Toward a pluralism of perspectives on AI – A book review of "Imagining AI: How the World Sees Intelligent Machines"

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Imagining AI: How the World Sees Intelligent Machines edited by Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal (2023) was published as a result of the Global AI Narratives (GAIN) project of the Leverhulme Center for the Future of Intelligence, University of Cambridge. The book has 25 chapters grouped into four parts, corresponding to different geographical regions: Europe; the Americas and Pacific; Africa, Middle East, and South Asia; East and South East Asia. All chapters contributed comprehensively to the mission of showing "the imaginary of intelligent machines is an incredibly rich site for exploring" and how the imaginaries shape the ways "different cultures reconcile the demands of being human in a technological age."

Diverse imaginaries of AI across societies

Importantly, the book will definitively broaden and nuance the readers' understanding of the notion of intelligent machine, itself. For example, the readers can learn the differentially value-laden ways in which different language groups (Germanic, Chinese, Japanese, Romance, Slavonic) denote intelligent machines (Chapter 2). Or we can critically examine the recent crisis of AI representation in its apparently dominant whiteness (Chapter 17). Notably, the readers are also introduced to the ambitious three laws of robotics that admonished the robots to observe and obey the propriety, postulated in the Chinese science fiction writer, Shuang Chimu's 'The Rooster Prince' (Chapter 24).

There are various mediums that have been explored: from science fiction novels in various parts of the world (Germany, Russia, China, Chile, etc.), to multimedia products such as the comic

strip Ranxerox (1978–1986), the cartoon WALL-E (2008), the Terminator franchise; to policies such as Singaporean Smart Nation Initiative; and South Korean's national news media; or the Polish philosopher Stanislaw Lem's speculative nonfiction Summa Technologiae (1964); or Japan's various companion robots; etc. Each essay has a unique spatio-temporal dimension and that has successfully primed the readers to be more sensitive to the ways the historical and cultural context can shape the imaginaries of intelligent machines. For example, in chapter 4, Eleonora Lima analyzes and contemplates the comic strip Ranxerox, whose central character is an android of the same name with a material hybridity that is recognized as "the perfect representation of the heterogeneous collective of the (political) '77 Movement" (p.61) in 1980s Italy that reacts against the orthodox, traditional middle-class values.

Socio-political turmoil entwined with current AI development: the risk of impoverishing our imagination of AI

From a political viewpoint, the book's birth date coincides with a period of turmoil in the use and regulation of AI in our time: the call for a stop in developing Large Language Model in early 2023, after the meteoric success of ChatGPT; the Bletchley Declaration by 28 countries on November 20, 2023, which aims to both ensure human safety in the development of AI and aims to use AI effectively for development; the adoption of the EU AI Act by the European Parliament on March 13, 2024; the recent launches of numerous Generative AI products such as Bard, Sora, Gemini, Perplexity, etc., a consequence of the 'arm race' among the global big-techs; and most recently, the passing of the first global resolution on AI on March 21, 2024 by the United Nations General Assembly. Within this chaos, there seems to be a unifying trend toward certain Western-centric narratives of AI. In contrast, Cave and Dihal's edited book shows the multipolar, pluralistic ways societies since time memorial have conceptualized and imagined intelligent machines. Here, the book brings to the front the worrying risk of our imagination of AI being impoverished.

The relentless neoliberal deployment of AI (Mantello et al., 2023), the abusive use of AI for political and economic gains could have an enormous impact on the cultural foundations of various societies. Thus, increasing the possibility that these societies' original AI-related ideas and cultures negatively shifted or even disappear. Then, global perspectives on AI will be at risk of only revolving around one or two dominant perspectives. Along with that, like westernization bringing about the risk of harming local cultures, the continuous expansion of the influence of the

West's narratives about AI through cultural media also affects the attitudes towards AI in other societies.

Henceforth, from a political, cultural, and epistemic standpoint, we are currently experiencing mixed responses as to how we should utilize and think about AI. On the one hand, we have taken into account the cooperation between humans and AI. For example, there have been ideas put forward on human-AI co-creation, urging us to view AI's impacts less as separated from human conducts, but more as cocreated acts (Ho and Vuong, 2024a, 2024b; Rezwana and Maher, 2022). Researchers also claim to foster diverse perspectives on AI and see AI as a tool for enhancing growth and combating social inequality among countries and groups, AI can also help us solve problems regarding nature, such as adapting to climate change (Jane et al, 2023) or protecting biodiversity (Sivestro et al, 2022). On the other hand, AI has been utilized as a tool of subjugation for political and economic gains. For example, AI is currently used as a military support tool, as was the case in the Russo-Ukrainian war, or to cause an arms race, as in the case in the Middle East (He, 2023). AI can also be used negatively to create economic benefits for big tech companies (Hutchinson, 2022) or to produce affective propaganda (Goldstein et al., 2024) or to contaminate the infosphere (Ho & Nguyen, 2023; Vuong, 2022). If we continue at this rate, will there be a time when we, while employing AI, will destroy ourselves, as so frequently grimly hinted in science fictions about AI?

In conclusion, the book is indeed a successful attempt to promote the pluralism of the imaginaries of AI, and it has shown how the notion of intelligent machine is often bound up with the particularities of historical, social, and cultural contexts. Thus, in this regard, research on AI, like those presented in this book, should have attracted more readers from various fields and backgrounds. Here, we also take into account the threat that malicious uses of AI pose to the pluralistic visions of AI, the book also serves the interest of the global community by encouraging curious readers to explore cultural works about AI and contemplate their implications for imagining how to be humans in the age of AI.

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