality

The most concrete effect the pink tax has is a build-up in the financial obligation. A study discovered that while one single price difference may not be a significant amount, the financial obligation accumulates over the years. The same New York City Department of Consumer Affairs study discovered a 7% overall price difference for items priced toward women, with personal care products holding a 13% higher price. When aggregated over the course of a lifetime, the cost can amount to thousands of dollars for consumers. For those with lower disposable incomes, this translates into persistent and inescapable financial strain. Beyond direct financial costs, the pink tax also reinforces inequalities. It establishes a social norm for higher consumption by women. In conjunction with a global 20% gender wage gap (ILO), increased spending for products can significantly deepen the existing financial disparity between men and women. The pink tax does not occur in isolation: it is intertwined with other structural inequalities, making it both a financial and social problem, and its persistence in subtle yet undeniable ways highlights a form of invisible inequality.



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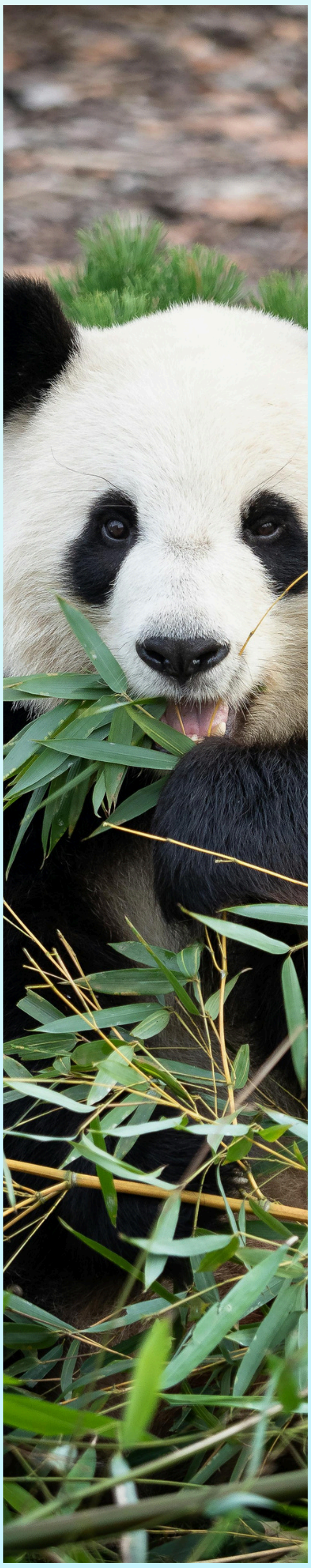
PANDA DIPLOMACY: WHEN CONSERVATION BECOMES A GEOPOLITICAL WEAPON

Amy Nguyen

In November 2023, three giant pandas, Mei Xiang, Tian Tian, and their cub Xiao Qi Ji, left the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington, D.C., to return to China. The official explanation was that the loan agreement had expired. However, those familiar with U.S.-China relations recognized that these charming animals represented a more complex geopolitical situation.

In the 21st century, as traditional warfare becomes more expensive, countries have moved to a new arena: the biosphere, and no country has used this strategy more effectively than China with its giant pandas.



What is soft power?

Joseph Nye, who established the concept of "soft power" in the 1990s, defined it as the ability to obtain desires through attraction rather than coercion. However, a new variation of this concept has emerged, known as controlled ecological soft power. In this model, nature itself becomes a leased asset attached to specific political and economic conditions. Unlike traditional soft power, China's ecological approach operates on three specific principles.

The first principle is scarcity. Pandas are not just protected, they are managed as profitable assets, with a loan fee of 1 million USD each year. Additionally, any cubs born abroad belong to China, creating a form of time-limited genetic leasing. The second principle is diplomatic reflection. Pandas serve as a measure of international relations. In 1972, they arrived in the U.S. after Nixon’s historic visit. By 2023, they left due to rising trade and technology tensions. The third principle highlights the dual nature of the narrative. Externally, it promotes the idea of protecting a shared natural heritage. Internally, it creates a dependence on biotechnology. Western zoos must share research data on reproduction and genetics, turning the relationship into a way to transfer hidden knowledge.

The development of history

The history of this strategy has evolved through three distinct stages. Between the 1950s and 1980s, pandas were given as pure gestures of goodwill. In 1957, China gave a pair to the Soviet Union to strengthen the socialist bloc, and in 1972, two pandas arrived in the U.S. to pave the way for normalized relations.

During this phase, pandas served as silent ambassadors.

The second stage, occurring from the 1990s to the 2010s, was characterized by commercialization. Following China’s entry into the WTO, the strategy shifted from "gifting" to "charging for loans." This established a precedent where China owned the global natural heritage and the rest of the world paid for access. The current stage, from 2020 to today, is known as the weaponization era. Trade wars and the pandemic accelerated this process. Between 2020 and 2023, China recalled pandas from various Western zoos, including Memphis and Washington, D.C. in the U.S. and Adelaide in Australia. These moves often coincided with diplomatic tensions regarding technology sanctions or COVID-19 investigations. Conversely, pandas were also renewed or newly sent to strategic partners like Moscow and Doha, confirming that panda distribution now aligns with China’s strategic map.

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Can others follow?

While other nations possess symbolic animals, few can replicate this model. Australia has the Koala, but it lacks a tradition of controlled ownership and the scarcity that pandas possess. Indonesia has the Komodo dragon, but do not possess the same "cuddliness" required for effective soft power. Therefore, China's success relies on a unique convergence of a natural monopoly, a positive emotional symbol, and clear geopolitical ambition.

Looking back and to the future

Pandas are now financial tools, geopolitical indicators, and propaganda weapons wrapped in a black-and-white coat. Future historians may look back at the 21st century and conclude that the new cold war was not only fought with missiles or bitcoin. Instead, it was also fought with endangered species and time-limited loan contracts. And in the middle of this conflict, the pandas continue to chew bamboo, unaware that they are both international ambassadors and geopolitical hostages.

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THE "PLASTIC" PRICE OF FAME: IS K-POP SUCCESS COSTING THE EARTH?

Phuong Nguyen Ha

In he hectic streets of Myeong-dong, there lies a peculiar paradox that is hard to miss: thousands and thousands of people line up waiting to buy the newest albums of their idols, but a few minutes later, those glossy new CDs- the things that are meant to hold the music- are found in the public trash bin. What remains in their hands are wallet-sized photocards, the thing that they seem to think is the most priceless merch in the album, or, in other words, they buy the album just for the photocards.

As every year, K-pop album sales skyrocket to over 115 million units annually, the whole industry faces a true reality: its success is built on a big pile of non-recyclable polycarbonate.

The "Lottery" Economy

According to the Korea Consumer Agency (KCA), over 50% of buyers purchase albums solely for random 'photocards' rather than listening to the music on them. The result of this consumer behaviour is approximately 6,667 tons of plastic waste generated in the past four years. While streaming has become the norm globally, surprisingly, CDs sold physically have increased in numbers from 25 million in 2019 to more than 77 million in 2023. This surge appears to be created by an artificial spike coming from the so-called "lottery" structure the record labels use, creating an incentive for wholesale buying to increase the likelihood of winning one of the highly sought-after places at a "fansign". As a result, to fans, purchasing an album has less to do with listening than it does with being a high-cost entry to be close to an idol.

The Immortal Legacy Of A 3-minute Song

There is more than just the amount of music-related waste created, and it is also in the chemicals contained in that waste stream. A typical album from a group such as IVE, Stray Kids, SEVENTEEN or even BTS consists of polycarbonate discs (aluminum infused) bundled together with laminated photo books and printed on with synthetic, non-decomposable inks. Because of their hybrid composition, these composite materials are not feasible to recycle on a professional level, and most recycling facilities cannot separate the materials; therefore, a significant portion of these materials will be sent to landfills, where they may not break down for more than 500 years.

As such, music production produces more than music; it produces "immortalized" waste for short-term chart success.

Transferred Burden

Was it a donation of charity or a form of liability? When consumers have too much unused space and too many trash cans, the waste will often be dumped back as "donation" via the fans' purchases of large quantities of "junk" music CDs. However, today those who provide such music CDs are being asked to stop, because the social services, orphanages, and the like have no way of disposing of these industrial-level plastic wastes and, as such, result in the recipient of the donation being both financially and environmentally liable for the donation that was intended in goodwill.

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More Than Just Greenwashing

Recent backlash against the negative impact of K-Pop on the environment has led several major record labels to develop "eco-friendly" K-Pop albums that use soy-based inks and FSC-certified paper to make their products appear less harmful. However, critics are calling this a prime example of "greenwashing," as changing the paper type does not address the primary issue causing environmental degradation, the incentive-based marketing model that creates millions of products that are completely unnecessary. In order for the K-Pop industry to create a truly sustainable model, physical waste must be separated from supporting artists. The K-Pop industry will need to change its current marketing practices and provide services to consumers digitally rather than physically in order to develop something called "Green K-Pop." If these changes do not happen, the sales generated from K-Pop albums will continue to accrue added environmental debt in the future.

Conclusion

To prolong the life of the record-breaking sales of today will surely not be seen in a positive light should they turn into the environmental debt of tomorrow. Music has always been meaningful because of how much it inspires and connects people. The production of physical musical products will create garbage that will remain on this planet for five hundred years; therefore, both the music industry and fans need to consider whether that brief moment of closeness to an artist is worth the cost of that long-lasting plastic.

For 'Green K-pop' to exist, the music industry must return to being the message, not the waste.

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NOSTALGIA KILLS INNOVATION, OR DOES IT?

Ingrid Tang

"The arts and culture industries have entered a period of stagnation, where innovation is stifled by commercial pressures and a reliance on nostalgia."

The claim that nostalgia is killing innovation presupposes a particular understanding of both terms: that innovation consists in the production of radically new forms, and that nostalgia, as an attachment to the past, necessarily inhibits such novelty. Yet this opposition is not self-evident. Innovation has rarely involved a clean and complete break from what came before, where cultural production has always been shaped by selective engagement with the past. The more precise question, therefore, is not whether nostalgia eliminates innovation, but how it alters the conditions under which innovation occurs.

I argue that nostalgia does not suppress innovation outright; rather, it redirects it. Under contemporary economic and cultural conditions, nostalgia tends to privilege forms of recombination and incremental change over more radical experimentation, while still providing the material through which new ideas are generated.

This dilemma of social innovation has gained prominence in recent debates about contemporary culture. Commentators across cultures have noted the growing dominance of remakes, sequels, antique and retro aesthetics, and traditional values, particularly in film and music. This parallels concerns that risk-averse market structures favour established ideas over experimental ones. At the same time, empirical research on cultural production suggests that the algorithmic recommendation systems and popularity dynamics that social media programs use reinforce existing trends and make it more difficult for novel forms to emerge. These observations are further bolstered by a widespread perception that cultural output was more innovative in the past than in the present. Whether or not this perception is accurate, it helps explain why nostalgia has become central to discussions of innovation: it appears both as a defining feature of contemporary culture and as a potential explanation for its perceived lack of originality.

One way to understand the relationship between nostalgia and innovation is through the economic organisation of cultural production. In many industries, particularly those characterised by high upfront costs and uncertain returns, innovation represents a form of risk. New ideas lack established audiences, and their commercial viability is difficult to predict. By contrast, nostalgia-based products benefit from pre-existing recognition and emotional attachment, reducing uncertainty. Within competitive markets, firms are therefore incentivised to prioritise strategies that maximise predictability. What appears as an excess of nostalgia can thus be understood as a rational response to structural conditions.

Here, nostalgia does not independently constrain innovation, but rather reflects institutional incentives that make certain forms of innovation less attractive than others.

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However, this explanation remains incomplete if it treats audiences as passive recipients of what producers supply. The persistence of nostalgia also reflects its psychological and social functions. Nostalgia provides a sense of continuity, identity, and emotional reassurance, particularly in periods of rapid technological and social change.Under such conditions, familiar cultural forms can offer stability in ways that unfamiliar ones may not. Innovation, thus, is evaluated solely in terms of novelty, but also in terms of its capacity to produce meaning. This suggests that nostalgia shapes not only the production of cultural goods but also their reception. New forms may struggle to gain traction, not because they are absent, but because they fail to satisfy the affective expectation that nostalgic forms fulfill.

At the same time, it is necessary to question the assumption that nostalgia and innovation are inherently opposed.

Innovation is rarely characterised by absolute novelty; more often, it involves the transformation of existing materials. Cultural and intellectual developments typically emerge through processes of reinterpretation and recombination, rather than through complete rupture. From this perspective, engagement with the past is not a deviation from innovation but a condition of it. Nostalgia can therefore function as a resource, providing the raw material from which new forms are constructed. The distinction here is now between modes of engagement with the past: one that reproduces existing forms and one that reworks them into something qualitatively different.

This difference becomes clearer when considering the temporal structure of innovation itself. Most forms of innovation are incremental and path-dependent, building on prior developments rather than replacing them entirely. Technological change, for instance, proceeds through modification and integration, while cultural change often involves adaptation rather than displacement. What may appear as nostalgia at the level of surface aesthetics may, at the deeper level, be part of a cumulative process of change.

The problem arises when engagement with the past becomes fixed or idealised, limiting the range of possible transformation. Nostalgia becomes restrictive not because it invokes the past, but because it constrains how the past can be used.

The political dimension of nostalgia further complicates its relationship with innovation. Nostalgic narratives are frequently mobilised to construct images of a lost or idealised past, particularly in the context of perceived decline. Such narratives can shape political priorities, often privileging restoration over adaptation. In these cases, nostalgia may inhibit institutional innovation by directing attention toward recovering previous arrangements rather than addressing new challenges. However, historical memory can also function as a basis for critique. Political movements have often drawn on past struggles to justify new forms of change, suggesting that engagement with the past can support, rather than hinder, innovation. The effects of nostalgia in this domain are therefore contingent on how it is articulated and mobilised.

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It is also necessary to consider whether the apparent dominance of nostalgia reflects an actual decline in innovation or a shift in its visibility. Innovation may be occurring in domains that are less immediately perceptible, such as digital technologies or scientific research, rather than in highly visible cultural forms. The prominence of nostalgic aesthetics in popular culture may therefore obscure ongoing innovation in other areas. In addition, changes in media structures and distribution have altered the conditions under which novelty emerges and is recognised. What appears as repetition at the level of mainstream culture may coexist with significant experimentation in less visible contexts.

The claim that nostalgia is killing innovation thus depends on an implicit definition of innovation as radical, visible and culturally dominant. Once this assumption is reconsidered, the relationship appears more complex. Nostalgia can contribute to risk-averse behaviour within certain institutional settings, particularly where economic incentives favor predictability. At the same time, it can provide the material and context from which new forms of innovation emerge. Its effects are therefore not uniform, but dependent on the structures within which it operates.

In conclusion, nostalgia does not eliminate innovation, but reshapes its direction and form. The central issue is not whether societies engage with the past, but how they do so.

Where the past is treated as a fixed model to be reproduced, innovation may be constrained. Where it is approached as a resource for reinterpretation, it can support the development of new forms. The relationship between nostalgia and innovation is therefore best understood not as one of opposition, but as a dynamic interaction shaped by the economic incentives, cultural expectations and institutional conditions that characterize the modern day.

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THE BIOLOGICAL COMMONS: WHO OWNS THE CODE OF LIFE?

Hà Ngô

For millennia, the human genome has existed as a shared biological script - a 3.2-billion-letter sequence that underpins the structure of human life. It can be understood as a "Biological Commons": a collective inheritance that belongs not to individuals or corporations, but to humanity as a whole. However, advances in biotechnology have transformed this shared code into a potential object of ownership. As private entities seek to patent specific genetic sequences, a fundamental question emerges: Should the building blocks of life be owned? Many arguments suggest that while intellectual property (IP) rights are designed to incentivize innovation, extending them to the human genome could potentially risk both commodifying biological identity and constraining scientific progress.

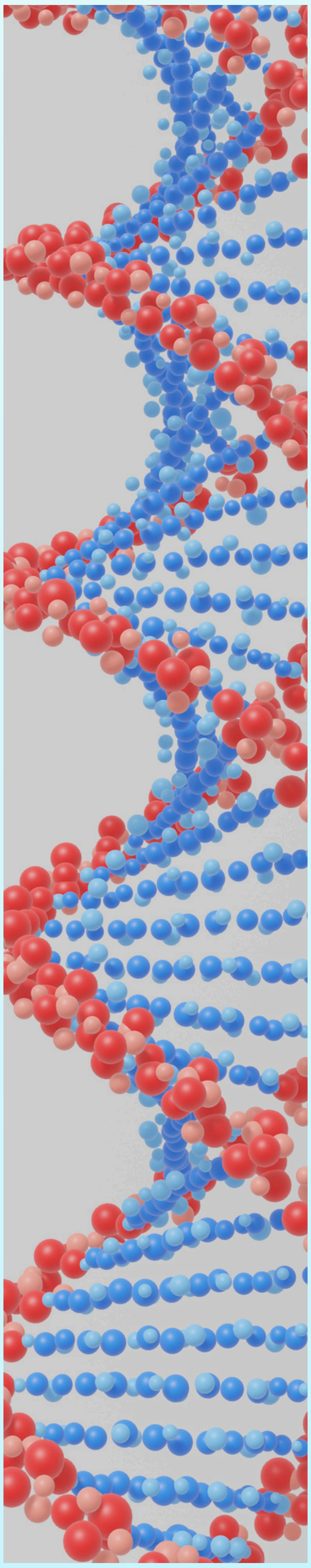
Supporters of genetic patenting argue from an economic perspective. The process of translating genetic discoveries into clinical applications is costly, uncertain, and time-intensive. Estimates suggest that developing a new genomic therapy can require investments exceeding billions of dollars. In this context, patents provide a period of exclusivity that enables firms to recover costs and attract investment. Moreover, the patent system encourages disclosure; by granting temporary monopolies, it requires inventors to publish their findings, thereby contributing to the broader scientific knowledge base rather than relying on secrecy.

However, the central philosophical objection lies in the distinction between discovery and invention. Patent law traditionally protects novel, human-made solutions to technical problems, not naturally occurring phenomena. The human genome is the product of evolutionary processes rather than human ingenuity. To claim ownership over a gene is therefore comparable to claiming ownership over naturally existing elements or physical laws. This concern is reinforced by the concept of the "anticommons", in which excessive fragmentation of ownership creates barriers to use. When multiple parties hold rights over different genetic sequences, researchers may face a complex web of licensing requirements, increasing costs, and slowing the pace of innovation.

This tension was addressed in Association for Molecular Pathology v. Myriad Genetics (2013), where the United States Supreme Court ruled that naturally occurring DNA sequences are not patentable because they are products of nature. At the same time, the Court allowed patents on complementary DNA (cDNA), which is synthetically created in laboratories. This distinction provides a partial resolution: it preserves the genome as a shared resource while allowing protection for engineered applications derived from it.

Beyond legal and economic considerations, the issue raises broader concerns about what might be termed "genetic sovereignty".

If genetic information becomes subject to private ownership, individuals could lose meaningful control over data derived from their own biology. In extreme cases, access to diagnostic tools or therapies could be restricted by proprietary claims, raising questions about fairness and accessibility in healthcare systems.



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THE BIOLOGICAL COMMONS: WHO OWNS THE CODE OF LIFE?

Hà Ngô

Addressing these challenges requires a careful balance between openness and incentive. One possible approach is to reinforce the principle that raw genetic sequences remain in the public domain, while allowing patents on clearly defined downstream applications, such as specific therapeutic methods or engineered molecules. In parallel, policies that promote open-access genomic databases and limit overly broad patent claims could reduce the risk of anticommons effects. Such measures would preserve incentives for innovation while maintaining the accessibility necessary for scientific collaboration.

Ultimately, the human genome represents more than a resource for economic development; it is a foundational element of human identity and shared history. Legal frameworks must therefore distinguish between what can be owned and what must remain accessible. While markets play an important role in advancing biotechnology, they are not always well-suited to govern resources that are universal in nature.

Ensuring that the genome remains a true commons, while supporting responsible innovation, will be a defining challenge for contemporary science policy.

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31/05/26
The 28th Edition

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BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER: BEYOND 'JUST INSECURITY'

Chau Do Minh

Have you ever looked in the mirror before going to school, only to notice a fresh new pimple? Has your first thought ever been 'Wow, I wish I looked like them' when you were scrolling through social media? Or have you ever fretted about your clothes because they made your complexion sickly, or your stomach show, or your legs skinny and disproportionate? No matter how negative these thoughts may seem, they are often fleeting. They may cause brief embarrassment or frustration, but, for most, they usually fade as the day goes on. This type of insecurity is common, especially during adolescence, when identity and self-image are still forming and are especially vulnerable to instability.

However, for some individuals, concerns about appearance do not simply pass. Instead, they grow into persistent and distressing beliefs about perceived flaws in the body. In severe cases, individuals may avoid mirrors or struggle to look at their reflection for long. When these worries become obsessive, time-consuming, and disruptive to daily life, they may indicate a condition known as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD).

Many believe BDD is merely a vanity issue. In reality, this disorder is real and severe, sometimes causing sufferers to inflict physical harm upon themselves.

On social media sites, such as Reddit, and blogs like Headspace, many users have described in detail their symptoms, including extreme perceptual hallucinations—seeing oneself as physically different from how others see them—and an urge, or compulsion, to conceal or change their flaws, whether through makeup, surgery, or other forms. One of the clearest differences between typical insecurity and BDD lies in the degree of disruption they cause. Ordinary insecurity may produce discomfort, but it rarely interferes with daily functioning. Body dysmorphic disorder, by contrast, can affect nearly every aspect of life. People with BDD may experience intense shame and anxiety about their appearance. Some pursue repeated cosmetic procedures in an attempt to "fix" the perceived flaw, often without relief from the distress. According to Priory, "fewer than 10% of BDD patients will be satisfied with the results of the BDD plastic surgery, and their anxieties are often transferred to another aspect of their appearance."

A Reddit user wrote, "I know I see things differently. I see things that exist, but I magnify them, and then I also make a value judgment about [them]. [...] For example, when I see a zit on myself, I think it's so red and enormous, and everyone is definitely looking at it and thinking how disgusting it is. Meanwhile, most people will see a dot of acne on my face, and they won't care because it's so small and unimportant. They have no idea I'm even slightly worried about it."

The most targeted part of the body is the face. Those affected by BDD fret about moles, pores, and acne, completely normal occurrences, repeatedly feeling their face for 'ugly' parts. Some people report picking at their skin to 'fix' it, or wearing long-sleeved, modest clothing if they feel that some of their features are 'not right' or 'disgusting', including body hair, supposedly disproportionate arms or legs, or simply a hatred of one's own skin. Others do not focus on individual parts, or do not mind them, but amplify perceived imbalance, asymmetry, or imperfections in how the parts fit together.

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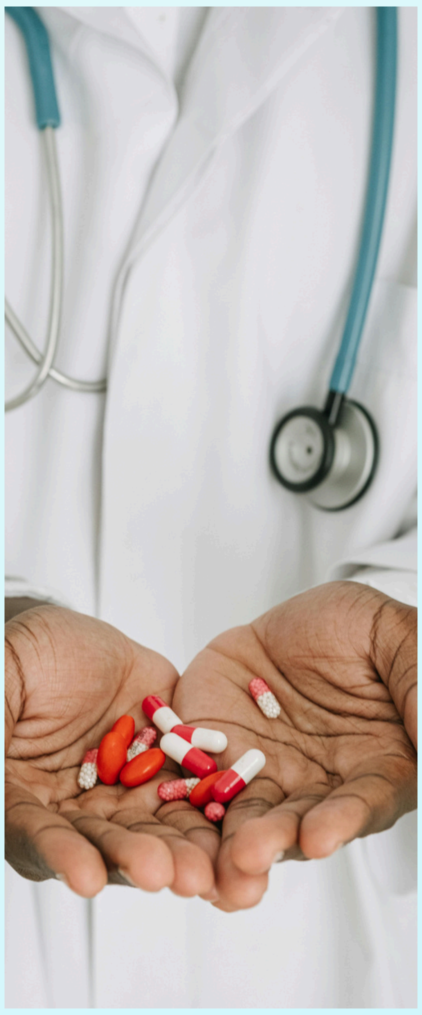
Another type of disorder often found comorbid (that is, to exist within the same individual) with BDD is an eating disorder (ED). While BDD amplifies perceived defects, it can also extend to body shape, weight, and/or size of certain body parts, including but not limited to: cheeks, waist, hips, thighs, or shoulders, which EDs focus on. For that reason, these two disorders are found together in a significant percentage of those affected by either condition. The International OCD Foundation states, "In a study of patients with eating disorders, 60% also had body dysmorphic disorder. Another study found that 32.5% of people with body dysmorphic disorder had a comorbid lifetime eating disorder: 9% had anorexia, 6.5% had bulimia, and 17.5% had an eating disorder not otherwise specified (EDNOS)."



This combination of mental conditions can significantly decrease quality of life, increasing the risk of physical harm through starving oneself, binge eating, or eating large amounts of food in one sitting. Besides, individuals may look toward unhealthy habits, such as restricted or uncontrolled eating, obsessive weight-checking, or the use of laxatives.

However, in most cases, BDD is not lifelong. Moreover, effective treatments exist. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and certain medications (Prozac, Paxil, Lexapro, ...) can help individuals challenge distorted perceptions and reduce obsessive thoughts about appearance. Early recognition and support can significantly improve outcomes. Those with BDD should avoid cosmetic procedures, as they are only quick fixes that may worsen BDD with time.

It is important to recognize that BDD and its associated symptoms and disorders aren't the same for each person. Rather, they exist as a spectrum, presenting themselves differently every time, from mild discomfort to deprecating thoughts bad enough to trigger suicidal ideation.

For those suffering from BDD, awareness is the first step—don't disregard the symptoms as just persistent but ordinary insecurity.

After that, everyone has to understand that body dysmorphic disorder isn't just extreme self-doubt, but rather a mental health condition that requires treatment and support, clearing up stigma around BDD and helping individuals open up and explore their options. Once aware of their condition, one can choose from a multitude of treatments and therapies to improve their quality of life. With these steps in mind, we can shift the conversation from judgment to awareness, and communities can help create environments where people feel safe asking for support.

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RETHINKING CORRUPTION: WHAT AFGHANISTAN REVEALS ABOUT CASH ASSISTANCE

Yunshu Yang

Cash and voucher assistance can often be overlooked or dismissed as part of international aid and its effects downplayed by critics who argue that funds flow directly to armed groups or fuel corruption. Yet, when designed effectively, it can reduce instability and conflict pressures, with Taliban-controlled Afghanistan serving as an example. Fear of money flowing directly to extremist organisations has sparked spirited debate over how organisations should organise aid programs in Afghanistan, causing some donors to temporarily withdraw after the 2021 takeover.

While concerns around corruption hold some validity within this context, the practical effects of cash aid in Afghanistan show that perhaps it is not merely money that is handed over, but trust in the people themselves.

In Afghanistan, fear around misuse obscure the truth that corruption is not unique to cash, undermining the scrutiny applied to cash aid exclusively. Tightly monitored cash transfers can often prove to be more accountable when compared to traditional aid, even under one of the world's most corruption-prone and sanctioned regimes. Though critics paint cash transfers as particularly susceptible to misuse, independent review of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan shows that traditional programs, such as DFID, struggled to track funds or effectively safeguard against frauds or leakages – proving that corruption is not exclusive to one aid mechanism.

Afghanistan is an eminent example of what can happen when aid is shifted towards direct household cash assistance. For instance, the use of mobile money where possible, hawala systems with verification, and biometric or household-level monitoring have helped households buy food locally and pay rent, meaning that they are less likely to be forced into selling valuable assets or suffer financially. Most importantly, the success of cash aid programs highlight that cash flows are often more traceable than truckloads of goods moving through contested territory, while also providing families a flexibility that in-kind aid fails to provide.

Under the Taliban, in-kind aid often means checkpoints and insurgent taxation from armed groups. Goods are skimmed, redirected, or resold, while contractors negotiate access through local power brokers and losses are quietly written off as operational changes. Though cash aid is scrutinised for hypothetical misuse, material aid is compromised in more visible ways but somehow remains tolerated.

The stark contrast between the two, both in scale and in effectiveness in tackling poverty, shows that cash aid is not something to be feared but remains important in assisting vulnerable communities, now central to many programs assistingAfghans. While cash can still circulate in Taliban-controlled economies and reduce pressure on regimes, this is not exclusive to cash aid; in-kind aid is susceptible to even greater risk. Critics fail to address that all aid shapes political economies to some extent, causing global debate over conflict and interest. However, the question here is not whether aid has political effects, but whether it reaches citizens effectively. Afghanistan is not an exception to the effects of direct cash giving; it is a mirror that reflects the instrumental effects of cash assistance across the globe.

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Fears of corruption around cash assistance more often reflect donor discomfort, the mistrust of recipients, and desire for visible control than rational concern.

If cash assistance can function with accountability under the Taliban, then opposition to it elsewhere says less about risk and more about who international actors are willing to place their trust in – themselves, or the people they claim to assist.

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WHY DOLLARIZATION IS A POLITICAL GAMBLE

Arianna Rodriguez

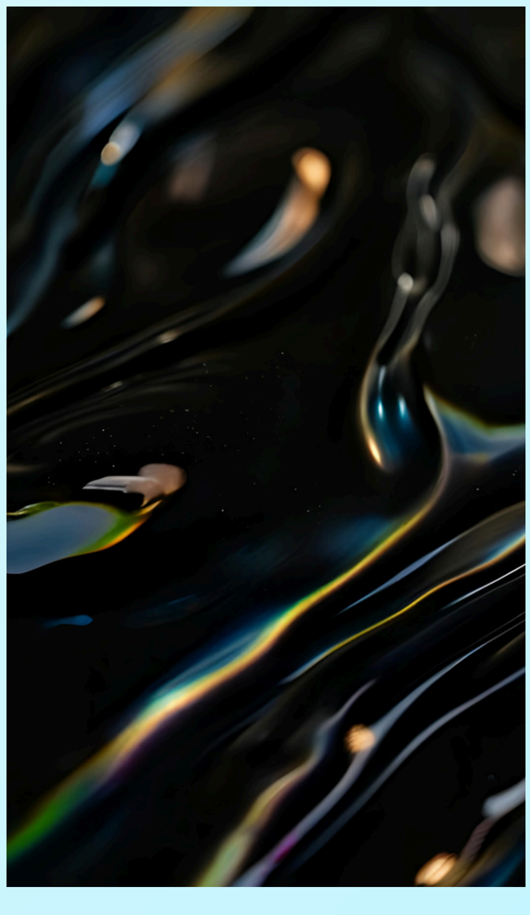
In December 2023, Javier Milei swept into Argentina’s presidency. His campaign promised the abolishment of the central bank and the replacement of the peso with the U.S. dollar. To millions of Argentinians, this was a hopeful salvation from the triple digit inflation that plagued the country. However, for more than a year into his presidency, full dollarization has not been achieved. What happened?

Milei blamed the political environment for the shelving of the dollarization plan, stating “Politics does not accompany us or support us; it tries to block us all the time,” adding that he believed the move could have led to his impeachment. Instead, he opted for a large one-time devaluation of the peso and monthly micro devaluations coupled with aggressive cuts to government spending, equaling about 6% of GDP. This effectively produced Argentina’s first budget surplus in over a decade.

The results were striking. Monthly inflation, which at times hit 25.5% in December 2023, had fallen to 1.9% by July 2025 and year on year inflation slowed down to around 36-37%. However, for Argentinian citizens, poverty spiked to 55% in early 2024 before declining to about 31.6% by mid 2025. For fifteen consecutive months, mass consumption fell. What Milei achieved was fiscal discipline compared to full dollarization seen in Ecuador and El Salvador.

Ecuador dollarized in 2000 of January after facing a recession crisis, bank failures, and incipient hyperinflation. By late 1999, 56% of bank deposits and 66.5% of bank loans were already denominated in dollars. The dollarization plan proved successful in reducing inflation that peaked at 108% in September 2000 which declined consistently and reached single digit levels by 2003 - values not seen since early 1970.

Ecuador imported U.S. monetary policy which eliminated the use of domestic lenders and autonomous interest rate by adopting the U.S. dollar. Twenty-five years later, the dollar remains in place, but Ecuador's underlying vulnerabilities have not disappeared.



Between 2014 and 2016, oil prices collapsed, and Ecuador’s only option was to borrow more, as it had no monetary tools to cushion the blow.

Unlike Ecuador, El Salvador dollarized in 2001 during a period of relative stability. The government promised that dollarization would attract foreign investment, boost exports, and generate quality jobs - outcomes that never materialized. Average annual economic growth over the following two decades was just 2% of GDP, and the economy remained afloat largely because of the remittances from Salvadorans living abroad. The exchange rate applied at conversion did not appropriately account for purchasing power parity, meaning that in practice, many workers effectively lost half their purchasing power overnight. According to a recent analysis, neither the adoption of dollarization nor Bitcoin in El Salvador sufficiently transformed the economy nor foster sustainable growth, showcasing that change in currency alone cannot adequately address economic difficulties caused by structural problems. The lesson both countries offer is that dollarization can tame inflation but cannot be a substitute for deeper reforms that drive economic prosperity.

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While some economists argue that full dollarization is the only credible path for Argentina because it would insulate the country's monetary system from future political interference and prevent the next government from undoing Milei's progress. Ecuador and El Salvador demonstrate that dollarization can be a straitjacket as much as it is an anchor. Dollarization can discipline governments but can also strip them of the tools needed to respond when things go wrong. Argentina is a large and economically complex country whose relationship with dollarization deserves more scrutiny than it receives when the policy is framed as a simple cure for inflation.

Whether Argentina formally dollarizes or simply drifts toward a de facto dollar economy, the outcome will depend less on the currency than on what surrounds it: governance, institutions, and the will to sustain reform.

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HOW VIETNAM MOLDS ITS MUSIC

Khánh An Trương

Vietnam's musical traditions are shaped by many different factors, such as geography, history, and instruments. Most of all, the Vietnamese language itself is important. Linguists and ethnomusicologists have emphasized that a comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese music necessitates an examination of the language's tone, rhythm, and cultural context.

1. A language built on pitch:
Vietnamese belongs to a group of tonal languages, in which pitch is not merely expressive but lexically meaningful. Standard Vietnamese includes 6 different tones ("sac", "hoi", "nga", "huyen", "nang", and "ngang"); these tones can easily change the meanings of each syllable. This linguistic structure has had profound consequences for how music developed historically in Vietnam.

In contrast to many Indo-European languages, where melody can freely override speech intonation, Vietnamese songs must carefully preserve their intended meaning. Historically, this led to a special musical system that prioritized tone preservation over dramatic melodic movement that could distort the meaning. Traditional Vietnamese melodies often remain within limited pitch ranges, closely following the contours of spoken language (it's similar to a rap song, but it is slow, rhythmic, emphasizes the tones, and has an idyllic, gentle vibe). From a scientific perspective, this reflects an adaptive solution: when music evolves to remain intelligible within the constraints of its language.

2. Poetry, Confucianism, and Musical Restraints:
Thanks to the 1000 years of Chinese occupation, Vietnam had been heavily influenced by Sinosphere culture. Sinosphere culture taught one to appreciate nature's beauty, find balance, show restraint, and improve their morals. These values influenced the way people spoke and the way music sounded later on.

The Confucian ideals later influenced classical Vietnamese poetry, which was often sung rather than read word-for-word, and relied on strict tonal and rhythmic rules. Musical genres such as "ca trù" emerged within aristocratic circles, where mastery of tone, poetry, metaphors, hidden meanings, and musical timing signaled listeners' and composers' high-level education and cultural sophistication.

3. Folk Traditions and Linguistic Identity:
The elites liked refinement, but folk traditions show how language affected music in groups. For instance, "quan họ" is a style of music that people in Northern villages use to talk to each other. Its call-and-response format is similar to how people talk to each other every day, and it strengthens social ties through musical conversation. Linguistic studies have demonstrated that quan họ melodies frequently correspond with intonation patterns, indicating that these songs developed organically from speech rather than being derived from imposed musical theory.

Similarly, "lý" folk songs across regions often reflect local dialects, embedding linguistic variation directly into musical style. In a way, folk music styles have preserved local accents and folk culture across time.

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4.Colonialism, Modernity, and Musical Adaptation:
The arrival of Western musical systems during the French colonial period introduced musical harmony, fixed scales, and broader melodic ranges; yet, Vietnamese composers did not simply adopt these Western elements wholesale, as they would selectively adapt them to fit the Vietnamese language's nature.

Even today, Vietnamese pop music often modifies Western melodies to avoid tonal conflict. For example, wide pitch jumps are softened, and lyrics are carefully arranged to preserve intelligibility. In genres such as rap, where tone may be deliberately flattened, artists rely on context and rhythm to maintain original meanings, demonstrating linguistic flexibility rather than abandonment.

5.Conclusion:
The similarities between Vietnamese speech and song are not accidental. They are the result of centuries of adaptation in the harmonious combination of language, culture, cognition, and history. To listen closely to Vietnamese music is, in many ways, to listen to the language speaking through melody, carrying with it the echoes of Vietnam's history, identity, and collective memories through generations.

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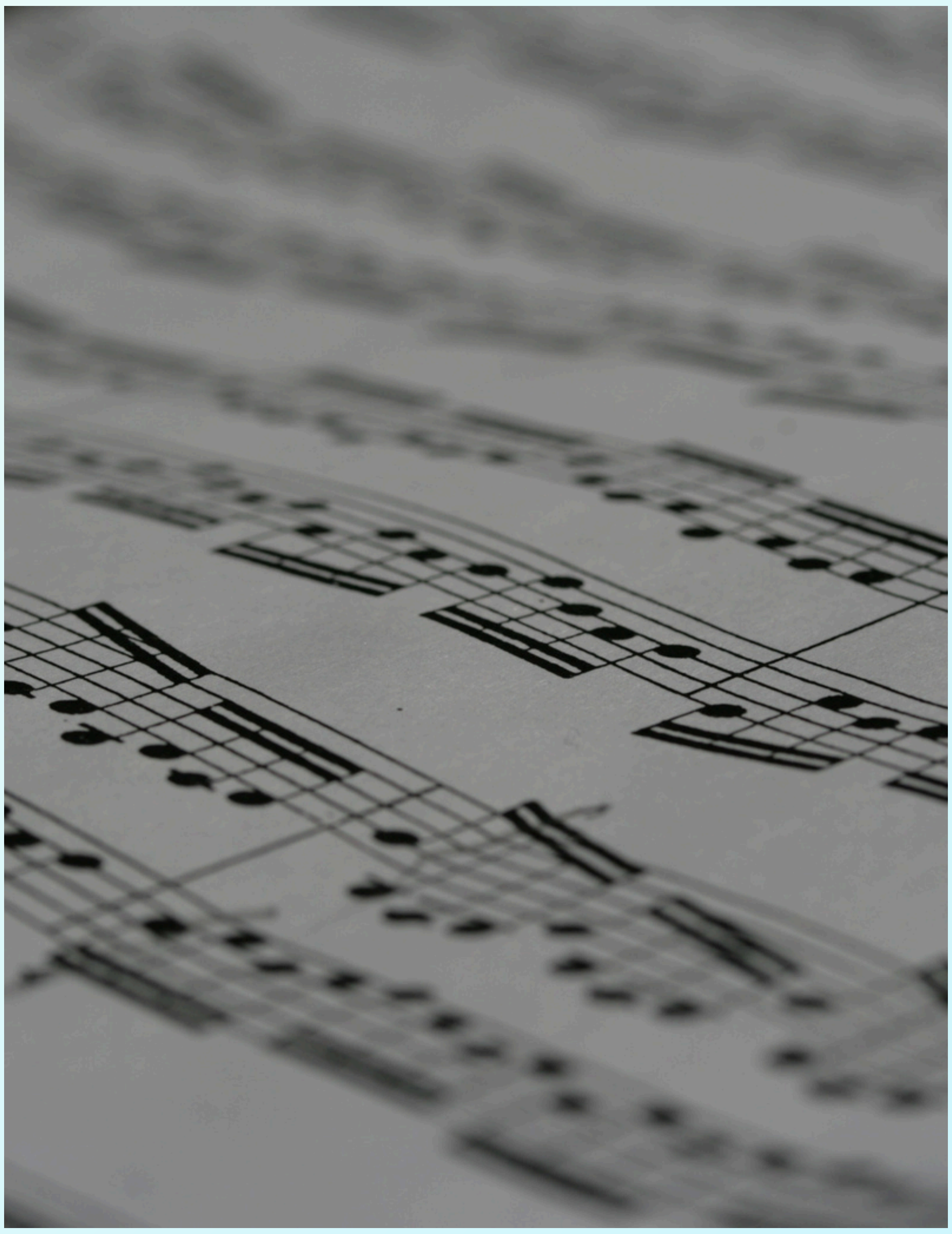

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VIETNAMESE WRITTEN LITERATURE: FROM VIETNAM TO THE WORLD

Ngoc Minh Le

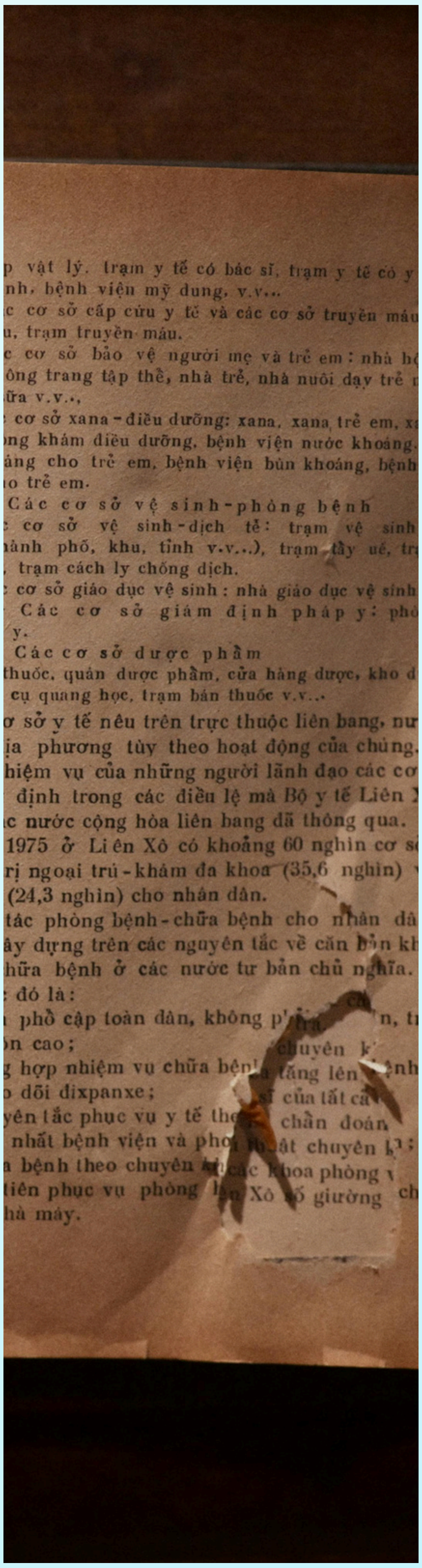
Every nation in the world has its own history to tell. From linguistics and religion to politics and economy, all have waded through countless criticisms, prejudices, and support to become what they are today. Each of them marked the growth of a nation, including literature. Vietnam is not an exception. Having experienced warfare and revolutions, Vietnamese written literature stayed and evolved with its homeland throughout history, from the first original writing system to the Vietnamese modern era.

There are two main stages of Vietnamese Written Literature: Vietnamese Medieval (X-XIX) and Modern (XIX-now) Written Literature. Each period holds different characteristics regarding writing format, popularity, and content.

In 938 AD, Ngo Quyen won an infamous battle on the Bach Dang River, building an independence era for former Vietnam, ending 1.000 years of Northern domination. It was then that Vietnamese written literature began to emerge. However, Classical Chinese, the Dai Viet official written system, was too complex for residents. Therefore, during X to XII, few literary works were found, mostly written by the intelligentsia. These works focused on the sovereignty of Vietnam, notably Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country (Nam Quoc Son Ha), Vietnam's first declaration of independence, by Ly Thuong Kiet:

“The Southern emperor rules the Southern land.
Our destiny is writ in Heaven’s Book.
How dare ye bandits trespass on our soil?
Ye shall meet your undoing at our hands!”
(English translation by Huynh Sang Thong)

Not until the 13th century was the Southern Characters (Chu nom) formed, though no one knew exactly when or who invented this writing system. This new writing system adopted Chinese symbols while maintaining the former Proto-Vietic grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Till XV, Southern characters were fully developed, literacy rates rose, and more official examinations popped up. Its integration in everyday literature was marked by Nguyen Trai’s Quoc am Thi tap, followed by unique forms of poems and remade versions of legendary tales. These tales and poems reflected and criticized the corrupted nobility and the unfair treatment of the proletariat. There also went the bloom of well-known poets and writers such as Ho Xuan Huong (Banh troi nuoc, Moi trau), Nguyen Dinh Chieu (Luc Van Tien), and Nguyen Khuyen (Thu dieu, Thu vinh, Thu am). The most prominent figure in this era was Nguyen Du, who was named the National Great Poet and recognized as a UNESCO-recognized cultural celebrity. He wrote The Tale of Kieu (Truyen Kieu), which was published and translated into more than 20 foreign languages with over 60 different translated versions. More noticeable still, these stories adopted Chinese myths and storylines, yet through the pens of Vietnamese medieval poets and writers, these literary works featured Vietnamese identity and beliefs, emphasizing the Vietnamese authors' notion of integration without assimilation.



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The 20th century saw a remarkable transformation in Vietnamese written literature when it adopted global trends. Throughout the French invasion from 1858 to 1945, Christianity crept into Vietnam, bringing not only new ideologies but also a Latin-based writing system, the national script (Chu Quoc Ngu), enabling access to Western literary works and signaling the dawn of modern Vietnamese literature. Then, Western literature influenced the mindset of modern Vietnamese written literature, during which writers demanded freer, more expressive forms of literature. Playwriting, literary analysis, treatises, romantic literature, and free verse were introduced and evolved dramatically in Vietnam during the French invasion from 1858 to 1945. Between 1932 and 1945, the New Poetry Movement, which most signified the impact of Western literature on Vietnamese literature, emerged. Focused on the pride and self of the author, the New Poetry Movement in Vietnam advanced significantly for over a decade, with The Lu (famous for the poem Nho rung) being the most contributing writer.

After multiple adoptions and intimacy, Vietnamese writers had finally been able to balance and create new forms of literature between Western, Asian, and Vietnamese literature itself. Specifically, during the French Second Invasion (1945-1954) and the American War (1954-1975), modern Vietnamese written literature stood up for revolution and for communism. If the key to the New Poetry Movement was the self, the heart of revolutionary literature was the community. It was a means of communication and raising awareness during the Resistance War against France and the American War. To do this, such literature works emphasized Vietnamese virtues, dignity, patriotism, and sovereignty; cases in point are Lang le Sapa (1970)—honoring hardworking people who contribute to the nation—by Nguyen Thanh Long and Nhung ngoi sao xa xoi (1971)—highlighting the courageous Vietnamese Volunteer Youth during the resistance war—by Le Minh Khue. On 30/4/1975, Vietnam finally united and gained independence after 20 years of partition. Vietnamese modern written literature then mostly delved into the introspection of the individual and the everyday lives of society, including Chiec thuyen ngoai xa (1985) and Ben Que (1985) by Nguyen Minh Chau, a prominent figure in Vietnamese modern literature.

In this day and age, in a world of frequent globalization and cultural exchange, many may fear that a nation will assimilate, eroding its distinctive culture and identity. Yet this is not inevitable. Looking back beyond history, not only do we learn about the developments and cross-cultural influences on Vietnamese written literature, but also about how previous generations could follow the idea of integration without assimilation. We, the younger generation, should preserve the distinctive features and history of Vietnamese literature. Sharing the uniqueness of Vietnamese literature, experiencing and distinguishing different literary backgrounds, supporting literary works that bring out Vietnamese identity, and integrating story writing and detailed literary analysis into schools' curricula are ways the "new gen" can ensure a healthier and more striking development of Vietnamese modern written literature on the journey of bringing Vietnam to the world for years to come.

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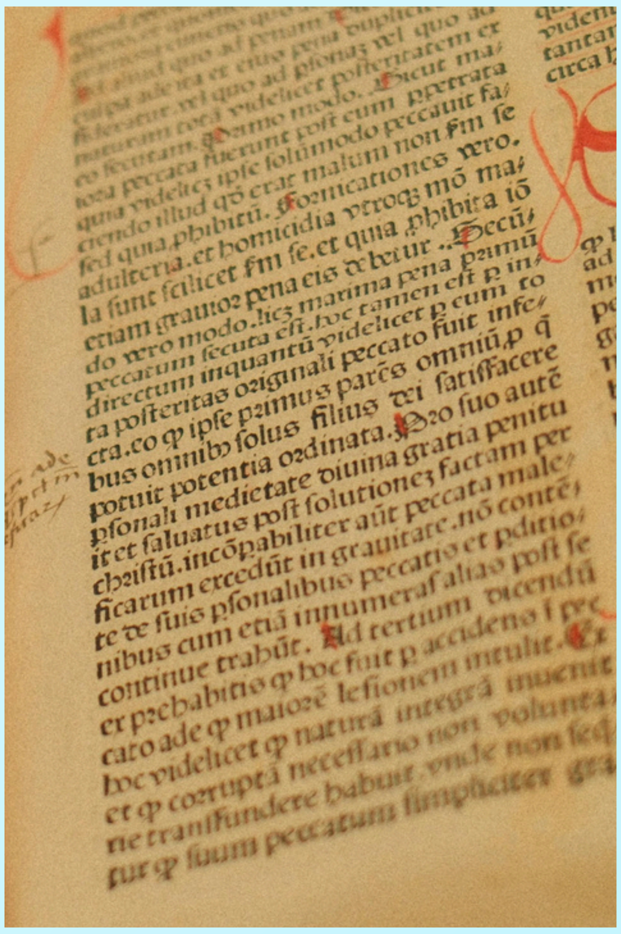

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SPEAKING IMPERFECTLY: THE HIDDEN INTELLIGENCE OF DISFLUENCIES

Thao Nguyen Hoang

Disfluencies in Daily Speech

Small breaks appear in almost every sentence we say: "um," "uh," "well... you know," and the often-criticized "like." They are so common in everyday conversation that we hardly notice them, but in formal situations, they are often seen as habits to avoid. Many people think these phrases mean you're nervous or not ready, and public speakers are often taught to get rid of them completely.
But they never really go away.

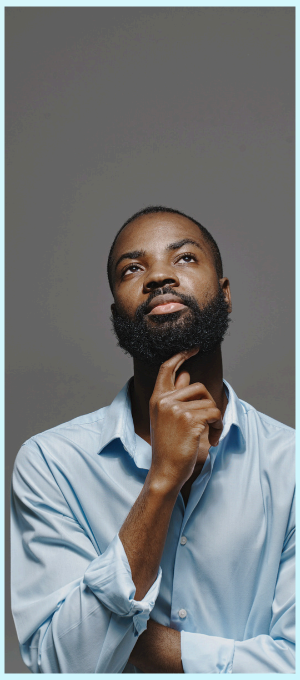
This raises a simple but important question: if these interruptions don't mean anything, why do they appear so consistently in speech?

They might look like mistakes at first. But in real life, they serve a different purpose. These moments are part of a secret system that shapes how we communicate. What sounds like hesitation is often the brain actively working—organizing ideas, refining meaning, and adjusting language in real time. These features, known as disfluencies, include hesitation, repetition, self-correction, and filler sounds. Rather than weakening communication, they quietly reveal how thoughts are formed and expressed as we speak.

Language as a Real-Time Process

The brain is often most active at the very moments when speech appears hesitant. Unlike writing, which allows for planning and revision, spoken language unfolds in real time. Speakers frequently begin articulating ideas before they are fully formed, leading to pauses, repetitions, and self-corrections. Rather than indicating uncertainty, these moments reflect the mind actively organizing and refining meaning as it speaks.

That's why we pause, repeat ourselves, or revise our wording in the middle of a sentence. A speaker might say, "I was going to—I mean, I wanted to explain earlier," as they try to make their sentence clearer. People usually interpret these times as uncertain, but they show something else. They show the mind in motion.



Linguist Herbert H. Clark describes speech as an incremental process, which means that ideas are built up over time instead of being delivered all at once. From this point of view, disfluencies are not errors but rather natural outcomes of thinking while speaking. They keep communication flexible, even when ideas are still forming.

In a classroom setting, a student presenting an idea may pause and reformulate their sentence mid-speech. While this may appear uncertain, it often reflects an effort to clarify meaning rather than a lack of understanding.

They also have a useful social purpose. When two people are talking, silence can mean that one person has finished. A brief "um" or "uh," however, tells the opposite person or the listeners that the speaker is not done speaking yet. These subtle cues help manage the flow of conversation and reduce interruptions.

Research by Jean E. Fox Tree supports this idea. Her studies suggest that listeners tend to allocate greater attention to words that follow disfluencies, suggesting that hesitation can function as a cue rather than a disruption. In other words, what sounds like a pause can actually guide the listener, preparing them for something important.

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Rethinking "Imperfection"

Disfluencies play an even bigger role than conversational management. Research has demonstrated that they can facilitate language acquisition as well. Katherine Demuth's research showed that young kids were better at recognizing things they didn't know when the instructions included a short pause, like "um." In this context, pausing can signal new or unknown information, helping listeners focus and learn more effectively.

Even so, people still tend to look down on disfluencies, especially in formal settings where clear and polished speech is important. But this expectation comes from written language, where you can change things. Spoken language is different. It unfolds in real time and is shaped by thought as it happens.

Ultimately disfluencies demonstrate that language is not a completed entity, but rather a dynamic process—one that is adaptable, flexible, and profoundly human.What we often try to eliminate from our speech may, in fact, be what makes communication possible—not despite its imperfection, but because of it.

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A MARRIAGE THEORY: PSYCHE AND SOCIAL CORRELATES

Harshitha J

Introduction

Psychologists have long researched the cross-section of marriage and IQ between the two genders. This has raised critical analysis among them. A study by researchers at four British universities states that for each 15-point increase in IQ, the likelihood of getting married increases by around 35% for a man but decreases by around 58% for a woman. This compelling study has raised debate and speculation about the underlying reasons.

Expectations and Societal Pressures

It is known that several decades ago, or historically, men were expected to go out into society to work and be the breadwinners of the family, while women were expected to be homemakers; further, a person who was to an extent controlled by men, and most likely her husband. The world has revolutionized greatly since then, but historical views and expectations are not completely abolished yet. The way our society treats men and women is one example of this.

A major reason for the difference in the likelihood of marriage with respect to an increase in IQ could be that a man does not go through the pressures of expecting to cook, clean, and marry from society.

Neuroticism is a personality trait characterized by emotional instability, anxiety, self-doubt, and depression. It represents the degree to which a person experiences the world as threatening and distressing. For a man with an increase in IQ, his neuroticism goes down, and he tends to react better to negative environments by not taking them too seriously and overthinking them. This would mean that he wouldn't be subjected to the stereotypical expectations in the world about marriage, which would increase the chances of neuroticism. Since men are generally not subjected to the same social expectations as women, a man with higher IQ would feel less pressured and less conflicted about marriage. This would ensure that his likelihood of marriage would remain the same or even increase.

Since societal pressures and treatment are far different for a woman than a man. Most times, society pressures a woman to marry and to be able to manage a home in an efficient manner. It is a known fact that throughout their lives, a woman is treated much differently than men. When a woman with an increased IQ is being preconditioned by society on what to do and what not to do, it brings down her personality trait of agreeableness (the personality trait associated with submissiveness, selflessness, and gullibility). IQ is negatively associated with neuroticism. Therefore, an increase in IQ would cause a decrease in neuroticism. Although her neuroticism is low due to her rise in IQ, the decrease in agreeableness outweighs her low neuroticism. This time, in a woman, it triggers something called "reactance." Reactance is a psychological response that motivates us to fight back against anyone or anything that threatens our sense of freedom, resulting in an increased desire to do what we've been told not to do and vice versa. This would eventually lead to a woman with an increase in her IQ, lessening her chances of marriage. Thus, it explains the fact that for each 15-point increase in a woman's IQ, her likelihood of getting married goes down by around 58%.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the societal treatment of men is one of the important causes for keeping the percentage of men's neuroticism from rising as compared to women and, therefore, increasing their chances of marriage. However, that would be a different case for women. For a woman, the societal pressures she receives from her external environment amount to a decrease in agreeableness, which would also outweigh her low neuroticism and eventually result in reactance. Thus, this is the reason why for each 15-point increase in IQ, the likelihood of getting married increases by around 35% for a man but decreases by around 58% for a woman.

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LITHIUM EXPANSION IN JUJOY PROVINCE

Phu Hoang

In the high-altitude salt flats of Jujuy Province, evaporation ponds stretch across the desert, extracting lithium from beneath the surface. But as production expands, the province has also become a focal point for political and social tensions. In 2023, reforms made by the Argentine government were met with protests and tension. As the need for lithium arises through the means of electric vehicles or batteries, many more local communities suffer from continued exploitation.

Currently, Argentina stands as the fourth largest worldwide supplier of lithium, according to the International Energy Agency (IAEA), and is part of the ‘lithium triangle’, a region of countries like Chile and Bolivia that is estimated to hold about 50-65% of the world’s untapped lithium sources. With the projected demand of lithium to increase four to six times by 2030 due to reasons mentioned, putting immeasurable amounts of pressure on isolated provinces, such as Jujuy, to produce enough to please the global supply chain.

The Cauchari-Olaroz operation is one of Argentina’s newest lithium sites, producing more than 25,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate in 2024, according to Ganfeng Lithium, and is expected to scale further. Nearby, the Olroz project was documented to produce 17,500 tons. Both these projects are maintained and facilitated by international investments and companies like Ganfeng, contributing to national export revenues of up to $7 billion by the late 2020s.

Economic gain is one thing, but when it is a result of the sacrifices of workers' jobs, careers, and livelihoods, is it truly a gain? Tensions in the area started in June 2023, when local authorities approved a reform amending 190 articles, leading to provisions of land to these lithium companies, restrictions on protest, in the form of road blockades, among other changes under the guise of maintaining public order and economic improvement. Indigenous groups and local communities are affected in the sense that they lose land resource rights and the fundamental right to free speech. With indigenous communities accounting for 7-8% of Jujuy’s population and primarily living in the region’s salt flats, along with the fact that Argentina is a signatory of the ILO Convention 169, establishing the principle of ‘free, prior informed consent’ for projects involving indigenous communities, trying to use these principles to support their case against lithium extraction, as reported by the UNHRC.

Following the aforementioned changes, demonstrations were reported across Jujuy and in other similar parts of Argentina. Some protest groups, such as Tercer Malón de la Paz, marched over 1,500km to reach Buenos Aires (the capital city of Argentina). On a related note, the Human Rights Watch reported the use of tear gas and rubber pellets in stopping these protesters, with severe injuries documented in some incidents.

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In addition to indigenous needs, the environment also plays a part in lithium extraction. The usual process in Jujuy is to dump brines from salt flats and allow them to evaporate in ponds. Producing just one tonne of lithium can require several hundred thousand liters of water, according to analysis by the World Bank, cited by the International Energy Agency, although the figure varies on the amount, place, and extraction method. Researchers from CONICET (the scientific and technology research council of Argentina) note that not all water used is fresh water, and most use depends on hydrological conditions.

From a broader standpoint, Jujoy province is an example of common stateside abuses for economic gains. Desensitizing it means giving away land to foreign companies, destroying indigenous homes, and causing active civil unrest. While lithium extraction may be an avenue to a greener world powered by electricity or some other renewable source, it also causes environmental damage, exploitation, and human rights abuses.

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FROM RHYME 10 TO RHYME 0: THE NATURE OF PERFORMANCE ART IN THE LENS OF MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

Teu-Khanh Phuong

"Art is not just about another beautiful painting that matches your dining room floor. Art has to be disturbing; art has to ask a question; art has to predict the future."

This saying from Marina Abramović accurately exemplifies the notion of "performance art", a form of expression that extends far beyond mere sight and challenges personal boundaries. According to her, unlike paintings and static images, performance is a "mental and physical destruction that the performer makes in a specific time in a space in front of an audience." Most importantly, the most striking feature about performance art is the collaboration between performers and the audiences; together they aim to create pieces that can only be recalled through memory and personal perspectives. When observing Marina's masterpieces, themes related to endurance, fear, and pain immediately spring to individuals' minds, leaving them confused and speechless regarding the complexity, severity, and thought-provoking nature of her wide-ranging artworks.

Marina Abramović and her inclination towards performance art

Marina Abramović, a Yugoslav-born performance artist, is not exactly the typical kind of artist or performer you would imagine. Explicitly known for art pieces and performances that capture the boundaries of individuals' physical and psychological endurance, Marina deliberately pushes her limits in confronting fears and personal comfort. Initially majoring in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade in 1965, Marina subsequently switched to performance art upon her graduate studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Croatia. During the early 1970s, her pursuit of performance art was inspired by several radical performance artists, including Chris Burden and Hermann Nitsch, who dedicated extreme performances through exposure to hazards and ritualistic pain. Furthermore, growing up during a turbulent period marked by the aftermath of World War II, she was strongly influenced by her complex and strict upbringing under two partisans. Consequently, the oppressive nature of Tito's regime in the former communist Yugoslavia was generally depicted in her hazardous works, highlighting her privileged yet austere upbringing.

Today, at age 77, her artwork still holds precedence in the general public discourse, especially for the younger generation, in which her focus on creating long-lasting impacts has fundamentally transformed the nature of performance art. Previously against art commercialization, Abramović's attitude towards partnerships subsequently changed over time, embracing the art market as an invaluable tool to ensure the recognition and intrinsic growth of her extensive career. This transformation was emphasized through a multitude of collaborations with renowned experts and institutions, namely, The Museum of Modern Art, where the auspicious "The artist is present" was publicly performed with thousands of spectators.

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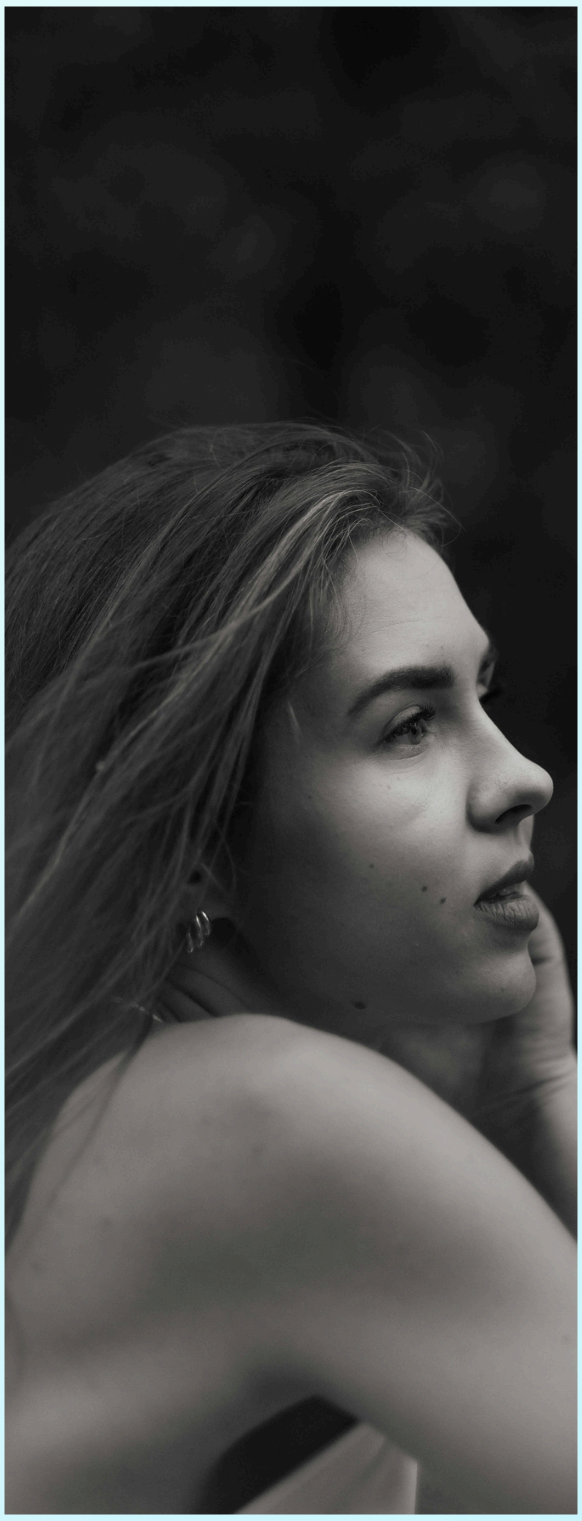
The concept of performance art and Marina's distinctive approaches

"Here and now" is one of the most common phrases that is centrally associated with Marina Abramović, capturing the core purpose of her durational performance art, specifically her mission in cultivating presentness, mindfulness, and direct connection with the audience. Indeed, Moderna Museet, a state-owned museum for modern and contemporary art, once confirmed that "Performance art can be described as the presentation of an action intended to be experienced here and now." Similarly, Marina's extensive depiction of "here and now" accurately exemplifies the notion of the present moment, countering the distraction of modern life and accelerating viewers' perception of their existence.

To exemplify, Marina's indelible demonstration, "The artist is present," has profoundly mesmerized spectators and artists alike with a simple yet sophisticated theme behind her intentions. With only a table, 2 chairs, and a hired public space, she fiercely challenged a deeply embedded fear of resistance and vulnerability to authentic self-recognition. Her message is precise and well-meaning: "You do everything to amuse yourself; you are afraid to do nothing; you look at television, text messages, the computer, and email. Instead, we need to learn to be still, to be present, to be here and now." Such a long-established belief has prompted Marina to sit for 8 hours straight during 3 consecutive months, simply locking eyes with strangers in complete silence. What starts from mere blank staring has gradually transformed into a genuine interpersonal connection and emotional appeal, hinging on the principle of addressing vulnerability as the gateway to human presence. By stripping away unwanted distractions and engaging in prolonged eye contact, Marina's demonstration indirectly forced participants to confront their existence, raw feelings, and internal beliefs, which the artist herself referred to as the art made of trust, vulnerability, and connection. These three primary factors constitute the fundamental principle of conceptual art, in which performance extends beyond mere observation and evolves into transcending interactions among individuals.

From Rhyme 10 to Rhyme 0

In her early works, extreme themes depicting nudity, unconsciousness, and self-inflicted injuries were Marina's frequent means of expression, one of the most controversial methods in protesting against decorative aesthetics during the artist's youthful times. While art commonly contains multilateral perspectives, Marina generally leans towards the disruptive nature of art, claiming that "it should pose questions while being trendsetting". Being considered one of the most pivotal performance artists during the 20th and 21st centuries, her groundbreaking work, Rhyme 0 (1974), is emphasized as the turning point in contemporary art history, breaking the mold in navigating human nature. The resulting piece is unlike any other, with Marina serving as a campus for people's unlimited desires, reflecting the dangerous and unspoken reality of humans' cruelty when accountability is absent. This explicit performance not only showcased a bold, violent interaction but also sparked heated discussions on human nature, power, and violence in society.



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As part of Marina Abramović's Rhyme series, Rhyme 10 was first performed in Edinburgh in 1973, originating from a drinking game played by Russian and Yugoslav peasants. During the performance, 10 knives were spread out, with the artist continuously stabbing down the knives in the spaces between the spread-out fingers. A big crowd observed the performance, while a tape recorder captured every sound and movement, creating a strange feeling of togetherness that united the audience through shared tension and anticipation. Lisson Gallery reported on this exact moment: "The sense of danger in the room had united the onlookers and me in that moment: the here and now, and nowhere else."

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HOW DO WE DESIGN EFFECTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS?

Lan Dao

Public administration is the administration of governmental affairs, with the aim of producing public values that enhance the citizens' quality of life. In this journey, it's important to take into consideration the general citizens' opinions and demands.

The question is: how can we design effective citizen participation mechanisms that both tackle political values such as efficiency, equity, and transparency, and create public values for a better society?

Effective citizen participation mechanisms must first weigh the advantages and potential drawbacks. We should consider the citizens' background and resources, the level of complexity of the situation, the availability of stakeholders, and perceptions of citizens towards the government in order to define which step to involve the public and to what extent they can join the public administration. Ideally, there should be clear goals, available resources for citizens, appropriate group sizes, professional facilitation, committed agencies and participants, supportive policymakers, and a bottom-up approach, considering both low-cost and high-cost indicators. Thus, it's important to evaluate the community's homogeneity, size, and motivation to ensure participation thrives rather than fails.

Firstly, we should create a clear plan for the citizens to understand the situation, as well as where and how they can give the most valuable inputs. We might refer to Fung's cube framework to build an effective plan. The cube in the framework has three dimensions: participant selection, mode of communication and decision making, and extent of authority and power. For participant selection, open access appeals to inclusivity but risks bias toward wealthier or interested parties; random or recruited methods enhance equity but require resources. For communication and decision modes, deliberative modes foster deeper engagement and better outcomes but demand time and skills, while simpler modes like surveys suit broad input. Finally, authority links discussions to action, from personal benefits to communicative influence, advisory roles, co-governance, or direct authority.

Secondly, we should assist by giving them materials and assistance in transforming their ideas into adjustments or final comments. We can use big data to provide citizens with unprecedented volumes of information, coordinate with them to generate technically detailed information and data, and demonstrate responsiveness through transparent feedback that helps the citizens express their needs in a more understandable and persuasive way, making the participation process less time-consuming and challenging. When the topic doesn't require representatives to master complex technical information quickly, the citizens can respond quickly with their understanding and steady research, contributing to a faster and more accurate decision-making process. This way, we can raise the internal efficacy of the public—the belief that one's self is knowledgeable and can participate effectively in government —by assisting the public in collecting information and providing them resources to connect and showcase their needs.

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Thirdly, the government must make participation accessible for as many citizens in the community as possible. As we are living in a digital era, we can use social media to collect data from the citizens, asking for their input while frequently updating the results online via polls or online chats. We can host in-person town hall meetings for offline residents, while simultaneously running online polls and contribution forms on social media platforms. By delivering talks, the citizens will better understand the shared motivation with us, encouraging a more interactive collaboration. With the help of the local government, we can have diverse inputs for a comprehensive plan, make participation easier for more citizens, track the effectiveness, and form a close relationship with them.

Finally, we should build trust in the citizens via clear accountability, making them feel their effort would really make sense and that they are contributing and working with the right officers. The citizens will consider if we actually listen to them and how well we do the work. Thus, we must maintain legitimacy over time by frequently updating the output, outcome, and democratic process. Public administration accountability involves the means by which public organizations and their workers manage the diverse expectations generated within and outside the organization. We should reflect on both the work and the resources, showing the public that the results are optimal, the resources provided are legit, and the officers they are working with are trustworthy.

By engaging in citizen participation, we can uphold the rights of citizens in a democratic society, maintain the stability of the political and administrative system, achieve better policies and programs, and educate and develop citizens. Citizen participation may generally take longer but increases decision acceptance and works well in the absence of strong discord among employees, and decision quality is worth the increased group efforts. Ultimately, such effective mechanisms strengthen public agencies by making them more responsive, just, and effective.

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WHO DECIDES WHAT WE SEE? THE ROLE OF ALGORITHMIC GATEKEEPERS

Ngan Le

The term ‘algorithmic gatekeepers’ refers to the automated systems that filter, rank, and prioritize information, effectively acting as gatekeepers in the digital realm. These algorithms determine which content becomes visible to users, thereby shaping their online experiences and influencing public perception. Rather than making independent judgements, they operate solely on programmed objectives and data-driven learning, using signals such as relevance, popularity, and user engagement to guide their decisions. Hence, algorithmic gatekeeping directly affects the accessibility and impact of information online. Algorithms become gatekeepers primarily because digital platforms depend on automation to manage the overwhelming amount of online content. Human editors can’t process the scale and speed at which information is produced, making algorithmic systems the default tool for arranging visibility. Consequently, decisions about what information reaches users are increasingly delegated to automated processes rather than human judgment. Another reason why algorithms function as gatekeepers is their reliance on engagement-based metrics. Content that generates higher levels of interaction, such as clicks, shares, and watch time, is more likely to be promoted, whilst less engaging material is deprioritized. For instance, YouTube’s recommendation system has historically prioritized watch time, often directing users toward increasingly sensational or extreme content because it keeps them engaged for longer periods. This design choice incentivizes certain types of content and enables algorithms to control information flow based on performance.This design choice incentivizes certain types of content and enables algorithms to control information flow based on performance. Finally, the lack of transparency surrounding algorithmic systems reinforces their gatekeeping roles. Given that platforms treat their algorithms as proprietary, users and content producers are often able to grasp or challenge how visibility decisions are made. This can be seen on Twitter, where users frequently question why certain posts are downranked or removed without a clear explanation. This opacity grants platforms significant influence over the circulation of news and limited, along with limited accountability. The consequences of algorithmic gatekeeping are multifaceted and have significant implications for how individuals understand and engage with information. One major effect is increased vulnerability. By repeatedly exposing users to similar perspectives, algorithmic systems can limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, reinforcing cognitive biases and minimizing opportunities for critical thinking.For example, platforms like TikTok quickly learn user preferences and continuously deliver similar content through personalized feeds, creating a self-reinforcing information loop.

Over time, this narrowed information environment may shape opinions and decisions without users being fully aware of the filtering process associated. In addition, algorithmic gatekeeping also contributes to broader social and informational inequalities.

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WHO DECIDES WHAT WE SEE? THE ROLE OF ALGORITHMIC GATEKEEPERS

Ngan Le

For instance, differences in access to reliable and diverse information may create an information divide, where certain groups benefit from greater visibility and resources, whereas others remain marginalized. This divide can extend into economic and social dimensions, since restricted access to information may set a boundary between educational, professional, and civic opportunities and already disadvantaged communities. In this way, algorithmic systems can inadvertently reinforce existing structural inequalities. Moreover, the opaque nature of algorithmic decision-making can undermine trust in digital platforms and the information they distribute. A striking example is the role of Facebook in Myanmar, where algorithmic amplification of harmful content contributed to the rapid spread of hate speech, demonstrating how digital gatekeeping can have serious real-world consequences. When users don't understand why certain content is suppressed or promoted, questions arise about fairness, accountability, and legitimacy. This erosion of trust furthermore highlights the need for greater transparency and responsible government so as to ensure that the benefits of automation don't come at the expense of an informed and equitable public sphere. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach. Increased transparency in algorithmic decision-making, appropriate oversight of powerful platforms, and stronger digital literacy can help mitigate the risks linked with algorithmic gatekeeping while preserving the advantages of automation.At the same time, companies such as Meta and YouTube have begun introducing moderation and fact-checking measures, indicating that algorithmic systems are evolving in response to public concern. Only by understanding and critically engaging with these systems can users and institutions alike work toward a more informed digital environment.

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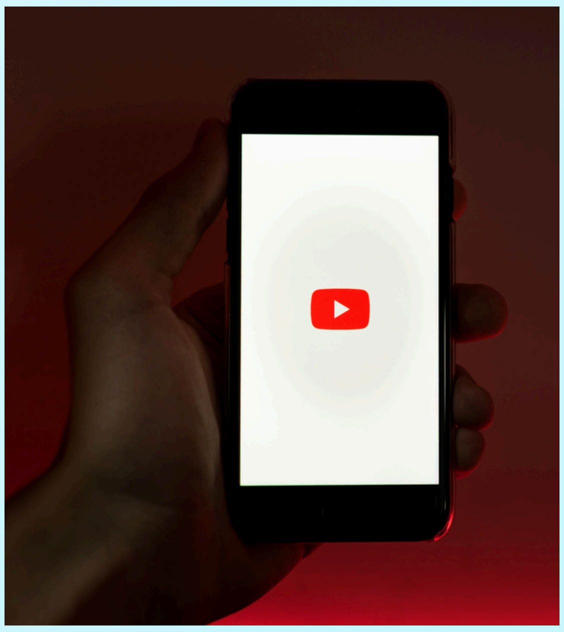

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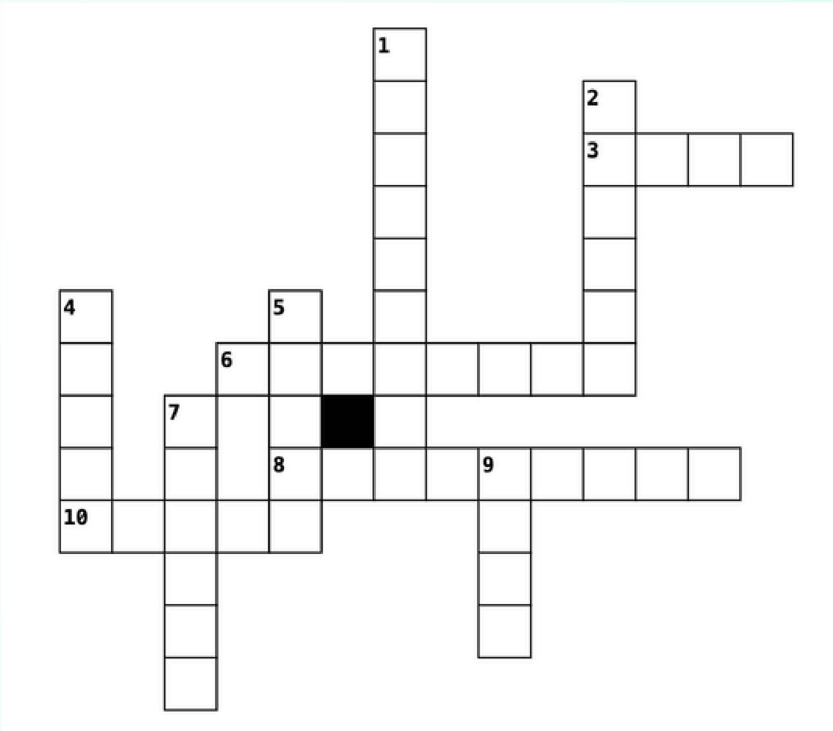
A GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR YOUTH JOURNALISM

Crossword: May Flowers



Across

3. A classic flower often associated with love and romance
6. A bright orange or yellow flower often planted to repel pests
8. A tall yellow flower that follows the sun
10. A large fluffy flower prized in late spring gardens

Down

1. A ruffled flower commonly used in bouquets and corsages
2. An exotic flower known for its intricate blooms
4. A cup-shaped spring flower popular in the Netherlands
5. A simple white-petaled flower with a yellow center
7. A small purple flower that shares its name with a color
9. A trumpet-shaped flower often seen at Easter

Word Search: Insects

A	C	B	O	X	F	K	R	N	Y	Z	Q	Q	T
M	L	A	U	M	J	B	E	E	V	O	N	R	G
O	T	N	Y	T	N	T	C	S	Q	F	I	G	D
S	N	F	D	P	T	A	Q	W	T	M	Z	A	S
Q	V	I	P	X	Y	E	N	D	Y	J	B	K	S
U	D	R	G	J	O	F	R	T	W	F	V	S	Q
I	Y	E	G	F	H	W	I	F	L	W	A	C	Q
T	I	F	I	Y	Y	T	M	W	L	T	D	L	S
O	L	L	J	R	C	B	W	Y	R	Y	W	A	Y
R	F	Y	G	E	S	T	J	J	A	N	U	D	Z
A	C	R	I	C	K	E	T	B	L	M	S	Y	M
K	G	R	A	S	S	H	O	P	P	E	R	B	O
G	G	P	A	M	D	Z	W	C	G	L	D	U	T
R	D	R	A	G	O	N	F	L	Y	D	X	G	H

Word Bank:

Ant
Bee
Butterfly
Dragonfly
Grasshopper
Ladybug
Mosquito
Moth
Firefly
Cricket

Crypto-Quote: Out of the Comfort Zone

E FMVH MW WEJI MR MXW
RIWX — FYX XLEX MW RSX
ALEX MXW AMRKW EVI QEHI
JSV — EQMX VEC

Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRFLP = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.

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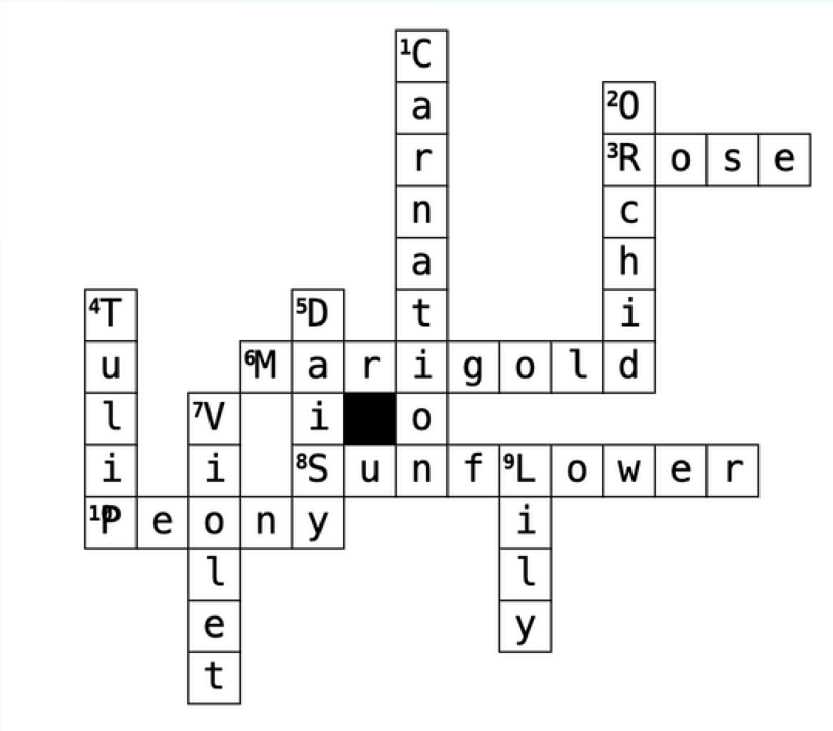

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O	T	N	Y	T	N	T	C	S	Q	F	I	G	D
S	N	F	D	P	T	A	Q	W	T	M	Z	A	S
Q	V	I	P	X	Y	E	N	D	Y	J	B	K	S
U	D	R	G	J	O	F	R	T	W	F	V	S	Q
I	Y	E	G	F	H	W	I	F	L	W	A	C	Q
T	I	F	I	Y	Y	T	M	W	L	T	D	L	S
O	L	L	J	R	C	B	W	Y	R	Y	W	A	Y
R	F	Y	G	E	S	T	J	J	A	N	U	D	Z
A	C	R	I	C	K	E	T	B	L	M	S	Y	M
K	G	R	A	S	S	H	O	P	P	E	R	B	O
G	G	P	A	M	D	Z	W	C	G	L	D	U	T
R	D	R	A	G	O	N	F	L	Y	D	X	G	H

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Bee	Mosquito
Butterfly	Moth
Dragonfly	Firefly
Grasshopper	Cricket

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A BIRD IS SAFE IN ITS NEST — BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT ITS WINGS ARE MADE FOR — AMIT RAY

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