



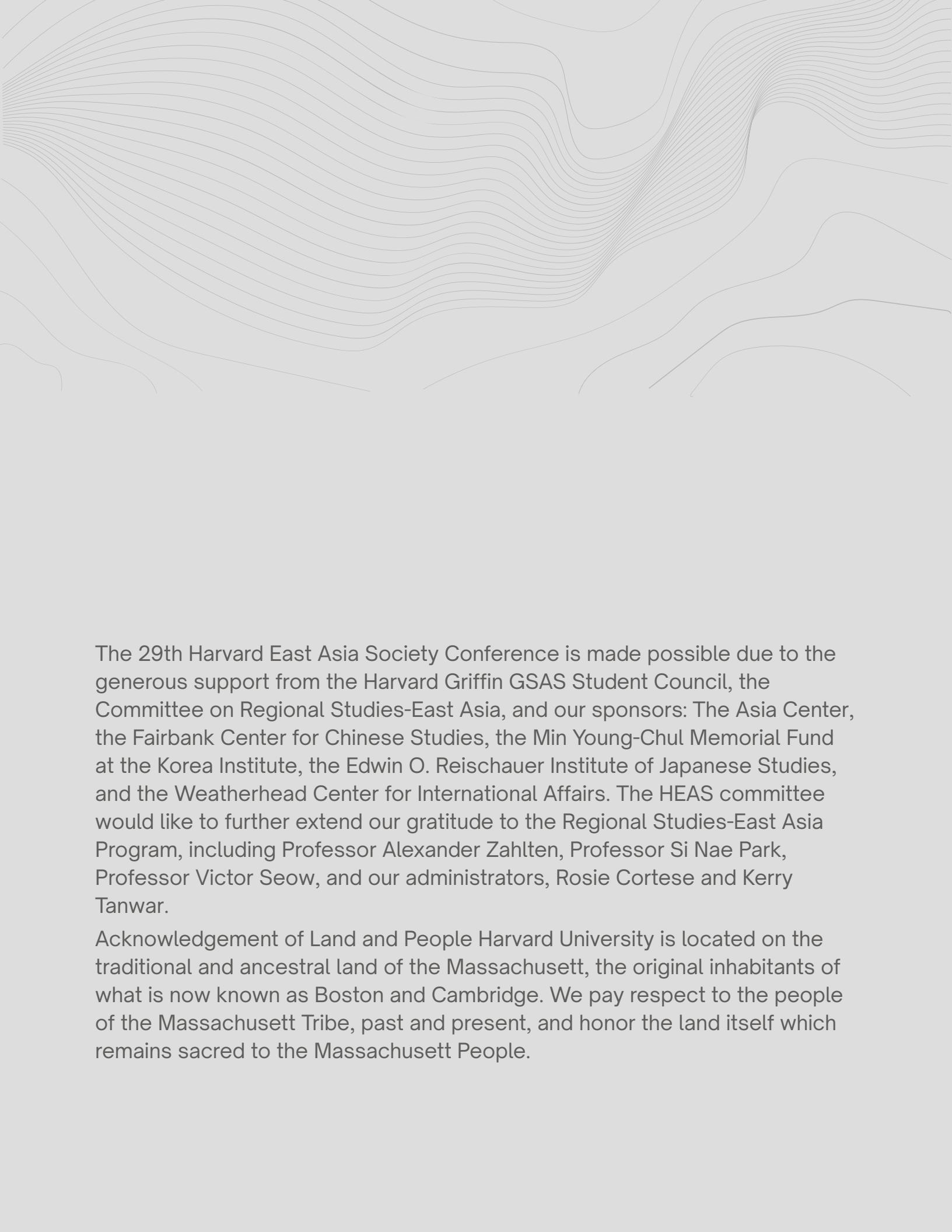
H E A S
哈 佛 東 亞 學 會
HARVARD EAST ASIA SOCIETY

delineations

*temporality, boundaries, and
imaginaries of east asia*



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The 29th Harvard East Asia Society Conference is made possible due to the generous support from the Harvard Griffin GSAS Student Council, the Committee on Regional Studies-East Asia, and our sponsors: The Asia Center, the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, the Min Young-Chul Memorial Fund at the Korea Institute, the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. The HEAS committee would like to further extend our gratitude to the Regional Studies-East Asia Program, including Professor Alexander Zahlten, Professor Si Nae Park, Professor Victor Seow, and our administrators, Rosie Cortese and Kerry Tanwar.

Acknowledgement of Land and People Harvard University is located on the traditional and ancestral land of the Massachusett, the original inhabitants of what is now known as Boston and Cambridge. We pay respect to the people of the Massachusett Tribe, past and present, and honor the land itself which remains sacred to the Massachusett People.



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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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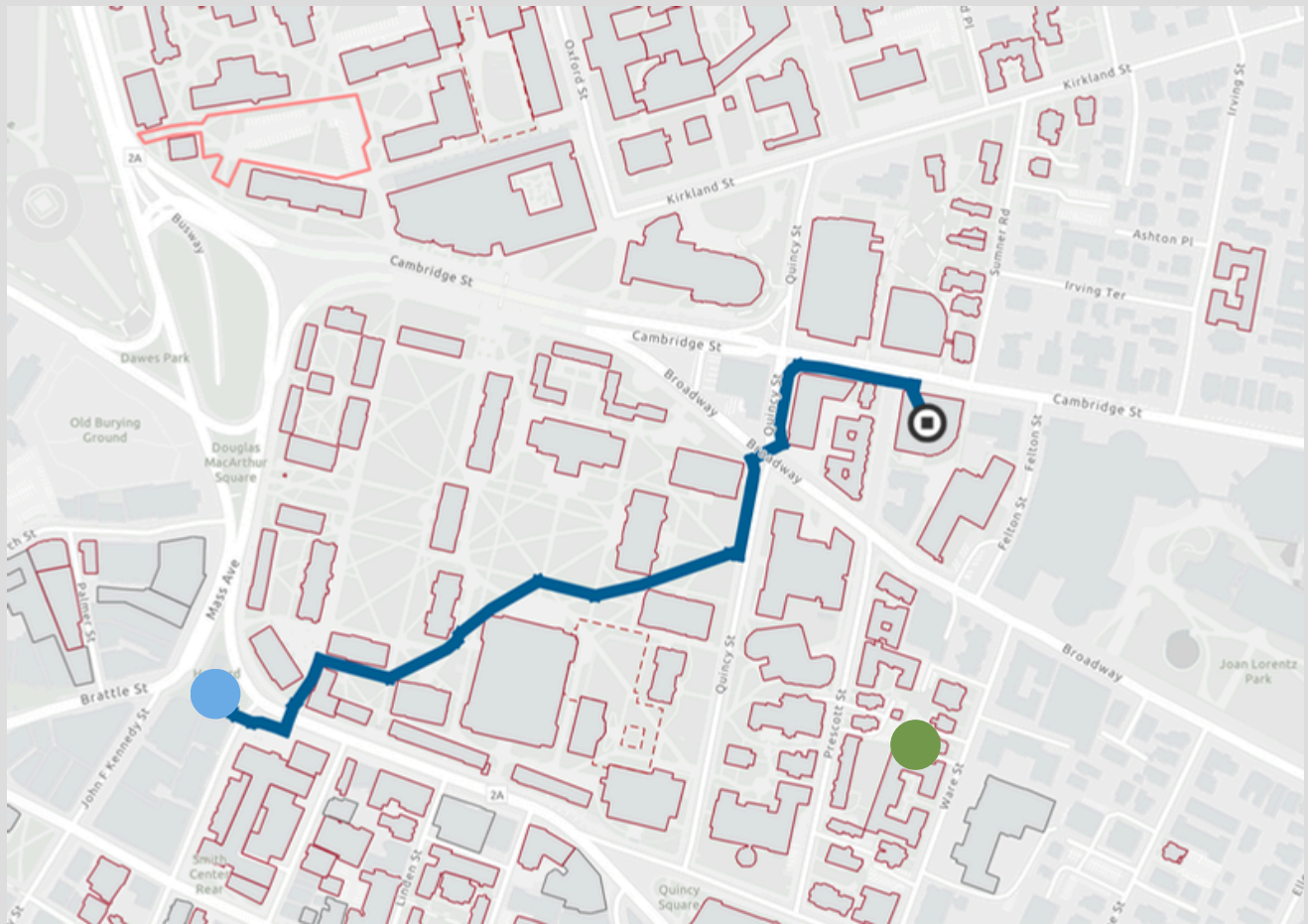
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Welcome to “Delineations,” the 29th Harvard East Asia Society Conference! This year, we received approximately 600 submissions from around the world, and we are honored to host 38 distinguished panelists who will share their research. We hope the two-day conference offers a space for meaningful, critical, and timely intellectual exchange. This year’s theme, delineations, asks scholars to re-examine how a world created entirely of ascriptions reveals intrinsic and extrinsic connections among subjects, space, borders, history, and time. In asking questions, like “What do we do when we draw the line?” and “How does navigating between liminalities inform our understanding of East Asia?” this Committee asked scholars to consider how to describe, trace, portray, and mark out vagueness and ambiguities that find purchase in East Asia and its scholarship.

In pursuit of this intellectual journey, we are pleased to form 11 panels, each spanning across different methodologies, temporalities, and subject matters. We look forward to an enriching experience for all attendees.

Warmly,
The 2026 HEAS Conference Committee

11:30 AM

Registration

12:30 PM

Opening Remarks

CGIS S010

Prof. Alexander Zahlten, Harvard University

Chair of the Committee on Regional Studies East Asia

1:00 PM

Session A

CGIS S050

Panel A1: Earths and Wires

Prof. Jie Li, Harvard University

Changran Liu, Postgraduate Fellow, Yale University

Jixin Jia, PhD, University of Toronto

Juntao Yang, MA, Columbia University

CGIS S010

Panel A2: Straits and Archipelagos

Prof. David Wang, Harvard University

Edward Dehua Wang, MA, Duke University

Lanqing (Catherine) Li, PhD, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Xiangyu Li, PhD, Nanyang Technological University

Ziyu Liu, MA, University of Pennsylvania

CGIS S020

Panel A3: Frictions of Reform in Late Qing and Republican Era

Prof. William Kirby, Harvard University

Sophie Cope, MA, American University

Xianni Zhang, PhD, University of Michigan

Xueyan Zhang, MA, Beijing Foreign Studies University

2:30 PM

Tea Break

3:00 PM

CGIS S010

Keynote Address

Prof. Yoon Sun Yang, Boston University

"Toward Transpacific Literary Studies: Translation, Archives, and Gender"

4:15 PM

Session B

CGIS S010

Panel B1: Contested Narratives, Agentic Materials

Prof. Victor Seow, Harvard University

Botao Zhao, PhD, Yale University

Sufeng (Sophia) Xiao, PhD, Harvard University

Yiqi Lin and Lin, MA, Beijing Normal University

Yunjie Zhang, PhD, Harvard University

CGIS S050

Panel B2: Economies and Imaginaries of Digital China

Prof. Moira Weigel, Harvard University

Jamie Tang, MA, Harvard University

Yijian (Lexa) Lyu, PhD, University of Iowa

Yixuan Wang, MA, University of Pittsburgh

CGIS S020

Panel B3: Territories and Populations of/after the Imperial

Prof. Andrew Gordon, Harvard University

Aaron Hopes, PhD, Stanford University

Minah Kang, PhD, Johns Hopkins University

Randy Garcia, MA, UC Berkeley

Yi (Yuuki) You, MA, Dartmouth University

6:00 PM

Dinner

9:00 AM

CGIS S010

Keynote Address

Prof. Paul Roquet, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
"Drawing Out Computation in Japan: CGI Beyond Simulation"

10:15 AM

Session C

CGIS S010

Panel C1: Utopic/Dystopic Media

Prof. Chan Yong Bu, Harvard University
Seoeun Choi, MA, Columbia University
Wenyu Zeng, MA, Dartmouth University

CGIS S020

Panel C2: Frontiers of the Corporeal and the Conceptual

Prof. Shigehisa Kuriyama, Harvard University
Hanzhi Zhang, PhD, University of Oxford
Xiaoqiao Liu, PhD, University of Chicago
Yehan He, MA, University of Michigan

11:30 AM

Lunch

12:45 PM

Session D/E

CGIS S010

Panel D1: Bodies in Extensions, Representations, and Subjectifications

Prof. Alexander Zahlten, Harvard University
Natalia Wojas, PhD, Stanford University
Qianwen Xue, MA, University of Chicago
Ziyi Lin, PhD, University of Chicago
Zhixin Pan, MA, Yale University

CGIS S020

Panel E1: Earthly Things in/as Literature

Prof. Wai-yee Li, Harvard University

Clio (ZhiChen) Luo, MA, University of Chicago

Ranting Zhang, MA, Columbia University

Run Zhou, MA, Yale University

CGIS S050

Panel E2: Modernities in Translation and Transculturation

Prof. Mingwei Song, Wellesley College

David Kolosov, PhD, Peking University

Letian Xiang, MA, Nanjing University

Zhenxu Qin, PhD, Hunan University

2:30 PM

CGIS S010

Closing Remarks

Prof. Victor Seow, Harvard University

Director of Graduate Studies of the Committee on
Regional Studies East Asia

Toward Transpacific Literary Studies: Translation, Archives, and Gender

Prof. Yoon Sun Yang, Boston University

Yoon Sun Yang is Associate Professor of Korean & Comparative Literature and of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Boston University. Her book *From Domestic Women to Sensitive Young Men: Translating the Individual in Early Colonial Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Asia Center, 2017) won the James B. Palais Book Prize of the Association for Asian Studies in 2020. She is the editor of the Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean Literature (2020). Her bilingual anthology of early colonial Korean short stories and essays, "Loving, Unloving and Other Short Stories from Early Colonial Korea," will be published in the MLA Texts and Translations series. She is currently at work on "Beyond the Medical Gaze: Sexuality and Illness in Korean Literature" and "Transpacific Palimpsests: Early Twentieth-Century Korean Migrant Literature between Two Empires."

Drawing Out Computation in Japan: CGI Beyond Simulation Prof. Paul Roquet, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

What might the history of computer-generated images look like if we reject the simulation of reality as its teleological endpoint, and focus instead on where computed visuals depart from everyday perception? Tracing Japanese media industries' adoption of 3D computer graphics, this talk aims to delineate a trajectory distinct from the photorealistic imperative that dominates CGI today. Rather than push for the synthesis of computers and everyday life, I show how media creators and artists in Japan are instead exploring the divergent physicality of computer-generated space, tracking where CGI departs from more analog forms of expression. What results, I argue, is not so much a “mixed reality” as a strategy of indexical montage: compositing together the algorithmic, the photographic, and the hand-drawn, and drawing out the critical differences and divergent possibilities between them. I argue this composited approach to computational life offers a critical alternative to dominant regimes of algorithmic power.

Paul Roquet is associate professor of media studies and Japan studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in the Comparative Media Studies/Writing section. He is the author of *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self* (Minnesota, 2016) and *The Immersive Enclosure: Virtual Reality in Japan* (Columbia, 2022), along with other writings on experimental animation, environmental aesthetics, and the cultural politics of mediated perception. See proquet.mit.edu for more.

Sweet Memories: Socio-cultural Legacies of the Changing Sugarcane Industry in Post-Reform Southeast China

Changran Liu, Postgraduate Fellow, Yale University

This paper examines the sociocultural legacies of the sugarcane industry in southeastern China, where this industry once served as a proactive economic choice by smallholders since the Ming-Qing dynasty and restructured into a centralized “sugar commune” regime under the Maoist planned economy, with “sweetness” embedded into local sociopolitical hierarchies and everyday life. Market reforms from the 1980s onwards led to a state-mandated westward relocation of sugarcane production. This shift induced a reconfiguration of rural livelihoods marked by land dispossession, proletarianization, and migration, yet also left behind infrastructural, cultural, and mnemonic traces.

Through historical analysis and ethnographic research, this paper explores how sugarcane continues to voice itself through its materiality, sociocultural association with “sweetness”, and ritual significance in the post-reform era. Specifically the paper investigates vernacular legends of sugarcane-as-refuge and the enduring role of sugarcane in Tiangong worship rituals, even in communities where it once symbolized collectivization-era coercion and trauma. This ambivalent human-sugarcane dynamic reflects a modal logic, wherein sugar-related memories and affects are articulated as intimate enough, not too traumatic. The paper further questions into how such modal articulations intersect with sugar-related sociocultural legacies to shape the worldmaking of global southeastern Chinese communities. These formations influence imaginations and practices of rural–urban mobility, sociopolitical hierarchy, local identity-making, and human–nature relations.

Ghost Town and A Cinematic Afterlife of Zomia: Opacity, Immiscible Times, Spatial Doubling

Jixin Jia, PhD, University of Toronto

This essay reads Zhao Dayong's *Ghost Town* (2009) as a cinematic afterlife of "Zomia," James C. Scott's term for the highland Southeast Asian massif whose communities have long cultivated practices of evasion in the face of lowland state-making. Set in Zhiziluo, an upland Nujiang town officially "abolished" in 1986 yet persistently inhabited, the film refuses documentary's promise of transparency and declines the genre's license to "speak about" its subjects. Drawing on Édouard Glissant's notion of opacity and Tremblay and Swarbrick's formulation of Indigenous "ap pedagogy," I argue that Zhao safeguards the non-transparency of Lisu and Nu life by staging a limit to what the camera can claim to know. *Ghost Town* withholds the explanatory question—why do residents remain?—and treats distance, the low-resolution illegibility of DV optics, and unglossed self-contradictions as conditions of relation rather than deficiencies to be repaired.

The essay further argues that this ethical stance becomes what Bliss Cua Lim calls a "temporal critique." In the film's final section, "Innocence," four temporal topoi carried by sound—consumer playback, Mao-era wired loudspeaker, animist exorcistic chanting, and a cappella hymn duration—stage immiscible temporalities that do not resolve into a single developmental clock.

The final section situates *Ghost Town* within a broader lineage of PRC 1950s ethnic-minority border cinema. Reconstructing the production history of the counter-espionage film *Mysterious Travelling Companion* (1955), I show how an extreme case of substitute-location shooting—Jilin landscapes made to pass for the Yunnan–Burma border under a mid-1955 thrift directive—renders ecological difference portable and securitizable. Set against that earlier project of epistemic capture, *Ghost Town*'s receptive opacity comes into sharper view.

Unsettled Grounds: The Deep Now, Post-Wenchuan Documentaries, and the Aftershocks of Earthquake-Media

Juntao Yang, MA, Columbia University

This paper examines how post-Wenchuan documentaries transform the 2008 earthquake from an event to be recorded into the earthquake-media: a generative force that reconfigures relations among bodies, technologies, and political structures, compelling new epistemologies, aesthetic forms, and modes of solidarity, while remediating documentary as its material continuation.

Drawing on Koselleck's geological metaphor of temporal sediments, Parikka's media geology, and Litvintseva's geological filmmaking, I argue that the earthquake, as a more-than-human vibrant matter, created a "deep now" where stratigraphic temporal faults are superimposed, overdetermined by geological, political, and spectral forces. This deep now is marked by what I call an irreducible belatedness—the earthquake as a "that-has-been" that was already missed and thus uncapturable, forcing all documentary engagement into a permanently retrospective posture. The paper analyzes how Chinese activist and experimental documentaries develop competing form strategies as temporal investments for dwelling within this ruptured temporality. Ai Weiwei's *Disturbing the Peace* (2009) deploys extended black screens to materialize the double opacity of seismic rupture and state censorship, where vision fails and hearing becomes the sole forensic channel. Lu Chunqiao's *Class 4, Grade 3* (2018) counters with smooth aerial cinematography that sutures trauma into developmental narrative. Chen Xinzhong's *Red White* (2009) mediates through spectral temporality where ghosts refuse both retrospection and resolution. Finally, Cong Feng's *Stratum 2: Asthenosphere* (2021) radicalizes belatedness itself, constructing geological strata from found footage where disasters recur as metamorphic intrusions.

I conclude by theorizing attunement—the physical, affective, and imaginative labor of dwelling precariously within an unstable continuum generated by the disaster agency's ongoing intermediation.

Nanyang as Plant: Plant-being and Vegetal Representation of Georgette Chen

Edward Dehua Wang, MA, Duke University

In this paper, I examine plants as both motifs in Singaporean artist Georgette Chen's (1906-1993) oeuvre and a crucial source for her identity construction, especially after her arrival and eventual settlement in Singapore in 1953. Recognized as one of the pioneer members of the Nanyang Style — an art movement often characterized by the depiction of Southeast Asian subject matter through a combination of Western painting techniques and Chinese ink traditions — Chen's paintings have traditionally been praised for her masterful application of Impressionist techniques on local subject matter. However, the emphasis of her technical skill, though important, risks omitting compelling insights into what living and painting in Southeast Asia meant for her, both affectively and philosophically. In her letters, Chen extols Singapore for its “perpetual summer and sunshine” and “warmth of these tropical shores”, calling it her Tahiti. Furthermore, she sees the island as a refuge for rehabilitation and frequently labels herself as a tropical plant and tropical escargot. Therefore I argue that her paintings, especially those depicting fruits and plants, must be interpreted in conjunction with this vegetal self-identification — a tropical plant-being. Combining archival research of her letters with analysis of her artworks, this paper presents a non-anthropocentric perspective on Nanyang Style aesthetics which go beyond binaries of Western and Chinese art traditions. Finally, the case of Georgette Chen offers insights into how we can interpret and articulate Southeast Asia/Nanyang and its histories as a vegetal and ecological concept rather than merely a geopolitical region.

The Islands' Wetness: Rain, Desire, and Bodily Fluidity in Su Wei-chen's *Island of Silence* — Toward an Inter-Asian Hydrological Unconscious

Lanqing (Catherine) Li, PhD, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

This paper explores how the agentive power of rain and other wet forms functions narratively and symbolically in Su Wei-chen's *Island of Silence* (2013), a novel set across a generative constellation of islands. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of archipelagic thinking and wet ontologies, I argue that "wetness" operates as both medium and material condition that facilitates transformations in the protagonists' identity and bodily autonomy amidst an East Asian archipelago that is not fully recognized as geographically or politically organic. Attending to permeable boundaries and temporality between corporeality and environment, especially in psychic fluidity and bodily aphrodisiac experiences, the analysis situates the novel within the emerging discourse of Archipelagic Asias. This paper challenges regional boundaries and narrative subjectivities, by associating the monsoonal rain and affective wetness, it suggests a continuum of interwoven temporalities within island space. Engaging Volland and Ching's (2024) notion of fluid perspectives, this study emphasizes the relational dynamics of wetness and archipelagicity as a mode of reimagining and storytelling. By tracing how wet forms unsettle delineations between bodies, islands, and nations, the paper examines how archipelagic wetness reconfigures narratives of identity, desire, and embodiment. In doing so, it challenges bounded conceptions of nation and temporality, proposing instead an inter-Asian hydrological unconscious and a "wet" temporality that dissolves linear spatial and modernity frames. Ultimately, the paper suggests that rain and other wet forms offer a generative way of imagining East Asian spatial and temporal relations submerged within archipelagic and aqueous imaginaries.

Suturing Ruptures: Delineating Mainland Influences in Taiwanese Modernist Poetry under Martial Law

Xiangyu Li, PhD, Nanyang Technological University

This paper examines the formation of Taiwanese modernist poetry under Martial Law and its connections with Mainland Chinese modernist poetry of the 1930s and 1940s, focusing on temporality, boundaries, and the cultural-political dynamics in cross-regional transmission. Centering on He Qifang, Dai Wangshu, and Xin Di, it analyzes how their poetics and linguistic forms were transmitted, adapted, and transformed in Taiwan, and incorporates close readings of poets such as Ya Xian, Zheng Chouyu, Luo Fu, and Yu Guangzhong to reveal the poetics of selection in trans-regional reception. The study also considers the impact of the Cold War context and the United States on East Asian literary networks. By reassessing the intellectual genealogies of Taiwanese modernist poetry and challenging the binary framework of the “two-root theory,” it proposes a more fluid understanding of modernist formation, offering a new theoretical perspective on poetic production, regional identity construction, and literary imaginaries in East Asia.

The “North” of the South: A Comparative Study of Women Migrant Workers’ Poetry across the Taiwan Strait

Ziyu Liu, MA, University of Pennsylvania

Drawing upon theories of space and field, and combining textual close reading with sentiment computation methods based on Natural Language Processing, this study conducts a cross-regional comparative examination of migrant women's poetry in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland. It aims to investigate how, contingent upon distinct literary fields and socio-spatial structures, migrant worker women's poetry develops differentiated thematic contents and aesthetic characteristics in response to varying contexts.

The research reveals starkly divergent affective landscapes across the three regions. In Taiwan, the institutionalized literary ecology subsumes migrant writing within a framework of warmth; sentiment computation indicates an overwhelming dominance of positive emotion, reflecting the strategic accommodation of marginalized subjects to mainstream values. In HongKong, decentralized production mechanisms and high-density public space practices endow poetry with dual qualities of resistance and balance, transforming it into a Third Space where migrants navigate between private and public spheres. Conversely, Mainland exhibits significant features of a "lacuna" and "negative dominance" due to dispersed migrant residence and scarce articulation channels, manifesting primarily as a compassionate gaze from a third-party perspective.

This study substantiates that migrant women's poetry serves not merely as a record of transnational labor and migration experiences, but as a profound projection of gender, class, and geopolitics within the literary domain under the backdrop of globalization. The intervention of digital humanities methods not only corroborates the qualitative judgments of textual close reading with quantitative data but also offers a robust methodological reference for understanding the literary practices of marginalized groups in the globalized era.

Double Indignity: The Funding and Founding of the First China Fulbright Program

Sophie Cope, MA, American University

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, as global power structures were redrawn, Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright proposed transforming the material remnants of war into instruments of peace. His amendment to the Surplus Property Act enabled the sale of American war materiel abroad in exchange for “intangible benefits” such as educational exchanges. The 1946 bulk sale to China and the subsequent establishment of the first Fulbright program in 1947 embodied a moment of profound geopolitical delineation: a U.S. attempt to redraw the boundaries of international engagement in a newly unipolar world. However, archival evidence surrounding the short-lived China Fulbright program reveals how asymmetrical power structures and unequal agency undermined Fulbright’s vision of mutual understanding. American officials manipulated the Kuomintang’s postwar desperation for military supplies to offload unusable goods while curtailing Chinese oversight of the Fulbright program’s administration. By leveraging these power asymmetries, the U.S. government strong-armed China into paying for a scholarship program that it was functionally barred from influencing, thus undermining the Fulbright program’s ideals of mutuality and shared governance. Some contemporary international relations scholars champion relaunching the Fulbright program as a panacea to devolving U.S.-China relations. By re-examining the China Fulbright program as a site of diplomatic and epistemic boundary-making, this paper highlights historical inequities to examine how future exchange programs might risk reproducing similar hierarchies rather than fostering genuine mutuality. Future scholarship programs must actively navigate the boundaries of power, knowledge, and participation that shape East Asia today.

Learning from the Enemy: Organisational Competition and Mutual Borrowing between the Communist Youth League and the Young Men's Christian Association during the 1920s Anti-Christian Movement in China

Zhenyan Lu, PhD, King's College London

This article examines the shifting organisational relationship between the Communist Youth League of China and the Chinese Young Men's Christian Association in the Anti-Christian Movement. Drawing on archival records of communist and Christian youth movements, as well as periodicals and personal papers, it shows how the two rival organisations, one shaped by Leninist party culture and the other rooted in American capitalist commercial practices, sought to expand their influence among Chinese youth. While existing scholarship has framed the movement as ideological confrontation, this article argues that organisational competition and mutual learning were equally central to its dynamics.

In the early 1920s, the CYLC lagged behind the Chinese YMCA in grassroots mobilisation. By launching the Anti-Christian Movement, it aimed both to weaken the latter's influence and to accelerate its own expansion by appropriating its techniques of mass outreach. By the late 1920s, confronted with organisational disintegration, the Chinese YMCA in turn shifted towards more disciplined, 'party-like' forms of association inspired by the CYLC. Tracing the reciprocal processes of competition and borrowing, the article shows how struggles over organisational capacity reshaped the balance of power between the two movements, enabling the CYLC to consolidate its position while marginalising the YMCA.

The article makes three contributions. It complicates conflict-centred interpretations of the Anti-Christian Movement by highlighting organisational emulation, enriches scholarship on communism–Christianity interaction in Republican China by foregrounding institutional practices, and advances global–local approaches by demonstrating how localisation unfolded through rivalry and learning among multiple global currents within the same local area.

Class Formation at the Periphery: Salt Workers, the May Thirtieth Movement, and the Making of the Working Class in Republican China

Xianni Zhang, PhD, University of Michigan

Drawing on extensive archival sources, local industrial gazetteers, newspapers and published document collections, this article examines the process of class formation among salt workers in Republican China. Following the collapse of the Qing salt administration, the expansion of capitalist forces, increasing numbers of salt laborers lost control over production and became wage workers. In response, they mounted various forms of resistance, drawing on traditional cultural resources to construct solidarity and collective identity. Yet such traditional frameworks limited cross-regional and cross-industrial connections, constraining the emergence of a unified “class.” Meanwhile, early labor organizing led by intellectuals and leftists rarely reached salt workers. Within this context, the May Thirtieth Movement, a nationwide anti-imperialist patriotic movement, became a crucial catalyst for the class formation of salt workers. This process was underpinned by two mechanisms. First, the movement introduced salt workers to anti-imperialist patriotic nationalism as a new ideology of struggle and accelerated their entry into political struggles. It also created an opportunity for other worker-related radical ideologies to be advanced. Second, it expanded the capacity and willingness of various political parties to organize workers. Consequently, salt workers’ modern unions and associations rapidly emerged, integrating new forms of solidarity and philosophies of struggle that fostered class consciousness. These organizing experiences left a lasting imprint on salt workers’ self-organization and identity. By focusing on the salt worker case, this article highlights how working-class formation can unfold through social movements not explicitly centered on labor, particularly for peripheral groups excluded from mainstream organizing.

Translating Prussia into Late Qing China: Military Knowledge, Institutional Friction, and the Limits of Reform

Xueyan Zhang, PhD, Beijing Foreign Studies University

This paper examines the translation and adaptation of Prussian military knowledge in late Qing China, focusing on how military texts, institutional models, and reform imaginaries were selectively appropriated during the late nineteenth century. Rather than treating “Westernization” as a linear process of knowledge transfer, the paper conceptualizes translation as a historically contingent practice shaped by temporal constraints, political boundaries, and institutional interests.

Drawing on a close reading of Prussian military manuals translated into Chinese, archival materials related to Zhang Zhidong’s military reforms, and German advisory networks operating in China, this study analyzes how Prussian military concepts were reinterpreted to fit the Qing bureaucratic structure and its reform agenda. Particular attention is paid to the tensions between imported organizational ideals and existing administrative practices, revealing the limits of institutional adaptation under late imperial conditions.

By situating military translation within broader debates on temporality and boundary-making in East Asian modernity, this paper argues that late Qing military reform was not merely a technical or military project, but a negotiated process of reimagining state power and institutional order. The Prussian model functioned less as a blueprint than as a flexible repertoire, whose meanings were continuously reshaped by local political realities. This study contributes to East Asian history and global military history by highlighting translation as a key site where global knowledge encountered local institutional constraints.

Ripples from Afar: Modernity, Global Frictions, and the Disappearance of Horse Caravans in A Sino-Tibetan Frontier Village

Botao Zhao, PhD, Yale University

Horse caravans are critical means for people's subsistence through a vast environment-dependent network in the Sino-Tibetan frontier, but they have completely faded away during the first two decades of the 21st century. This paper examines the abrupt decline and eventual disappearance of horse caravans in Yanjing, Markham, Tibet, by analyzing the interplay between global economic upheaval and local economic transformations. Based on participatory observation, oral history and archival studies, this study argues that the caravans' disappearance was not a natural cultural and social progression as is usually in development theory but rather a form of structural externality, exacerbated by global financial dynamics. Employing Harvey's "spatial fix" and Tsing's "friction," this study contends that the 2008 global financial crisis triggered mass overproduction in China's domestic market, which stimulated its expansive stimulus package and rural development policies, featured by subsidies for vehicles, infrastructure development, and market integration under initiatives like Vehicles-Motorcycles Entering the Countryside. The state redirected surplus capital to rural frontiers and undermine the economic viability of caravan-based salt-grain trade. Thus, global crises reverberate into peripheries through state mediation, dismantling centuries-old livelihood systems. By situating local transformations within global political economy, this study repositions modernity not merely as a front stage project but as a contingent backstage reconfiguration of entangled global-local forces and the distributed agency of states, markets, and material interdependencies.

Contouring Time: Temporal Curation and the Politics of Platform-Mediated Rurbanity in Zhejiang, China

Sufeng (Sophia) Xiao, PhD, Harvard University

Boundaries are often treated as spatial facts, yet they are equally temporal accomplishments. In rural Zhejiang, China, platform-mediated villages are increasingly assembled into a rurban territory, a relational landscape where rural places are reorganized as interfaces for governance legibility and urban-facing consumption through events, media circulation, and infrastructural accessibility. In this paper, rurbanity refers not only to a rural–urban spatial mix but to the recurring socio-spatial and temporal arrangements that make villages simultaneously visitable, narratable, and governable. I argue that an underexamined driver of this territorial formation is temporal curation, defined as boundary work in time that stabilizes rurbanity by translating rural ecological and relational rhythms into forms readable by the state and digital platforms, and vice versa.

Conceptually, the paper distinguishes two temporal infrastructures. State time frames time as a procedural envelope of authorization and auditable closure oriented toward demonstrability. Platform time frames time as perishable visibility, measured through speed, frequency, and circulation capture, obligating continuous responsiveness. Rural rhythms operate as both substrate and counter-force that enables and constrains these infrastructures.

Empirically, the paper uses an event-centered, mechanism-oriented qualitative design and traces a three-day late-summer festival cycle through participant observation, interviews, and temporal and digital artifacts. The episode reveals three boundary operations through which infrastructures are enacted: strategic delineation (carving workable windows and extending post-event afterlives), forced ambiguity (absorbing incompatible tempos through distributed synchronization and intensified coordination labor), and generative blurring (converting ecological and ritual time into shareable highlights while leaving slow variables outside binding deliberation). These operations reallocate a temporal commons necessary for rest, care, ecological recovery, and collective coordination, clarifying why temporal boundary politics is central to the sustainability of platform-mediated rurban territory.

Drawing Boundaries of Property: Forest Ownership and the Politics of Delineation in the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces, Southwest China

Yiqi Lin, MA, Beijing Normal University, and Sihan Lin

A growing water shortage in the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces of Southwest China has directed public concern to the forested highlands that sustain its renowned irrigation system. Yet beneath this visible crisis lies a more fundamental, though largely unarticulated, question—the ambiguous and overlapping delineation of forest property. This paper argues that these entangled property regimes constitute a latent fault line with far-reaching consequences for subsistence, ecological resilience, and heritage-based tourism in this UNESCO-listed landscape.

Drawing on 19 weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in Long Village, the study approaches property as a temporal, processual phenomenon rather than a static legal category. Using Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann's multilayered analytical framework—cultural-ideological, legal-institutional, social-relational, and practical—it traces how forest rights have been delineated and redelineated through socialist collectivization, post-reform marketization, and international heritage inscription. These shifting processes of delineation generate layered and often conflicting imaginaries of ownership, value, and belonging, revealing how concepts of "property", though historically rooted in liberal economic thought, are reimagined within the moral and institutional landscape of Chinese socialism.

By situating these negotiations within broader regimes of heritage governance, the paper contends that the state's pursuit of clarified "property rights" paradoxically reproduces new ambiguities and dependencies. The Hani case foregrounds delineation not as a single act of demarcation but as an ongoing temporal and political process through which multiple imaginaries of nature, community, and development intersect, contest, and coevolve—illuminating how invisible property boundaries structure visible ecological and social crises in a globalizing East Asia.

Water as the United Front: Liquid Power and the Planned Remaking of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area

Yunjie Zhang, PhD, Harvard University

In the Greater Bay Area in Southern China, territoriality of water is constantly redefined by changing economy, politics, engineering, and society. Due to geography and climate, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have faced water scarcity alongside rapid urbanization. To mitigate this, the two megacities have adopted approaches to water allocation through negotiations and regional coordination, involving multi-scalar interactions with national, provincial, and local governments. By examining the history of water from the mid-20th century to the present, this research aims to reveal how actors at all levels redistributed water resources and, in doing so, generated political power. We map changing water dynamics using numerical data and geographic information; collect historical government documents, municipal plans, and water-engineering schemes; and conduct interviews to explore these political endeavors. The research finds that regional rescaling of governance around water began with a state intervention: to “unite” Hong Kong, then a British colony, by supplying fresh water from the hinterland in the 1950s—a decision both economic and political. Since then—especially during the Great Leap Forward—mass construction of reservoirs and canals in Shenzhen and Guangdong has reshaped urbanization patterns and influenced local development strategies and intergovernmental bargaining. In this process, actors weaker in water power—Hong Kong and Shenzhen—have emphasized narratives of scarcity, pollution, water insecurity, and lack of resilience, steering themselves toward state- and region-dependent supply configurations and water-centered power structures. Given water’s indispensability and inherent upstream–downstream relations, it has become a core force driving a national and regional United Front.

Blurring the Line: Outsourced Algorithmic Management and Skill Exploitation in China's Home-cleaning Platforms

Jamie Tang, MA, Harvard University

Drawing on over 100 hours of ethnographic observation, 30 in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, and a survey of platform workers (N = 518), this study examines how home-cleaning platforms in China appropriate workers' pre-existing service, technical, and communicative skills to sustain day-to-day operations and achieve market expansion, a process I conceptualize as outsourced management through skill extraction. This study finds that home-cleaning platforms increasingly rely on workers to perform managerial tasks previously handled by marketing, human resources, and customer service departments, generating new fissures within the labor process. Four forms of outsourced management emerge: "Gig Advertisers," who act as micro-celebrities promoting the platform and their services on social media; "Gig HRs," who recruit workers through personal networks and online platforms; "Gig Sales," who maintain customer relationships, resolve complaints, and actively sell orders; and "Gig Mentors," worker-lecturers who conduct training sessions for newcomers and maintain mentor-mentee relationships in the workplace. The outsourced managerial tasks reveal platforms' continued reliance on human labor, causing ongoing tensions between formality and informality in platform governance. Rather than treating the tension between workers' informal practices and platforms' formalization efforts as evidence of managerial failure, I argue that the two are structurally interdependent, given that its labor process and market contain inherent residues that cannot be fully formalized. This study challenges platform scholarship that centers on top-down algorithmic control and contests the dominant Uberization model, which assumes standardized mechanisms of platform governance.

Staging the Future of Money: Delineation and Infrastructural Governance in China's e-CNY

Yijian (Lexa) Lyu, PhD, University of Iowa

This paper examines how digital money projects in non-Western contexts articulate visions of digital modernity through moral and institutional boundaries. Such projects provide one of the few sites where scholars can observe how non-Western actors anticipate the future of finance: the absence of settled data and precedent in emerging cryptocurrency markets allows actors to articulate future-oriented visions with fewer historical constraints. Following Victor Turner's concept of liminality, digital money projects are interventions in the existing global finance, challenging the conventional finance system. Meanwhile, diversity within digital money projects occurs. Western blockchain projects have often been aligned with a far-right anti-government imaginaries, an orientation materially expressed through technical design. In parallel, non-Western actors do not merely adopt the Western blockchain technology; they suture it with their own understanding of trust and legitimacy. Through comparative discourse analysis of two non-Western projects, e-CNY of China and the HAQQ Network of the Gulf region, this study identifies contrasting boundaries of different digital money projects. The e-CNY grounds legitimacy in sovereign responsibility and institutional continuity, whereas HAQQ anchors legitimacy in Shariah-based ethical governance beyond the nation-state. Situating the e-CNY within this shared liminal field, the paper argues that the Chinese state repudiates the idea of decentralized networks while engineering their project to incorporate the efficiency of blockchain while embedding it in the state's responsibility.

Who Made This? Platform Ecology, Gen-AI Content Authenticity and AI Anxiety in China

Yixuan Wang, MA, University of Pittsburgh

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into cultural production has raised fundamental questions about creative value in the digital age. Why do people remain so obsessed with distinguishing human creativity from algorithmic output even when AI can produce functionally equivalent works? What do intense anxieties about AI-generated content reveal about how we understand human creative labor? And how do different platform configurations and content categories shape these responses?

In 2025, China's digital platforms became critical sites for negotiating these questions. Following the implementation of AI content disclosure policies in September 2025, three distinct controversies erupted: Jinjiang Literature City readers discovered AI prompt residue in a popular novel despite institutional labeling requirements; Weibo's art commission community organized elaborate verification procedures to determine whether a popular artist was using AI tools; and Douyin users debated a viral AI-generated song from a variety show, with creators proactively disclosing its algorithmic origins. These cases represent different disclosure mechanisms (institutional labeling, community detection, and voluntary confession) producing strikingly different community responses ranging from categorical rejection to pragmatic acceptance.

Through comparative analysis of these three cases, this study reveals that AI content attitudes are shaped by three intersecting factors. First, platform specialization: dedicated creative communities exhibit intense authenticity obsession while casual consumers demonstrate pragmatic tolerance. Second, content category: literature and art generate stronger resistance than music due to differential emphasis on individual authorship. Third, emotional investment depth: highly invested participants experience AI disclosure as profound betrayal. Despite significant variation, a common thread persists: users continue to value human creative labor not for functional superiority but for what it represents about human struggle, effort, and emotional investment. AI content debates are thus fundamentally about preserving the cultural significance of human creativity when its economic necessity diminishes.

The Good Naichaa: Some Matters and Places Kept Unsettled Amidst Ongoing Japanizations of Northern Okinawa

Aaron Hopes, PhD, Stanford University

Now over half a century after the United States “reverted” control of Okinawa back to Japan in 1972, Japanese who move to Okinawa discover as they are getting settled that beyond the faculty of language, that socially, culturally, and racially they are outsiders who may never be fully accepted into Uchinaanchu (Okinawan) society and communities. This paper critically examines their settler positionality, the continued inaccessibility around renting or buying unoccupied homes (akiya) in the region, and how lines of inclusion, and exclusion are made through the careful strategizing of Indigenous community leaders. Developed from thirty-six months of fieldwork conducted in Okinawa and Japan between August 2022 and January 2026, the essay works to make legible the lines around settler dynamics in an Indigenous majority society, particularly in Okinawa Main Island’s northern Yambaru region. Investigating not only why Japanese migrants (ijūsha) decide to move to Okinawa, it also looks at how settlers’ usage of a once -and sometimes still-derogatory Uchinaaguchi (Okinawan) word for Japanese (naichaa) becomes a form of self-indexing. In addition to contrasting the positionality of Japanese ijūsha with Japanese activists who do Okinawan demilitarization activism and environmental conservation advocacy work in mainland Japan, the paper also draws from a model proposed by an Uchinaanchu business owner and economics researcher (Mitsugu Iha) who proposes expansive ways of thinking about “Naichaa” who live in Okinawa.

Staging the Region: Geography of Empire's Afterlives and the Institute of Pacific Relations

Minah Kang, PhD, Johns Hopkins University

This paper examines how the Asia/Pacific region emerged as a contested site of delineation since the interwar period, where boundaries between empire, nation, and internationalism were actively drawn, debated, and institutionalized. Focusing on the Institute of Pacific Relations (1925–1962), I analyze how this transpacific organization brought together U.S., Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and British-dominion delegates to imagine and argue over the future shape of international order following World War I.

Rather than treating the region as a pre-existing geographic category, I theorize it as the geography of empire's afterlives—a spatial imaginary shaped by the entangled dynamics of imperial authority, nationalist aspiration, and geopolitical ambition. Grounded in multi-site, multi-lingual archival research, I trace how the IPR became a space where divergent postwar visions were staged through the contested grammar of regionalist futures, often via asymmetrical encounters between metropolitan and colonial actors.

I argue that these encounters were not only geopolitical or institutional, but epistemic: they produced region as a scale onto which competing anticipations of postwar—and for some, post-imperial—futures were projected. These imaginaries fed into, but also exceeded, the frameworks of wartime strategy and postwar settlement that would later shape international governance. Regionalism here functioned less as a descriptive category and more as a political technology of futurity—enabling actors to stake claims about what kind of world should emerge after empire, and for whom.

Race, Empire, and Migration: Japanese Expansionism and the Making of Japanese Brazil

Randy Garcia, MA, UC Berkeley

Japanese and Brazilian policies, driven by racial perceptions, influenced migration patterns, the treatment of migrants, and the socio-political dynamics they encountered. Japan's expansionist ambitions, rooted in ideas of national superiority, spurred migration to Brazil, where Japanese migrants were subsumed into Brazil's complex racial hierarchy. This paper explores Japanese-Brazilian migration as a case study of how race, both as a state policy and lived experience, structured migration dynamics. It highlights the dual roles of Japanese migrants as both victims and agents of racial discrimination, shaped by intersections of race, labor, and imperialism. Drawing on primary sources, including Japanese and Brazilian newspapers, novels, photographs, posters, and maps, this study examines how these racial dynamics were constructed and perpetuated in Brazil.

In the early 1900s, Japan, grappling with overpopulation and social instability, encouraged emigration, initially to the U.S., before many turned to Brazil. Their migration not only fulfilled Japan's imperial goals but transformed them from subjects to instruments of political and economic influence, illustrating their complex roles in both perpetuating and confronting discrimination. This dual narrative of seeking ""home"" and advancing Japan's imperial reach shaped the migration experience. Despite diverse socio-economic backgrounds, many migrants saw Brazil's *mestizaje*, racial or cultural mixing, as culturally inferior, while elites, in contrast, sought ties to Indigenous communities. Meanwhile, the Brazilian government, focused on racial whitening and European assimilation, viewed Japanese migrants as an ideal labor force but also as a racial "problem" to manage.

Along the Recursive Grain: Bureaucratic Anxiety and the “Phantom Report” on Wartime Chinese Forced Labor

Yi (Yuuki) You, MA, Dartmouth University

For nearly half a century from 1946 to 1993, the Japanese government delineated the boundaries of its war responsibility by insisting that its five-volume report regarding the wartime forced transport of Chinese laborers had been incinerated at the end of World War II. However, a newly declassified volume from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) reveals that the institution’s silence surrounding the so-called “Phantom Report” was not merely the product of a once-for-all destruction, but an active administrative project. This paper examines a bureaucratic crisis in 1983-1984, triggered by inquiry into the “incinerated” report resurfacing. Drawing Ann Stoler’s methodology of reading “along the archival grain” and theories of agnotology, I analyze the internal sanction documents (Kessai-sho) and the Ringi decision-making system to show the state’s “epistemic anxiety” regarding the sudden challenge to their consistent denial of existence. The paper demonstrates how surfacing evidence of the “Phantom Report” triggered the bureaucrats into retrospectively excavating past files not only for the existence of the archive, but also to formulate a defense that aligned with previous denials. By tracing the physical redactions, revisions, contradictions, and cut-off insertions in these files, I argue that the state’s denial was a form of “recursive denial,” driven by the ontological insecurity of the bureaucracy and the need for aligning present reactions with previous stances. This study challenges the view of state denial or archival silence as a monolithic, omniscient erasure, and shows it instead as an uncertain, anxious, and labor-intensive process.

Of Flesh and Steel: Female Snipers on the War-Torn Korean Cinematic Landscape

Seoeun (Sunny) Choi, MA, Columbia University

This paper explores the female sniper in Korean cinema and her position as an ahistoric border rider within the historical war film genre. The formal analysis of the North Korean sniper Yi Pang-hŭi from Kang Je-gyu's 1999 blockbuster film *Shiri* looks at how the memory of the North-South divisions takes shape within modern settings. By focusing on cinematic depictions of Yi's vertical positionality as a sniper within Seoul, this paper identifies the makings of the Korean female sniper and what her 'revisionist' inclusion into the sniper position signifies to the audience on critical approaches to a history of divisions.

This paper examines how a film about the North-South conflict deals with clashing ideologies and gendered gazes through the character of the female sniper. The female sniper emerges within the Korean blockbuster genre from a history of transgressive female figures on screen. She can be traced to the contact points between the illusive femme fatale of Hollywood and the camouflaged kanchŏp (spy) in Korea's revenge-heavy narratives. The female sniper's presence in the periphery (as the representative force of the female gaze) subverts the conventional power dynamics by enacting control over the male gaze, which occupies the intimate center. Filmic techniques used to depict the female sniper alongside various weapons on screen further emphasize her hybrid nature, determining this trope as one resisting an inherent desire for an impossible to return to the myth of the whole and advocating for the acceptance of one's disjointed but congruous past, present and future.

Rethinking Dictée: An In-Between Textual Space of Embodied Selfhood and Collective Becoming

Wenyu Zeng, MA, Dartmouth University

This paper rethinks Korean-American artist-writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (1982) from, but not within, the two dominant interpretive trajectories: cultural-historical specificity and poststructuralist formal abstraction. Rather, I approach *Dictée* as an embodied in-between textual space, mainly produced through Cha's disruptions of language, including fragmentation, mistranslation, generic collision, and archive montage. In this shared space among the authorial "I", the figures in the text, and readers negotiating its breaks, language emerges as an unstable regime of legibility, and identity, memory, and history are not simply interpreted, but felt, registered as materially affective forces. The subject in *Dictée* appears as a continual process of displacement, disruption, and rewriting across colonial, nationalist, and patriarchal discourses. "History", likewise, is staged as a turbulent formation through collage that resists documentary transparency. Yet what exceeds legibility does not disappear. The text insists on a bodily remainder – material pressures and affective forces persist in selfhood and memory – too intense to be stabilized as knowledge and too insistent to be erased. I propose that *Dictée* thus generates a field of an embodied double-becoming: writing as bodily process and reading as bodily encounter, through which a collective "we" emerges without relying on stable identity categories. Cha's work therefore offers not only a critique of the colonial regime of language, but also an alternative epistemic ethic: identity and history are not approached to be conclusively known, but as forces to be felt – felt in the fractures of language, felt as the conditions of collectivity in the process of becoming.

Documenting Transnational Materia Medica in Ming-Qing Transition: Michat Boym's *Flora Sinensis* (1648) and its Contemporary Herbals

Hanzhi Zhang, PhD, University of Oxford

This paper, inspired by the work on materia medica by the Jesuit missionary Michat Boym (1612–1659), explores the interplay between personal observation, text-based medicine, and the intellectual frameworks in the Sino-European transmission of medical knowledge during the long seventeenth century. By reading *Flora Sinensis* (1648), one of the first works that introduced Chinese materia medica to Europe, this paper examines how Boym adopts emerging European concerns for precise nomenclature, structured description, and visual accuracy while drawing extensively on Chinese knowledge and personal observations. Three intersecting dimensions of *Flora Sinensis* is examined in this paper: nomenclature, description, and illustration. First, it shows how Boym's multilingual naming practices including Latin translations and transliterations, Chinese characters, and European vernaculars parallels with both the Chinese ideal of *zhengming* 正名 and the budding taxonomy in Europe. Second, it argues that Boym's integration of habitat, morphology, life cycle, and organ-specific efficacy represents a development from simple to complex in both cultures. Third, it suggests that Boym's illustrations are a product of the broader 17th century development from derivative, pedagogical images to analytic, part-focused representations.

By reading *Flora Sinensis* alongside both Chinese and European contemporary herbals, the paper demonstrates how Chinese medical practice and herbal knowledge were understood by an observer from a heterogeneous medical tradition. It argues that *Flora Sinensis* is a product of the changing medical and botanical studies set forth by a blend of philosophical curiosity and practical necessity.

Coherence, Difference, and Relation: Rethinking the Path of Sino-Western Comparative Philosophy in a Global Context

Xiaoqiao Liu, PhD, Beijing Foreign Studies University

The methodology of contemporary Sino-Western comparative philosophy is undergoing a significant reorientation. As globalization and digital technologies deepen, alterity-centered comparison is increasingly giving way to approaches focused on shared problems and the integration of cross-cultural resources. While this shift reduces the risks of cultural essentialism and relativism, it also threatens to neutralize difference by translating it too quickly into commensurable terms. Against this backdrop, this paper rethinks the philosophical function of difference in transcultural inquiry. Taking Brook Ziporyn's idea of coherence as a point of entry, it argues that coherence should not be read as a static assertion of Chinese cultural identity, but as a hybrid concept generated through the encounter between Chinese intellectual materials and Western philosophical vocabularies. By contrastively reconstructing the Western identity/difference binary, coherence exposes the contingent conditions under which judgment and understanding operate. Difference, here, is not an end in itself but a strategic intervention that temporarily suspends assimilative interpretive habits. At the same time, the paper contends that coherence alone cannot account for how difference functions within deeply hybridized realities. To address this limitation, it turns to Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and his defense of opacity, shifting the focus from defining cultural wholes to tracing conceptual friction within specific contact zones. From this relational perspective, difference is neither a fixed boundary nor a fully commutable resource, but a dynamic process of ongoing negotiation within contemporary philosophy.

Translating Women's Bodies Across Borders: "Fuke," "Yakaepile," and the Politics of Healing in the Lancang–Mekong World

Yehan He, MA, University of Michigan

This paper examines how translation functioned as a mode of delineation—across linguistic, epistemological, and political borders—in the making of “minority nationality medicine” in late socialist China. Focusing on Dai communities in the Lancang–Mekong borderlands, it traces how women’s healing practices articulated through the Dai concept of yakaepile—antidotal remedies for postpartum and menstrual illness—were reclassified as fuke (gynecology) through state-sponsored translation and compilation projects of the late 1970s and 1980s. Through mimicry, standardization, and taxonomic alignment, Dai medicine was rendered legible within state medical infrastructures, enabling circulation while narrowing the relational logics through which illness and healing were understood. Juxtaposing state medical texts with Dai folktales, medical cosmology, and antidotal practice, the paper shows that women’s illness is locally conceptualized through a riverine logic linking water, blood, and environmental excess. By foregrounding potency rather than therapeutic action, it reframes debates on state power and resistance, arguing that what exceeds translation is not identity or territory but relational knowledge grounded in ecological timing and embodied labor.

When the Ruins Look Back: Memory and Matter in Postwar Japanese Performance

Natalia (Natt) Wojas, PhD, Stanford University

This paper situates the body as a crucial site for negotiating temporal disjunction in 1960s Japan - a moment marked by the retentive pull of wartime memory and the protentive drive toward modernization, epitomized by the the urban transformations surrounding the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. I argue that amid the rapid erasure of postwar ruins and the standardization of space under economic redevelopment, the body emerged as a residual archive—one capable of registering, sustaining, and reactivating historical experience no longer legible in the landscape itself.

Through a close reading of Kara Jūrō's theoretical writings on the “privileged body” (*tokkenteki nikutairon*), this paper situates his dramaturgical thinking at the intersection of postwar memory, object-centered ontology, and existentialist and phenomenological philosophy. Drawing on contemporaneous engagements with materiality—most notably *mono-ha*—as well as the reception of Sartre, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty in postwar Japan, I read Kara's work as articulating an ethics of embodiment grounded in confrontation, encounter, and the sustained inhabitation of contradiction rather than transcendence or symbolic resolution.

By tracing how ideological, temporal, and material forces sediment on bodies—organic, topographic, and performative alike—this paper opens a broader inquiry into how postwar Japanese performance reconceived the body as a site of engagement with history and material environments.

Guerrilla Survival of Chinese Queers: A Whack-a-Mole Philosophy of Living in the Gaps

Qianwen Xue, MA, University of Chicago

This paper explores the daily survival strategies of transgender women as they navigate gaps between medical, legal, familial, and temporal structures in Chinese cities. Based on a nine-month multi-site ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Nanjing, including semi-structured interviews with 23 transgender women, participant observation, and digital ethnography, it proposes the conceptual framework of “structural gaps.” Rather than portraying transgender lives through a binary lens of victimhood or resistance, this study examines how transgender women negotiate legitimacy within fragmented identity systems, reconstruct kinship bonds amid patriarchal obligations, and endure the nonlinear shifts of gender transition through bodily stasis, repetition, and silence. These fragmented domains are theorized as “fissures”: zones of institutional misalignment and governance uncertainty that simultaneously constrain and enable action. I describe the emergent strategic patterns within these spaces as a “whack-a-mole philosophy of survival,” a guerrilla mode of existence characterized by rhythmic visibility, partial recognition, and continuous recalibration. Grounded in queer theory, medical anthropology, and East Asian kinship studies, this research reveals how transgender women construct ephemeral legal pathways, moral economies, and affective infrastructures. The paper ultimately argues that institutional gaps are not merely zones of exclusion but also sites of creativity and ethical improvisation, where subjects survive not by overcoming power but by navigating its fissures with ingenuity.

Bodies as “Human Camera:” The Ghostly Feminine as Affective Interfaces for Media Technologies in Modern Japan

Ziyi Lin, PhD, University of Chicago

The modern age has witnessed a proliferation of female ghosts, a trademark of the J-horror genre, with the most widely-known example of *Ringu* (1998). This paper starts off by problematizing the unquestioned application of western film theories to Japanese horror genre, to arrive at a renewed articulation of the relevance of gendered bodies in mass culture. Specifically, I foreground the framework of the “ghostly” instead of the “monstrous” feminine in J-horror. I argue that the cultural imagination of female ghosts is instead intimately entangled with the uncanny and affective dimension of visual technologies and history of modern science in Japan. To that end, I explore three specific moments where one may read female bodies alongside and even as an optical technology—or “human cameras,” tracing from the late Meiji to the early 2000s, in written records of Fukurai Tomokichi’s infamous parapsychological experiments, the canonical J-horror film *Ringu*, and the videogame *Fatal Frame: Maiden of Black Water* (2014). The liminal female body points us to the nationalistic agenda of science advancement, a gendered paradigm of brute-force experimentation, and the violence embedded in this history that continues to haunt us today. This paper hence proposes to make two interventions: first a renewed understanding of genre forms in the field of Japanese film and media theories, second an intellectual reflection of the modern history of science and culture that evolve in tandem with these forms, one that is oriented towards a reconsidering of human-technology relations given the subject’s association with radioactive physics.

Bodies Across Borders: Imagining Sino-Japanese Female Solidarity in Hayashi Fumiko's Wartime Writing

Zhixin Pan, MA, Yale University

Women's wartime authorship emerged across the globe in the 1930s as the precarious time of World War II mobilized women both as active participants and as targets of national propaganda. What, then, becomes of women's voices when they are commercialized and politicized?

Japanese female author Hayashi Fumiko's autobiographical war writing as a government-recruited correspondent in China during the anti-fascist war offers a crucial case for examining how women's empathetic engagement was appropriated within the machinery of wartime propaganda.

Based on close readings of *Sensen* (The Frontline, 1938) and *Hokugan Butai* (The North bank unit, 1939), this paper explores how Hayashi Fumiko constructs and conveys the image of Chinese women, their absence, and their presence as both enemies and female counterparts.

Although scholarship has focused on Hayashi's shifting political stance and her wartime responsibility, few have analyzed her narrative strategies that foreground female bodies and sensory experience, nor situated her texts within Japan's broader propaganda strategies.

This paper argues that through the staging of different Chinese female figures, Hayashi constructs an imagination of Sino-Japanese women's solidarity across boundaries and beyond conflicts. However, such a fantasy composed of individual intimacy and domestic rituals gradually transforms from the author's psychological retreat to a narrative device that erotizes, romanticizes, and masks mass violence and the cruelty of war. By situating Fumiko's war writing within a larger historical context, this paper discusses a more unsettling question: how do Hayashi Fumiko's fantasies of women's solidarity become alienated as it was transformed into a vehicle of propaganda?

Balancing Heat and Clarity: Alcohol, Tea, and the Body in Premodern Chinese Texts

Clio (ZhiChen) Luo, MA, University of Chicago

This paper examines how tea (茶 cha) and alcohol (酒 jiu) emerged as philosophical and medical opposites in premodern China while remaining essential partners in bodily and moral balance. Through analysis of eight key texts spanning the Western Han through late Qing dynasties, I demonstrate how drinking constituted both therapeutic intervention and ethical self-cultivation. The *Recipes for Fifty-Two Ailments* (c. 200 BCE) establishes wine's pharmacological foundation as a warm solvent guiding medicinal herbs through the body. Tang dynasty treatises—Lu Yu's *Cha Jing*, the anonymous *Jiu Jing*, and *Cha Jiu Lun*—elevate these beverages to moral emblems, personifying their debate between clarity and indulgence. Later works including *Shi Jian Ben Cao*, *Qian Jin Shi Zhi*, *Sui Yuan Shi Dan*, and *Sui Xi Ju Yin Shi Pu* integrate dietary, medical, and aesthetic discourses around consumption practices. Beyond traditional close reading, I employ computational text analysis to visualize how moral and physiological vocabularies cluster around these substances. Using a controlled lexicon, I generate frequency charts, co-occurrence heatmaps, and network graphs mapping semantic relationships across the corpus. Results reveal two persistent clusters: a "cool" domain linking tea with clarity and integrity, and a "warm" domain connecting wine with heat and passion. These patterns illuminate a fundamental principle of Chinese medical-philosophical thought: health and virtue emerge not through abstinence but through harmonizing opposites—cool and hot, bitter and sweet, clarity and warmth. The computational analysis confirms what close reading suggests: Chinese healing logic conceived balance as dynamic integration rather than binary opposition.

Writing from the Ruins: Negotiating Historical Consciousness in Late Sixth-Century *Fu* Practice

Ranting Zhang, MA, Columbia University

This paper examines late sixth-century fu writing as a site for negotiating historical consciousness amid political fragmentation and dynastic collapse, focusing on Xiao Cha's Minshi fu 愍時賦 within a broader southern literary context. Complicating the long-standing notion of fu-as-history, or fushi, the paper argues that Minshi fu reflects a moment in which the genre's inherited resources for rendering history intelligible remain in use but no longer converge on a unified account of political meaning. Rather than abandoning fu's descriptive and explanatory ambitions, Xiao Cha continues to mobilize them, even as their coordination becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Building on scholarship that has illuminated late sixth-century fu through lenses of trauma, displacement, and loss, this study foregrounds fu's continued investment in historical positioning and justification under conditions of strain. Through close readings of Xiao Cha's allusive practices and his efforts to articulate political legitimacy within a ruined southern space, the paper shows how Minshi fu stages history not as a settled narrative but as an unresolved problem that must be worked through without secure resolution. Historical reference remains dense and active, yet its elements no longer align smoothly enough to stabilize sequence, causality, or moral position. In this respect, Minshi fu, alongside other late sixth-century works, presses fu toward a far more exposed and brittle mode of historical thinking, in which inherited forms continue to organize experience while simultaneously revealing the difficulty of integrating political collapse, personal implication, and historical explanation into a coherent whole.

The Intervention of the Self: Personalization and Internal Reflection in Three Skeleton Stories

Run Zhou, MA, Yale University

This paper analyzes the evolution of the skeleton story from a depersonalized allegory in the Zhuangzi into a highly personalized expression in Zhang Heng's "Rhapsody on the Skeleton (Dulou Fu 髑髀賦)" and Cao Zhi's "Discourse on the Skeleton (Dulou Shuo 髑髀說)." It investigates how the authors dismantle the original story's anonymity by inserting themselves as protagonists, thereby transforming the text into a work of "internal reflection (nei ying 內映)."

The first part, through a close reading of these two works, examine the authors' divergent interpretations of Zhuangzi's death philosophy, as well as the relationship between their characters and the Zhuangzi context.

The second part explores the genre roots of these adaptations, discussing how the tradition of the journey rhapsody allowed these works to transcend the boundary between external and internal reflection, a framework derived from the scholarship of Qian Mu. Ultimately, this study offers a modest perspective on how Han and Wei literati utilized classical sources to facilitate the growth of the "self" as the core of literary creation.

Across Borders: Poetics and Politics of Lu Xun's Translation (based on Lu Xun's translation of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*)

David Kolosov, PhD, Peking University

This article examines the formation of a transnational cultural space in China, Japan, and Russia during the cultural transformations of the first half of the 20th century. Based on Lotman's understanding of borders as zones of meaning generation rather than lines of division, the article proposes a rethinking of cultural interaction in East Asia outside of geographical and civilizational blocs. Particular attention is paid to the role of literature and translation as key mechanisms of cultural cohesion, functioning contrary to the logic of political confrontation of the era.

The analytical case study is Lu Xun's translation of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, which was done without access to the original language and based on Japanese and European translations. This material shows that multistage translation does not necessarily boil down to a mechanism of distortion of meaning, but rather represents a process of layering and calibration of the text structure, in which each stage of translation functions as an active zone of meaning generation.

Monsoonal Modernity: Wind, Affect, and the Non-Linear Structure of East Asian Experience

Letian Xiang, MA, Nanjing University

This article proposes the concept of “Monsoonal Modernity” as an analytic framework for rethinking East Asian modern experience beyond linear, nation-centered narratives of modernization. Rather than treating the monsoon as a metaphor or a case of climatic determinism, the paper conceptualizes wind as a mediating force that organizes affect, temporality, and cultural production across history. Drawing on literary theory, philosophy, and modern literature, it argues that East Asian modernity is structured by cyclical yet uneven environmental rhythms characterized by recurrence, disturbance, and delayed transformation. The study traces a genealogy of wind from early Chinese poetics to modern thought. Beginning with the Book of Songs, it examines how feng (wind) functions as a mechanism of affective circulation and political perception rather than a natural object. This logic is further developed in Wei-Jin literary theory, particularly in Lu Ji and Zhong Rong, where wind becomes a generative force that stirs thought and produces literary form. The paper then turns to Watsuji Tetsurō’s theory of climate (fūdo), interpreting it as a modern rearticulation of monsoonal ethics grounded in shared exposure and relational existence. In modern literature, the monsoonal structure undergoes strain and transformation. Through close readings of Guo Moruo’s revolutionary poetry and Han Kang’s vegetal and atmospheric narratives, the paper shows how wind reappears either as explosive mythic excess or as suffocating residue under conditions of compressed modernity. These moments reveal the limits of linear, rationalized models of modernity.

The Dissemination and Evolution of the Concept of *weiwu* in Modern China

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In the late Qing period, the term *weiwu* (唯物, “materialism”) entered China via Japan as a translation of the Western philosophical term materialism. Evolutionary theory further reinforced its association with natural science and endowed it with the attributes of *kexue* (科學, “science”), *wushen* (無神 “atheism”), and *jinhua* (進化, “evolution”). Before the 1911 Revolution, Reformists and Revolutionaries expressed sharply divergent evaluations of *weiwu* based on their rival choices between Chinese and Western value systems. During the New Culture Movement, amid linguistic debates between cultural conservatives and New Culture intellectuals, a scientific materialist cosmology took shape, and *weiwu* became the metaphysical expression of the natural sciences. After the October Revolution and the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement, *weiwu* began its own process of Marxist transformation. Influenced by Japanese socialist scholarship, however, pre-existing meanings of *weiwu* were transferred directly onto *weiwushiguan* (唯物史觀 “historical materialism”), resulting in a narrow economic interpretation of *weijingji* (唯經濟, “only the economy”). Nonetheless, this interpretation was regarded by Chinese Marxists as the defining marker of the scientific nature of Marxism. In particular, during the Debate on Science and Metaphysics, the historical materialism school completed the conceptual integration of *weiwu* and deployed it to assert Marxism as the only scientific doctrine. A conceptual-historical review of the dissemination and evolution of *weiwu* in modern China reveals not only the interactions and conflicts among competing ideologies, but also a language games in which *weiwu* served as a metaphorical medium through which visions of “what direction China should pursue” were expressed.

Exhibitions around Harvard

Cosmos Falling

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

AUX: Intermedia Gallery, Level-1

Cosmos Falling includes works by Xin Liu, (*The White Stone*, 2021); Lawrence Lek (*Geomancer*, 2017); Yuyan Wang (*The Moon Also Rises*, 2023); and Angela Su (*Cosmic Call*, 2019), which employ pseudo-documentary and speculative fiction as filmic techniques to re-animate the afterlives of technical objects, while also questioning an aesthetics of failure that surrounds the cosmic, technological frontier.

Signal and Strata

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

Signal and Strata brings together the work of three Peruvian artists—Elena Damiani, Ximena Garrido-Lecca, and Ishmael Randall-Weeks—whose practices examine the complex entanglements of land, history, and extraction through materially rich, architecturally resonant, and often pre-colonial forms.

Critical Printing

Harvard Art Museum

University Teaching Gallery, Harvard Art Museums

Harvard Art Museum
32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts
24 Quincy St, Cambridge, MA 02138

Film Screenings around Harvard

Friday February 13

7:00 pm at Harvard Film Archive

Trouble Sleep (2020), directed by Alain Kassanda

8:15 pm at Harvard Film Archive

The Spider's Stratagem (1970), directed by Bernardo Bertolucci

Saturday February 14

7:00 pm at Harvard Film Archive

Le amiche (1955), directed by Micheangelo Antonioni

9:00 pm at Harvard Film Archive

A Man Named John (1965), directed by Ermanno Olmi

10:00 at the Brattle Theatre

Dirty Dancing on 35mm, directed by Emile Ardolino

Sunday February 15

3:00 pm at Harvard Film Archive

L'avventura (1960), directed by Michangelo Antonioni

9:30 pm at The Brattle Theatre

Barb Wire (1996), directed by David Hogan

Harvard Film Archive
24 Quincy St, Cambridge, MA 02138

Brattle Theatre
40 Brattle St, Cambridge, MA 02138

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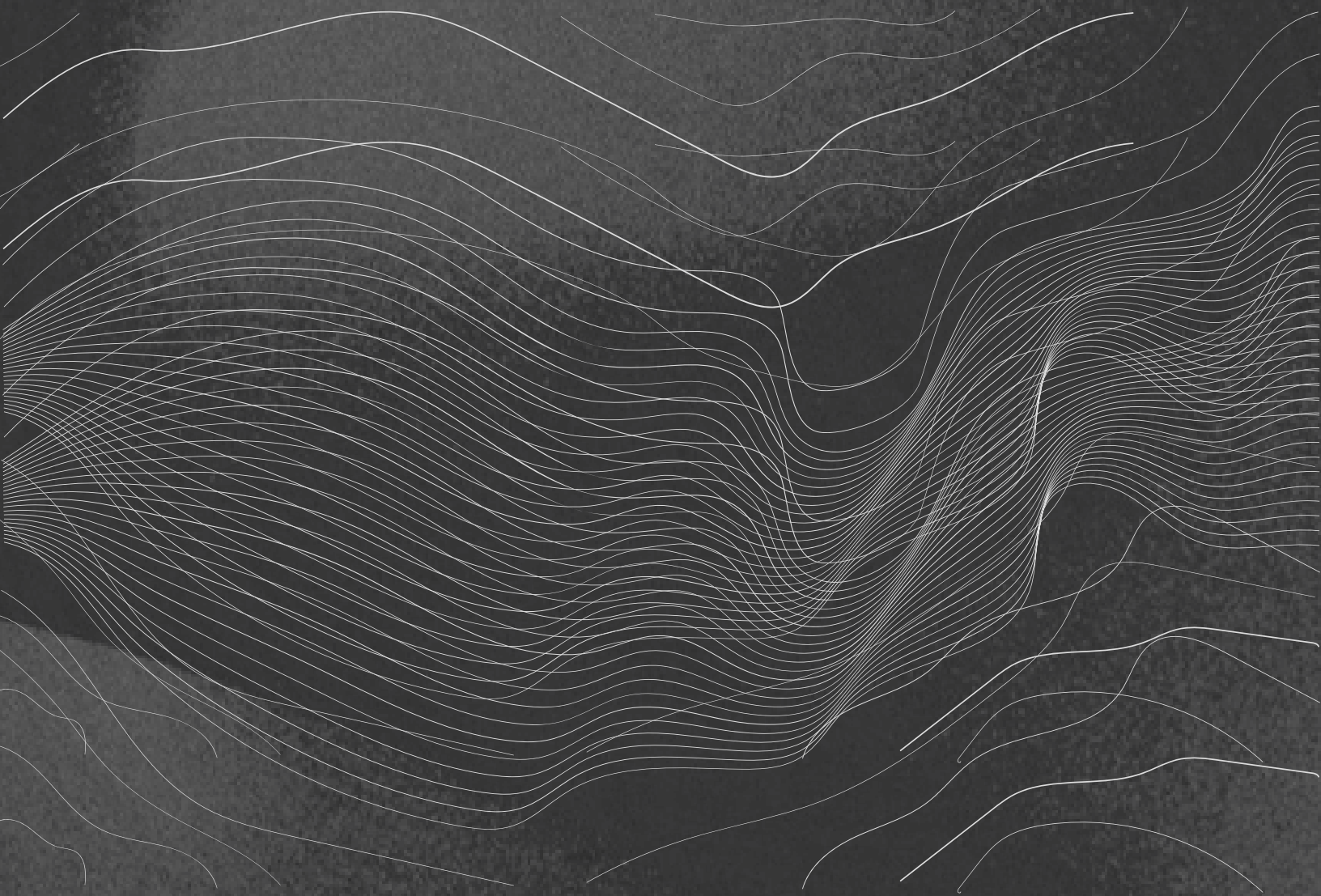
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