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A Modern Critique of Orientalism in Contemporary Visual Art

Emma Shi

Bergen County Academies, USA
Email: emmaqianshi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Orientalism is historically understood as a cultural phenomenon of 18th and 19th century Europe, when Western artists emulated Asian culture and aesthetics in their work. In 1979, Edward Said's Orientalism first introduced a post-colonial critical analysis to the European, Western portrayal of Eastern cultures in the Middle East. In spite of the perceived progress since the publication of Said's book, the underlying principles of Said's Orientalism critique are still widely applicable to modern visual art in 2023. This study is a fresh look at the persistence of Orientalism in contemporary Asian art. Research will show that Orientalism is not just a historical phenomenon, but an ongoing unsavory, and harmful reality in today's art world. Using data and examples collected from contemporary sources, I will examine and analyze the artwork of visual artists and art institutions in Western countries that reflect Orientalism in their portrayal of Chinese and East Asian cultures.

Keywords*— *Asian, Chinese, colonialism, culture, exoticism

I. INTRODUCTION

The term Orientalism, first established by Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, refers to a hegemonic ideology governing Western representations of and interpretations of Eastern culture by the West. Following its publication, Said's seminal work has seen immense influence, elucidating a novel consciousness within academia of harmful portrayals of Eastern culture within Western art, literature, film, and scholarship.

Orientalism is historically acknowledged as a cultural phenomenon characteristic of 18th and 19th century Europe and North America. The significant changes in global relations and the general geopolitical climate around the world since the publication of *Orientalism* have lended Said's original analysis of Orientalism to be regarded by many as outdated in present day contexts. Despite perceived social progress, this study contends that the underlying principles of Said's critique are still widely applicable today and have only been exacerbated by the global rise of anti-Asian sentiment due to geopolitical tensions rising from the recent coronavirus pandemic.

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the persistence of Orientalism particularly in Asian contemporary art. Evidence supporting the presence of Orientalism in modern interpretations of Chinese and East Asian cultures will carry significant implications in the current artistic discourse.

II. OVERVIEW OF ORIENTALISM & APPROACH

In *Orientalism*, Said notes the presence of a Western savior complex, characterized by a perpetuation of Eastern cultures as subservient, inferior, and alien throughout Western art and literature. Offering thorough analyses of such work, Said asserts a dangerous tendency among Western scholarship and media to exoticize and patronize the East. Said uses the term "Orient" to denote this social construction, through which the West imposes an "Other"-ness upon Eastern societies in relation to itself. The denotation of 'Orient' versus "Occident" presents the East as an antithesis to the West in all areas—including but not limited to culture, religion, government, physical appearance—and attributing the notion of Eastern inferiority to this supposed difference.

Said argues that the West adopted these ideologies of Orient versus Occident as a means of maintaining power and control over the East. Orientalism became a

"systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post Enlightenment period" (Burney, 2012). Thus, the Orient is a Western innovation, fabricated to command and contain the perceived "Orient" and promote Western structures of domination and social superiority through its exploitation. In Western media, the inherent inferiority of the Orient was repeatedly justification for Western colonialism, imperialism, and enforced cultural hegemony on Eastern cultures.

A key manifestation of Orientalism recognizes the tendency for Western scholars and artists to homogenize Eastern cultures, consistent with the bilateral concept of Orient. Eastern cultures were constantly presented with the same few cultural—and nearly always patronizing—stereotypes and aesthetics. By a large majority, the societies of the Eastern world are centuries older than any of those in the West, each possessing their own intricate, ancient histories and traditions. Orientalist perspectives disregard these histories, and those diverse, complex cultures were subject to oversimplification that catered them towards a Western audience. One caveat of this superficial consumption of the East arose as a fetishized appropriation of popularized Eastern "aesthetics," a phenomenon seen notably in the 18th-century European obsession with chinoiserie, seeing a surge in European-made "Eastern-style" furnishings, textiles, and architecture in the Western market.

In *Orientalism* itself, Said primarily examines this concept of the Orient in relation to the Arab Islamic world, consisting of countries located in the Middle East and North Africa. However, Said's arguments regarding the concept are widely applicable across the larger Eastern world as well, including East Asia and the countries of China, Korea, and Japan.

Notably in *Orientalism*, Said summarizes four "principal dogmas of Orientalism," of which Western studies of the East repeatedly incur.

The first dogma is the systemic portrayal of intrinsic disparity between the West as "rational, developed, humane, [and] superior" and the Orient as "aberrant, undeveloped, [and] inferior" (Said, 1978). This beginning dogma solidifies that the Orient exists as antithetical to the West. In the context of Islam, Said argues that this distinction is most evident in the Western understanding of religion's political role within the Muslim world, and a perception of Middle Eastern societies as "underdeveloped" due to their perceived incapability to separate church from state. An implication of this was ignorance, and subsequent reduction of the Middle East "to a special malevolent and unthinking essence" (Jacoby, 2023). Characteristic of these views is a consistent failure to consider nuance, or the possibility of alternative explanations unrelated and non-exclusive to a West-centric ideology. It implies a reductionist construction of the East devoid of complexity, assumed with the role of exploitative and demeaning treatment.

East Asians in the West have similarly been regarded throughout history as inherently "inferior," becoming subject to like stereotypes and categorizations whenever it offers an advantage or convenience for the Western perspective (Park, 2008). Thus, these ideologies see a surge at times of increased geopolitical tensions between Western and East Asian countries. Notable instances of this are the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and the Korean War. Following Pearl Harbor, numerous newspapers and other American visual media re-imagined Japanese as "subhuman apes and gorillas, treacherous in nature" and "morally corrupt and mentally and physically lesser [than] Americans," a ploy weaponizing racial ideology to fuel war tensions within America (Yang, n.d.). A similar phenomenon occurred during the Korean War in the 1950s. The Chinese, who fought on opposite sides as the United States, became subject to comparably patronizing stereotypes. Suddenly, they became brutish, evil, and degenerate in the public eye, like animals.

The second dogma of Orientalism remarks upon a Western inclination to draw "abstractions about the Orient" from "texts representing [classical] Oriental civilisation" over "direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities" (Said, 1978). The Orient thus reveals itself as a caricature of outdated images assembled from atavistic views of the East. Noah Raffoul Bassil explains how, with "complex forces removed, interpretations of Islamic texts become the key variable to unlocking knowledge about the Orient and its gradual decline from an imaginary golden age" (2018). A common thread was the Western usage of texts such as the Qur'an, which dates back to the seventh century, as a comprehensive basis for understanding a contemporary Muslim society. Speaking to the practice's inaccuracy, Tom Jacoby notes how "Muslim militants have regularly been found to be neither particularly knowledgeable about, nor especially observant of, the scriptural basics of Islam" (2023). The Orient is again regarded at once as a fantastical entity—wherein its existence as something constant renders it easily digestible to a Western audience—and powerless, in its incapability to change and evolve.

The third dogma follows then: The Orient is "eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore, it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing it from a Western standpoint is

inevitable and even scientifically 'objective'" (Said, 1978). This dogma arises from the belief that the Orient exists without autonomy or agency. The East, from an Occidental perspective, is framed into a passive entity that necessitates Western authority to achieve any intellectual consciousness.

Said's second and third dogmas of Orientalism remark upon a caricatured, unchanging view of the Orient which defines it in generalized terms for a Western audience. China, as perceived by the West through the lens of chinoiserie, is an example that aligns with these definitions of Orientalism. The notion of an Asian "Other"-ness has been something of spectacle to Western societies for centuries and beginning in the sixteenth century. The signature and exotic "Chinese style," derived from cultural symbols, became repurposed to conform to Western consumerist standards, culminating in the phenomenon known as "chinoiserie." (Porter, 1999). To a lesser-degree, mimicries of ancient cultural symbols remain as defining pillars of what it means to be "Asian" and "Chinese" to the West. It is an aesthetic still seen in current markets and reiterates outdated images of China. Orientalist ideology suggests perpetuating an exotic image of East Asia, in spite of evidence suggesting otherwise, is a method of exerting superiority over it, just as in Said's original examination of the Middle East.

The final dogma construes the Orient as, "at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, [or] outright occupation whenever possible)" (Said, 1978). Said originally connects this dogma to the narrative of violence, and subsequent fear, associated with the Middle East by the West, a narrative that still remains relevant today. This association of the Middle East with violence and barbarism as qualities that are innate, and a direct consequence of this geopolitical designation then implies an inherent moral fault. The belief in such an innate "evil" allows the West to undermine scientific, environmental analysis of the origins of violence and enact racially targeted legislation under the guise of self-protection.

Perhaps most applicable of all is the fourth dogma, citing the Orient as an object of both fear and control. Throughout Western history, and particularly in the United States, we see a repeated introduction of racially targeted legislation against East Asians, fueled by fear and contributing to the rise of demeaning narratives in Western art, literature, and academia of their time (Lee, 2007). The first of these is the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which instated a 10-year ban on Chinese immigration and naturalization into the country. The basis for the act was, ultimately, a fear of Chinese invasion into the American workforce. Even without pretenses, white laborers feared the Chinese would steal their jobs and homes. Similar attitudes were involved with the 1942 establishment of Japanese internment camps under Executive Order 9066, which "authorized the forced removal of all persons deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to 'relocation centers' further inland" (Roosevelt, 1942). These two examples exemplify both aspects of the dogma; Fear of the Orient lends itself to subsequent attempts to control it.

Analysis of these "principal dogmas" reveal a similar relevance to additional definitions of an Eastern "Orient". Especially in the context of the United States, East Asian people have existed in an exclusionary narrative within media portrayal since their first major arrivals to the country in the 19th century. The West has subjected East Asia to similar alienating academic, literary, and visual interpretations as it has the Arab Islamic world, as originally elucidated by Said. Similar trends persist to the twenty-first century.

Many scholars argue that the prominence of Orientalist ideology in modern society is diminishing as a result of increasing globalization in recent decades. They point to technological advances in the Digital Age that have afforded people with easy access to comprehensive views of different ethnic, regional, and economic backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles. Additionally, global society has evolved culturally and politically, and is now governed by new ideologies, power structures, and systems of international relation, giving rise to a novel, all-encompassing social interconnectedness distinctly at odds with Said's original theory of Orientalism. Global society is said to have evolved beyond the culturally hegemonic perspectives Said proposed (Samiei, 2010).

However, this is a shortsighted view. In fact, it is ignorant to equate awareness of the issue with triumph over it, as they are not mutually inclusive. While an increasing globalization and awareness among populations might diminish the traditional presentations of Orientalism as originally investigated by Said, the same Orientalist ideologies can and do continue to endure in ever-evolving forms. Within these new manifestations of Orientalism persists the same undertones of Eastern subservience, inferiority, and alienness (Sa'di, 2020).

Furthermore, modern globalization has not resulted in any decline in their relevance to present-day issues. In the face of recent events, increased globalization has arguably resulted in a proliferation of Orientalist views rather than diminishing them. Especially in light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, global interconnectedness has exacerbated anti-Asian sentiments across borders. Art, literature, news

outlets, academia, and especially online media then perpetuate these sentiments.

In an analysis of the persistence of Orientalism in the present, I will be examining in particular the presence of Orientalist perspectives in contemporary visual art. As a visual medium of communication, art provides a comprehensive glimpse into the social attitudes and societal norms of any given geopolitical context. I will analyze examples of both institutional artwork, that both caters to and represents a wider audience, in addition to the artwork of individual artists, to illustrate the continuing prevalence of this issue.

III. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF ORIENTALISM IN MODERN ASIAN ART

This paper will present a total of five examples of contemporary art that exemplify Orientalist perspectives.

I consider it helpful to begin with an analysis of institutional artwork, curated and exhibited by museums. Museums are public, community-oriented and thus exist as representatives for any cultures and cultural items it chooses to display. As such, critical care and discretion is necessary to any display or exhibition a museum chooses to present. Western museums in particular have a long history of exotifying Eastern cultures (Ward, 2021). It can be argued that Western museums are, by nature, agents of exotification, presenting cultural images and objects in a digestible manner for a Western audience.

3.1 "Kimono Wednesdays" at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston

In 2015, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts held an exhibition event called "Kimono Wednesdays," an art experience centered around French impressionist painter Claude Monet's 1857 painting, *La Japonaise*, meaning "Japanese Woman." The painting depicts Monet's wife Camille Monet, a white woman, in a traditional Japanese kimono and a blonde wig. She holds a paper fan in her right hand, and the wall behind her is covered in a variety of Japanese paper fans as well.

The exhibition experience invited museum visitors to put on a kimono themselves and pose for photographs in front of the painting. Participants were encouraged to then post these kimono photos on their social media platforms with the tag #mfaBoston, acting as promotional material for the exhibition and museum as a whole (Rodney, 2015).

Whilst it is not inherently problematic to participate or encourage participation in other cultures, there is a level of sensibility and historical appreciation that needs to be observed. When participants—especially Western and white participants—are properly informed of the historical and nuanced political contexts of the practices they are engaging with, the experience can be formative to combating harmful ideologies.

The Museum of Fine Arts did not make any sincere attempts in the presentation of this exhibition to educate its audience of the historical context. Multiple online accounts of the experience noted a failure of the museum in providing proper background information on either the Monet painting or the kimono garment. Monet's *La Japonaise* was painted during the historical period when Japonisme, a French movement characterized by a fascination and adoption of Japanese art and design aesthetics in Western European art (Ives, 2004). The painting is meant to reflect the culture of that time and has been considered by some to be a critique of the aesthetic's cultural appropriation.

Similar to any other item of cultural clothing, the kimono has a deeply rooted cultural history. The kimono has been around for centuries and has played significant roles in socioeconomic and gender distinctions within Japanese culture.

Yet, in the exhibition both the painting itself and the kimono-wearing experience are presented in a reductionist manner, with complete disregard to the cultural contexts behind both. To a Western viewer or participant, the kimono is viewed only superficially and aesthetically. By then inviting people to try on the kimono and emulate the painting, the museum undermines what could be an educational experience to one that directly exotifies Japanese culture and appropriates it for a Western perspective. This follows directly into the Orientalist notion of the West portraying the East as something "exotic," simplifying it to be digestible for Western consumption and avoid critical thought. The encouragement to take photos and share them online, again with little to no context, only exacerbates the issue, furthering the narrative of East Asian exoticism and spectacle.

3.2 China: Through the Looking Glass *at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*

Another museum exhibition that presents similar issues is the 2015 *China: Through the Looking Glass* exhibition held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. The primary objective of the exhibition, according to the museum's website, was to "explore the impact of Chinese aesthetics on Western fashion and how China has fueled the fashionable imagination for centuries." The exhibition, which showed at the museum for eight months, featured over 140 designs by renowned haute couture fashion designers such as Christian Dior, Alexander

McQueen, Karl Lagerfeld, and Yves Saint Laurent (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015).

Similar to that of the exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, the problem with this exhibition was also in its execution and presentation to the public. In a conversation regarding Chinese aesthetics in Western fashion, it is essential to address the role Orientalism plays within that narrative. The "Chinese aesthetics" present in the showcased fashion pieces are a direct consequence of Orientalist ideologies in the Western world, and to fully learn about and appreciate those influences, there must be awareness of the incredibly problematic aspects of that same narrative.

In the exhibition, however, the curators did not make any attempts to elucidate the nuanced, discriminatory, and racially targeted background of Orientalism. In fact, they did the opposite. The curators took the initiative to acknowledge the issue of Orientalism in a manner that illustrated their problematic approach. In a released statement, the exhibition curators explained that the exhibition was created from a viewpoint of Orientalism as something positive, and a site for breeding creativity (Shin, 2019). And therein lies a core issue—by definition, Orientalism is not and can never be a positive phenomenon, as it, by Said's definition, centers around the distortion and homogenization of Eastern cultures to cater to a Western consumer audience.

Additionally, curators marketed the exhibition as a "fantasy" of the Far East, a notion furthered by the exhibition's title. "*China: Through the Looking Glass*" markets China as an exotic Alice-in-Wonderland-esque "fantasy" in the eyes of viewers. The layout of the exhibition itself, which was curated to emphasize the "juxtaposition" between East and West fashions, also directly perpetuates Orientalist notions of exoticism and "Other"-ness in its depiction of the East and West as two distinct, irreconcilable entities.

The exhibition's wild success of over 815,000 visitors in 5 months and extensive social media coverage perpetuated such perspectives to an incredibly large audience (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015). The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts, which holds a collection of nearly 500,000 works today, is similarly problematic (Museum of Fine Arts Boston, n.d.).

3.3 "COVID CHINA" by ArtPusher

When instead considering the work of individual artists, there is a significantly greater level of nuance involved. In contrast to institutional art, which represents a community perspective, individual artists tend to create from personal perspectives and lived experiences. When considering museums, there are less considerations to take into account when discerning Orientalist perspectives. In the instance of individual artists, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between what can be considered a "Western" versus "Eastern" perspective.

My analysis of the artwork of individual artists showed that contemporary presentations of Orientalism in art can largely be categorized in two different categories, or perspectives. The first perspective is one that is best described as "obvious" Orientalism. These are artworks that present blatantly racist and patronizing portrayals of East Asian cultures. Over the last few decades, such depictions have been on the decline, but recently saw a surge as a result of the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

An example of this is a neon-light artwork by one Danish artist who goes by "ArtPusher." The neon window-display piece creates the image of a perfume bottle whose label reads, "COVID CHINA." The artwork clearly targets China, with little room for outside interpretation. The use of "Covid" as a descriptor specifically for China singles it out and pushes an exclusionary narrative against China in relation to the rest of the world.

3.4 "BAT MAN" by @ironartworks

An artwork that imparts similar anti-Chinese sentiments is a piece by Swedish artist Iron, or @ironartworks, on Instagram.

The artist takes a picture of Xi Jinping, the current president of the People's Republic of China, and caricatures him in a variety of Chinese stereotypes. He is drawn with exaggerated yellow skin and portrayed with bat ears along with the moniker "Bat Man," referencing the stereotype that Chinese people are "bat-eaters." His eyes are circled, presumably to draw attention to their straighter, smaller shape that is characteristic of Chinese features. There is a penis doodle on his forehead drawn in red as well, defaming and mocking him, and in conjunction, China as a whole. The patronization, mockery, and exotification is obvious here. The intentional decision to choose Xi Jinping as the target of caricature only substantiates the racist message intended to be conveyed. For a Western artist to reduce China and Chinese people to a racially demeaning stereotype, ignorant to the realities of Chinese culture, exemplifies the key dogmas Said's Orientalism.

Though not blatant in its reference to the Covid pandemic, this artwork was initially posted online in 2020, during the peak of Covid. The geopolitical tension between the East and West as a result of the virus's Chinese origin reiterated, in the modern technological age, the narrative of East-West duality characteristic of Orientalism. Influenced by and compounded with the significant rise in anti-Asian sentiment and sinophobia at

the time, social media and various online circles reflected these perspectives. It is under these circumstances that there has been a rise in racially discriminatory art such as "Bat Man" and "COVID CHINA".

3.5 Iona Rozeal Brown

The other perspective of contemporary Orientalism is both more common and more difficult to dissect. A large proportion of contemporary art about or relating to Asian culture is created without the intention to appropriate or misinterpret it. Contradictorily, in fact, contemporary portrayals of Asian culture in art are often executed with, or even as a result of, a certain cultural awareness, or in an earnest effort to critique. This does not, however, eliminate or excuse notions of Orientalism they may perpetuate.

Iona Rozeal Brown is a contemporary Black American painter born and raised in Washington D.C. She is well-known for her appropriation of ukiyo-e art, a genre of traditional Japanese woodblock prints and paintings originating in 17th-century Japan. Brown reimagines the ukiyo-e style with a Black American hip-hop influence, and her art frequently uses the style to depict Black American figures in place of the traditional subjects of ukiyo-e, a practice she has named "Afro-Asiatic Allegory" (University of Arizona Museum of Art & Archive of Visual Arts, 2007).

When viewing Brown's work, it is seen that the style emulates the traditional "form" of Orientalism. Historically, Asian cultures have been appropriated in a similar aesthetic manner, such as with the previously mentioned phenomenon of chinoiserie. It is tempting at first glance to label Brown's work as representative of Orientalist perspectives. However, a couple issues arise with that interpretation.

Brown specifies that her artwork is, at its core, a critique. After learning about the Japanese ganguro—or "black face"—subculture, which appropriates Black American culture as its aesthetic, she wanted to use her art as a critique. Furthermore, Brown has spent some time living in Tokyo and Yokohama in Japan and has allegedly trained professionally in the ukiyo-e style (Michael Steinberg Fine Art, n.d.).

It becomes more uncertain to determine whether Iona Rozeal Brown's work can be considered representative of Orientalist ideas. In spite of the difficulty in assessing Brown's work from an Orientalist critique, it ultimately does fit the aesthetic "form" commonly associated with Orientalism and perpetuate Orientalism to its audience.

Additionally, as a Black American artist, there is another form of nuance to consider when examining Brown's art. Historically, when we discuss the theory of Orientalism, it is with an understanding of the Western world as predominantly White. In his Orientalism theory, Said examines Africa, along with Asia, as a subject of Orientalism and exoticism by the West. Yet societal integration today has found people of Asian and African descent gaining more and more representation within Western media and academic circles. Many people have identities and cultural backgrounds that are diverse and multifaceted. The debate arises as to where people with such cultural multiplicity, like Brown, who is a Black American woman who has lived in Japan, fit into the narrative of Orientalism. Can someone from a demographic that has historically been subject to Western Orientalism itself embody the role of instigator? Can we consider this an example of Orientalism?

The dualistic nature of Orientalism recognized in the 18th century is insufficient in addressing the current cultural plurality within the Western World, a phenomenon that is reflected in contemporary art. It follows that a contemporary critique of Orientalist perspectives must reflect these changes as well. Considering contemporary Asian art as a collective, many Asian artists in the West have themselves created art to criticize Orientalist structures, contributing themselves to the "Western" narrative. It is not uncommon to see these artists incorporate and exaggerate elements and stereotypical "aesthetics" of Orientalism as cornerstones of that critique.

When we are analyzing the work of individual artists through a critical Orientalist lens, it becomes necessary to consider the artist's cultural background, the artwork's intentions, the artist's presentation and description of the work, and the audience's perception and interpretations of the work, all in the same discussion of Orientalism in the contemporary art world.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, as much as we believe ourselves to have evolved beyond racist views affected by Orientalism in the art world and beyond, these issues are still very relevant. Despite social advancements towards racial equity, the institutional presence of racially insensitive art in the 21st century signals their self-prominence, perpetuating the fundamental principles of Said's Orientalism to the present day.

Especially following the recent pandemic, many of Edward Said's original critiques have been rekindled, reversing previous progress. The post-COVID political scene is vastly different from that pre-COVID. As such, a resurgence of Orientalist ideologies has become inflamed, visible, and prominent in the past three years.

In March of 2020, following over 118,000 cases in 114 countries, the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). The epicenter of COVID-19 was in China's Wuhan province. Beginning in the initial stages of the outbreak, social media circles surmised a variety of explanations for the origins of the virus. Its zoonotic nature fueled stereotypes of Chinese cuisine as "exotic" and "dirty" and stereotypes of Chinese people as "dog and cat eaters". The interconnectedness granted by the internet resulted in widespread conspiracies, misinformation, and later discrimination against Chinese populations, effectively "Other"-ing them in a global context.

A similar phenomenon occurred following the 1980s AIDS pandemic. Its predominance in white homosexual men led it to be known colloquially as "gay plague" or "gay syndrome" and became presumed to be a punishment for "sexual deviation". This association resulted in health restrictions and stigma around homosexuality that still exist today. Debanjan Banerjee introduces the term "epidemic orientalism" to describe this phenomenon, where social portrayals of infectious outbreaks tend to stigmatize the affected, engendering an "Other"-ness akin to that in traditional Orientalism (2020). In the case of Covid-19, "epidemic orientalism" reappears and targets China, ushering along previous, centuries-old notions of traditional Chinese Orientalism with it.

A stigmatized China within Western and global media has incited a rapid, unprecedented rise in racism, hate crimes, and anti-Chinese rhetoric around the world. Political groups throughout the Western world, "including in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Greece, France, and Germany" [have] used the COVID-19 threat to justify furthering xenophobic, anti-immigration, and white supremacist views and legislation (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Contemporary artwork—especially those surfacing online—such as ArtPusher's "COVID CHINA" and ironartwork's "BAT MAN" clearly echo these attitudes.

Notably, Said's original four dogmas of Orientalism have experienced a newfound relevance as a result of the pandemic. Relating back to Edward Said's fourth dogma, the Orient—embodied in this situation by the Chinese—is framed as something to be feared, and consequently controlled. The pandemic, especially at its peak, became a significant source of fear for people around the world. In order to combat this fear and reassert control over the situation, we encounter a rise in racist and exclusionary media and art targeting China, the country who had become the cultural embodiment of that threat. This is a strong assertion of the modern-day relevance of Said's Orientalism theory.

It is, as well, an assertion of the timelessness and immutably geopolitical nature of Said's Orientalism. The recent resurgence of Orientalist ideologies suggests that, in response to future global happenings—pandemics, wars, or other large-scale events that cause stress upon global relations—we will likely see these sorts of sentiments arise once again. Future art will subsequently reflect this.

Thus, it is necessary to continue incorporating the topic of Orientalism within discussions of contemporary art. Racially targeted sentiment, as proven by both historical and recent events, continues to contribute to real violence and harm against Asian populations around the world. To recognize and then challenge the East-West paradigm requires an ongoing cognizance of intention, cultural history, and cultural context.

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