

An AI of Our Own: Innovating AI to Include Diverse Ways of Knowing

A project by Living Arts International

Background

As the use of AI tools and LLMs such as ChatGPT grow exponentially, we become more aware of bias in the datasets and a lack of representation for non-dominant narratives. For a large majority of the world's population, they do not feel as though AI models and systems are made for them, but rather **reflect traditional hegemonies and power dynamics**. The exponential growth of technology continues to exacerbate the digital divide, leading to greater inequalities in access to data and representation in online environments.

One area which is particularly threatened by the biases in AI and technology is **cultural heritage**, particularly in cultures in the global south which have traditionally been reliant on oral transmission. Despite the potential of technology to democratize access to cultural resources, digital heritage projects around global south communities which are created by and for the communities themselves are lacking. If digital scans exist, they are often the property of global north companies or museums, and are not accessible to the communities which they are about. Further, digital archives and training datasets for AI rely heavily on the existence of written records, a particularly western way of knowing, and do not honor or consider other ways of knowing. **Thus, the digital future of tomorrow risks to be monocultural, exclusive, and appropriative.**

Project Summary

"An AI of Our Own: Innovating AI to Include Diverse Ways of Knowing" is an initiative of Living Arts International in an attempt to leverage the potential and exponential growth in AI technology to create adaptive and responsive systems wherein cultural heritage is preserved in a way that goes beyond traditional wikis, written datasets, and western methodologies of knowing and documenting. ***Rather than trying to fit the diverse heritage of the global south into a system which was not built for it, we propose to create "an AI of our own," which leverages existing technological expertise and advancements of the global north but invites them to go beyond and envision a multi-cultural, diverse, and inclusive digital future.***

AAOO launched in spring 2024 in attempt to explore innovative solutions to the stated issues, with the concept note developed in a collaborative workshop, drawing on research and conceptual work LAI has been conducting since 2021. Four main pillars of the project were identified: **Connect, Nurture, Fund, and Co-create**, which have guided activities thus far.

In summer 2024, LAI **commissioned a research project** to understand the current landscape of digital heritage and AI in Asia and Africa, culminating in a report (final publication expected mid-Feb). In November 2024, LAI assembled a **diverse working group** of 6 individuals from different countries, backgrounds, and expertise, including data rights, computer science, technological storytelling, culture management, and philosophy. The working group focused on the development of a manifesto, which aims to define the values and methodology of AAOO and guide the launch of a pilot case of the AI in Cambodia.

The pilot case is planned to be a proof-of-concept for the manifesto, after which the replicability and scalability of the project will be assessed and adjusted if necessary to keep AAOO growing. Additionally, AAOO aims to leverage the manifesto as a guiding policy document for advocacy and build the consortium of stakeholders that will drive the future of AAOO.

Community-Centered Approach

Understanding the vital need for guidance and collaboration from the communities whose cultural heritage is the root of this issue, *An AI of our Own* is designed to be **community-centered, responsible, and responsive**: we go beyond simple 'buy-in' and invite community members and representatives to be co-creators and collaborators in each phase.

As such, an integral element of the project is the curation of a robust **community of practice** which involves artists and cultural practitioners both contemporary and traditional, guardians and custodians of cultural heritage, community members and representatives, tech experts, and ICH practitioners and professionals.

We integrate and respect the views and voices of minority cultures throughout our activities and ensure that our activities are upholding their needs.

Our project is **grounded and led by actors and stakeholders in the global south**. It is not our intention to exclude the global north from the conversation; rather, we seek to invite technology and AI experts as well as supporters and foundations who are interested in the **vision of a more inclusive and respectful digital future**. However, we feel that it is absolutely vital that the work is led by the global south to avoid the risk of – consciously or otherwise – imposing global north views, even if those views are on decolonization and inclusion.

A Positive Vision for the Digital Future

At the heart, this project takes a positive stance on AI and remains optimistic about the ingenuity and promises that it provides. Rather than focusing on 'stopping' AI development, "*An AI of Our Own*" seeks to investigate all potential routes of AI technology, from LLMs to generative AI and to those systems which have yet to be invented. We aim to **balance the leadership and knowledge of global south communities with as-of-yet unimagined ways of using and developing technology to reimagine what AI can be and do** in a context which is grounded in ethics, the principles of diversity and inclusion, and centered in and with the communities themselves.