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Interview with Jayson Chun

James Smith, Lindsey Mow, Alexander Lugo

HUM300 W 3:30-4:50pm

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Transcript: LMS Info League

James: Interviewer

Jay: Interviewee (Preferred to be called DR. Jay through Interview.)

James: Hello, welcome to our podcast with our guest, Prof. Chun.

What is it that you do, and how does your work relate to the humanities?

Jay: Well first what I do, I am a professor of History, and my specialty is Asian history from Asia. Um, I do courses related to East Asia, but I also teach popular culture. And so I use popular culture to help young students get interested in Asia and especially what I like to do is study, um, Japanese anime, that's animation, Manga and for Korea it's K-Pop, Korean pop music, and I also like to look at now Chinese movies as China now is the world's biggest movie market, coming out with Hollywood caliber movies that I think a lot of you will be watching in the future.

So um how does this relate to the Humanities? Well I'm a history professor. Um, um, by the way on the side, I'm also um am the coordinator for Asian studies certificate, so I help run our, um, Asian language courses here. So I like to look at the um, you know, even if you are not in the humanities program, I just want people to learn about Asia as well. So those are my key interests. So I've been here since 2004, at UH West Oahu and I'm part of the Humanities division. And so I teach history, which is one of the concentrations of the humanities division.

Okay thank you. Um, Do you consider yourself a Humanist?

Jay: Well what is humanities, you see I think that is the next question maybe you could ask that. What is it, and to be honest, a lot of people still don't know. Professors have given definitions or so, like for example, is psychology a part of the humanities? Isn't business, which actually we study of human behavior, be humanities? So you know yes, humanities classically speaking we are looking at the arts, you know the music, the history, what is it to be human, as opposed to physical sciences. How humans have reacted throughout history. So in that sense, I am a humanist. How I look at history through today, the cultural differences, and even within cultures, people are very different. And they can react very differently. So yes, you can call me a humanist.

James: Okay, um...

Jay: And a Animalist. (Laughter.) And a Petist, I like pets.

There is currently an issue with STEM courses and Humanities, one having the impression of being more important or beneficial than the other, do you feel that one of them is more beneficial than the other or are both important in your eyes?

Jay: You gotta have both, one thing that I believe, this is the defense step, you need both hard skills and soft skills, you can't have one without the other. Um, for example we do live in a world now with more reliance on technical skills, you're going to need these skills. Even for me for example, I'll say as a history professor, I know some of the best classes I've taken we're computer language courses that taught me to think logically. I've taken courses in the statistics, which has helped me a lot. I like to read like the basic science, so you have to know these things.

And so every Humanities Major, I recommend that you take these courses, like courses in statistics, economics, big data, data analysis, you need these things. I would recommend you take technical courses like skills like web page design, computers, you have to.

However, this is the next big thing, the problem with these hard skills, like um STEM skills, is that they go out of date rapidly. Like for example, I know four computer languages, the only thing is I can't use them anymore, because I learned them too long ago. (Laughter.) They're all obsolete now, you see that. I've learned the basic

principles of computer programming, but I can't you know, but thing is about hard skills is that they go out of date. Like, let's say in the year 2000, let's say I met you and you take a very specialized skill, "Hey, I just graduated with, um, DVD creation. Wow, I'm gonna have a good job." Nobody can predict the future. The thing is, technology changes soo fast. Think of you, how many of you had, what was it, MySpace? (Laughter) How many of you, what if I told you 6 years ago, 'Let's make Vine videos.' (Laughter)

Nobody can predict the future, and the thing is, technology goes obsolete so quickly. Skills go obsolete. And the thing now scary that is actually scary is that now there are software programs and artificial intelligence programs that do a lot of the work for you. Like for example, now I can easily download a photo app editor and add filters. It was hard back when I had to learn photography back in high school, I had to go to the dark room and get all these chemicals out.

Um, the other words basically is that skills go obsolete. And then with increasing automation, a lot of those skills will now be done by computers, so if you only focus on the technical skills, you are going to miss out really on what I think is the big benefit of humanities, which is if number 1: You learn how human beings act.

You can design a computer, but if people don't know how to use it or if they don't want to use it, it's useless. You see that, but number 2 also is that: Humanities, I thinks, teaches you critical thinking skills. In an age then that I can easily for example, let's take google, I can find now almost any information I want on google. The question is, how do I determine what I want to use, how do I fit it together, you see that, how do I put it in a way to convince people what to use?

In the end, I think what Humanities is going to be useful for the future is, is going to teach you how technology interacts with humans and for what information to use. Therefore, you need to have both, you can't just have one without the other. So that's why the humanities is still extremely relevant in this day and age today.

James: Thank you for the very well detailed response. (Laughter.)

Are you familiar with the concept of a contact zone?

Jay: The contact zone is what, where different cultures meet each other?

James: Yes, when different cultures, languages, religions, or basically, people from different sort of spheres and ideas interact with one another.

Jay: Like Waikiki. (Laughter) Well it is, it's one of the contact zones. What you go shopping for new clothes, you go there, that's a contact zone.

James: That's actually a really funny example.

Jay: Right yeah, no, Hawaii itself is a big contact zone. Yeah that's actually one of the things I work on my research is contact zones. That's where a lot of the, um, innovation in human beings come from. When you stop meeting people different than you, you die. Cultures are like that, the minute they try to seal off, or try to be pure, it dies. Every culture grows, throughout history, you learn that. Even in cultures when it says tradition is unchanging, no, societies have always changed, have always mixed with each other's. And this is how societies grow, through contact zones. So that's one of the things I study in through popular music, through anime, in food, it's contact zones. And you live in one, all of you, we all live in one.

James: That actually leads well into my next question, um:

Do you find yourself in contact zones in your line of work?

Jay: Oh definitely, my work is about contact zones. Um my latest research right now is about, um, K-Pop, Korean pop, and J-Pop, Japanese pop, and you know, that's music made in contact zones. For example, let's take uh...um, my most recent article, I look at what we call Japanese pop. Right, Japanese pop, one of the biggest practitioners, actually the person who created it, came from Los Angeles, he was a Japanese American. He grew up in a contact zone to Japan, called Little Tokyo, and then he moved to, um, afterwards to Japan and then he made American style music groups, you know he adapted to the Japanese market.

What happened later on is that the Koreans would take on this concept and change it even more. But look at early K-Pop, Korean Pop, that's actually made with Korean Americans who had grown up in LA. Some of the, um, most influential Korean Pop singers were Korean Americans. The question of helped actually create K-Pop was Isumong of SM Entertainment, who made many popular hits later on. He studied at Kell State Northridge in Los Angeles and saw MTV and said, 'Wow, this is what I

want to see, in Korean version.’ So he was in a contact zone as well. So contact zones in my research are important. For me, my wife’s Japanese, so I get to go to Japan to stay in an apartment there, with my mother in law, for one month every year. So I live one month every year in a contact zone. I also spend time every year in China or Korea as well, so that’s a contact zone as well. So being Professor, gives me that free time to go to other countries and start learning, so you know my life is a contact zone.

James: Alright, well we are down to our last question, and I feel you may have answered it already, um:

Do you feel that contact zones are necessary for the humanities to progress?

Jay: You have to do that in order to progress, in order to um, gain in new ideas, in fact for example, university itself is a contact zone, you’re supposed to be meeting people of different backgrounds. So if you only hang out with people who are just like you, you’re not learning. See that. That’s why, for example, I recommend people joining the international club, so that you can meet people from different countries and learn from them.

Okay, however, let me just point out what I see as the big flaw in education is: We have compartmentalized it. Where, for example, people when I meet at age 18 I ask, ‘What do you want?’ You have your road usually set up, mostly, 90 percent of them, is not humanities. And that’s all right, they say, I want to go to business, I’m gonna go Healthcare Administration, nothing wrong with that, because like I said, you need the skills. But when you do this, a lot of our education lacks the cultural component. People maybe take 2-3 humanities courses period throughout their entire college careers. So what is happening is that you are seeing a lack in the contact zone in education. People are learning ideas basically stripped of cultural contact. Like I said, you need to have hard skills and soft skills, you need to mix them both. So, as Humanities Majors, you are both in good shape, your learning about the contact zone, learning about cultures, I just encourage you to start learning some hard skills as well so to compliment your humanities learning.

James: Okay, well that’s all our questions, I thank you for taking the time to answer all our questions, uh, Dr. Jay.

Jay: No problem, anytime anytime.

James: Well, I hope you enjoyed this podcast, see you next time.