

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM • 16–17 JULY 2026

MEDIA WORK in ASIA

Programme & Paper Abstracts

DATES

16 - 17 July 2026
Thursday & Friday

VENUE

Executive Seminar Room
Level 2
Wee Kim Wee School of
Communication and Information

Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

PROGRAMME

Schedule at a Glance

Day 1

THURSDAY 16 JULY

08:30 – 09:00 **Registration and Breakfast**

Opening and Welcome

09:00 – 09:15

Prof. Jack Qiu, Chair of WKWSCl, Acting Director of the Asian Centre for Digital Cultures (ACDC).

Pei-Sze Chow and Siao Yuong Fong, co-founders of Asian Media Industries Research Network

09:15 – 10:15

Keynote 1

Prof. Hye-Kyung Lee, King's College London

10:15 – 10:30

Coffee / Tea Break

10:30 – 12:00

Panel 1

Technology and the Reorganisation of Media Work

12:00 – 13:00

Lunch

Screening of video essay — Memories of Covid-19 by Thai Film Crews: Encountering and Navigating Film Sets (Not) as Cramped Spaces (15 mins).

13:00 – 14:30

Panel 2

Institutional Dynamics of Media Work in Asia: Education, Policy, and Labor in Comparative Perspective

PROGRAMME

Schedule at a Glance

Day 1

THURSDAY 16 JULY

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 14:30 – 16:00 | Panel 3
Gendered Labour in Screen Industries |
| 16:00 – 16:20 | Tea Break |
| 16:20 – 17:50 | Panel 4
Platforms, Hierarchies, and Precarity |
| 18:15 – 21:30 | Symposium Dinner
For speakers and invited guests only.
Venue: Bumbu, 44 Kandahar Street.
Shuttle bus departs 18:15 from the lobby of WKWSCI. |

PROGRAMME

Schedule at a Glance

Day 2

FRIDAY 17 JULY

09:00 – 09:30 **Breakfast**

Keynote 2

09:30 – 10:30 Jasmine Ng, Executive Director, Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals.

10:30 – 10:45 Coffee / Tea Break

Panel 1

10:45 – 12:15 Negotiating Change: Media Labor, Education, and Advocacy in Indonesia's Creative Industries

Lunch

12:15 – 13:15 Screening of video essay — Memories of Covid-19 by Thai Film Crews: Encountering and Navigating Film Sets (Not) as Cramped Spaces (15 mins).

Panel 2

13:15 – 14:45 Geopolitics, Transnationalism, and the Body of Screen Labour

Panel 3

14:45 – 16:15 Production Cultures, Affect, and Regulation

16:15 – 16:45 Coffee / Tea Break

Panel 4

16:45 – 18:15 Film Cultures, Curation, and Cinematic Labour

18:15 – 18:30 **Closing**



Paper Abstracts

Cultural Policy and Cultural Labour

Prof. Hye-Kyung Lee

King's College London

Cultural labour has been obscured in cultural policy discussions and this has led to the underdevelopment of relevant institutions with few exceptions. At the core of the discussion, there are questions about how cultural policy perceives cultural workers: mainly as artists and creatives (human capital) rather than workers. In this context, the development of 'cultural labour policy' in South Korea in the recent couple of decades deserves our attention. I will contextualise its key institutions – artist welfare, the national employment insurance extended to cultural workers, standard contracts and state-mediated industrial relations – and explain what insights can be drawn from the Korean experience. This will be followed by reflections on the policy's limitations and the key challenges posed by global streaming platforms and Gen AI.

Technology and the Reorganisation of Media Work

Chair · Gerald Sim

Policy, Production and Platforms: Media Workers' Conceptions and Adoption of Generative AI in Japan's Media Industries

Takao Terui

The rapid emergence of generative AI has profoundly reshaped creative industries and intensified global debates about the future of cultural production. Within this context, media industry workers and media artists encounter both new opportunities and significant challenges while developing diverse practices and understandings of creativity, authorship, and entrepreneurship in the age of generative AI. To examine how generative AI is transforming media industries in Japan, this paper analyses three interrelated layers: national policies that regulate and promote AI in media production, the practices of media workers who critically adopt and evaluate AI technologies, and audience and platform responses to AI-generated content that influence market trends in media production. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining 20 semi-structured interviews with media industry professionals and digital media artists in Japan who engage with generative AI, alongside document analysis of policy papers, industry association reports, and news articles related to AI and cultural production. Drawing on these materials, the paper presents three key findings concerning media industries and media policy.

First, the Japanese government actively promotes the adoption of generative AI across media sectors ranging from advertising to film and television, guided by an AI-friendly and innovation-oriented policy framework. However, an unintended consequence of this approach is the marginalisation of media workers' concerns regarding autonomy, authorship, and copyright, and the emergence of controversial AI outputs imitating intangible creative and characteristic styles of major intellectual property holders. Second, the paper identifies diverse forms of critical engagement among media producers, who use generative AI at different stages of the creative

process while holding varied conceptions of its role. These include viewing AI as a tool to accelerate production and democratise creative opportunities, as a creative partner for idea development that still requires human refinement, and as a conventional or socially consensual reference point that creators deliberately challenge through human creativity. Their diverse and critical engagements with generative AI are broadly welcomed and represented in the digital media market and ecosystem developed in Japan. Finally, the paper demonstrates that Japanese fan communities and popular content platforms exhibit mixed responses to generative AI, ranging from the legitimization of AI-generated media as an emerging artistic genre to strong criticism of its use in popular culture, which some fans regard as a form of cheating or betrayal. Taken together, the experiences of Japanese creators highlight the complex and contested impacts of generative AI on cultural production and show how these impacts are shaped by specific policy environments and cultural contexts. By foregrounding the Japanese case, this paper contributes to the de-westernisation and internationalisation of scholarship on generative AI and media production.

Elixir, Exhaustion, and Exacerbation: Differential Temporalities of Generative AI in Hong Kong Advertising Work

Hui-Fung Chung, Ka Wai Dorothy Wong

Generative artificial intelligence (gen-AI) is frequently speculated as either a replacement for creative labor or an enhancement tool that accelerates productivity in creative industries. These polarized imaginaries—of existential threat on the one hand and techno-optimistic efficiency on the other—rest on a temporal assumption that technological change primarily takes the form of acceleration (Sharma, 2014).

Drawing on feminist studies of time and technology (Sharma, 2022; Wajcman, 2014), this paper challenges that assumption by unpacking the differential temporalities of gen-AI in creative work. We conceptualize gen-AI not as an instrumental extension, but as a relational and situated practice through which temporalities are unevenly distributed and governed within specific cultural and organizational contexts (Pasquinelli, Alaimo, & Gandini, 2024). Empirically, the paper examines advertising work in Hong Kong, a regional hub embedded in both monopolistic and

competitive dynamics of Asian capitalism (Tse, 2022; Pun et al., 2022), where creative practice is shaped by multiscale regimes of mediation, ranging from agencies, clients, consumer markets, and digital technologies (Cronin, 2004; Bizjak et al., 2024; Kobayashi et al., 2018). In this context, Hong Kong's advertising industry provides a critical site for examining how global and national sociotechnical imaginaries are imbricated with localized labor practices alongside regional trajectories of AI techno-developmentalism (Chung, 2025).

We argue that gen-AI reorganizes advertising work not simply by speeding it up, but by differentiating time unevenly across creative roles, relationships, and organizational scales. Based on 20 in-depth interviews with copywriters and art directors across employment types and seniority levels, the paper identifies three major temporal dynamics. First, within creative teams, gen-AI destabilizes established temporal divisions of labor. While some copywriters gain relative temporal autonomy by offloading lower-order textual tasks to gen-AI systems, art directors increasingly absorb residual time spent aligning and aestheticizing AI-generated outputs. This uneven redistribution of time produces role ambiguity and erodes professional identities historically anchored in craftsmanship and collaborative sequencing.

Second, at the worker–client interface, gen-AI intensifies a temporal mismatch between expectation and experience. Driven by techno-solutionist imaginaries, clients anticipate faster turnaround and reduced costs, while creative workers experience gen-AI-assisted production as slow, repetitive, and repair-intensive. Rather than eliminating necessary labor time, gen-AI generates new forms of hidden work that remain largely invisible within prevailing metrics of professionalism, contributing to the redefinition and devaluation of “creative moments.”

Third, gen-AI operates as an organizational imaginary of futurity management. Agencies adopt gen-AI to signal innovation and future readiness while seeking to render AI a habitual new media (Chun, 2016) embedded in everyday workflows and managerial infrastructures, even as they respond to growing demands for restraint amid perceptions of aesthetic saturation. This requires continuous calibration between novelty and tradition around creativity in relation to AI, revealing a temporal paradox at the center of the institutionalization of AI in creative industries.

Through the lens of differential temporalities, this paper contributes to dialogues between critical AI studies and creative labor studies beyond Northern-centric paradigms, illustrating how gen-AI reconstitutes advertising work across relational scales.

Platformized Creativity and the Technosphere: AI Film Production in Contemporary China

CHOI Sin-yi (Emilie)

The rapid integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into the cultural industries has precipitated a seismic shift in the ontology of creative labor. While global discourse often centers on the technological determinism of Silicon Valley, the deployment of AI in China reveals a distinct "technosphere" characterized by a unique interplay between state-driven sociotechnical imaginaries, platform capitalism, and individual creative agency. This paper investigates this intersection through a case study of "Keling," the text-to-video AI model developed by the short-video giant Kuaishou, to understand how platformized AI tools are fundamentally restructuring the conditions of media work and cinematic aesthetics in contemporary China.

Methodologically, this study employs a multi-layered approach combining production analysis, discourse analysis of policy documents, and ethnographic interviews with filmmakers and practitioners utilizing Keling. By triangulating these methods, the research moves beyond a purely technical assessment to offer a sociotechnical critique of the emerging AI creative economy.

First, the paper revisits the genealogical history of Keling and the broader platformization of AI generative imagery in China. It situates this technology within the context of recent government initiatives and policy frameworks that explicitly encourage the "AI film project" as a vehicle for national cultural soft power and industrial modernization. The study analyzes how these top-down state narratives regarding "AI and Creativity" are operationalized by platforms like Kuaishou to legitimize new forms of algorithmic governance over creative production.

Second, the paper argues that the introduction of tools like Keling represents a shift toward "platformized creativity," where the platform does not merely host content but actively dominates the filmmaking process. Through ethnographic data, the research reveals how the "imaginary" of the industry is being reshaped: the prototypical media worker is no longer defined solely by technical mastery of the camera, but by their ability to navigate prompt engineering and algorithmic logic. This section explores how the platform remodifies production workflows, creating new dependencies and precarities for labor while simultaneously democratizing access to high-fidelity visual production.

Finally, the paper assesses the circulation and reception of AI-generated films, examining how platformization influences cinematic aesthetics. It questions whether the "Keling aesthetic"—driven by specific algorithmic biases and training data—is creating a homogenized visual language that challenges traditional notions of cinematic authorship and artistic aura.

By focusing on the specificities of the Chinese digital ecosystem, this paper challenges dominant Euro-American theories of creative labor which often overlook the role of the developmental state in shaping platform economies. It contributes to inter-Asian dialogues by mapping the convergences between state policy, platform infrastructure, and the lived experiences of media workers, offering a critical framework for understanding the future of labor in an AI-driven Asian media landscape.

Perceptions of Singapore's Creative Labour in a Neo-Networked Platform Economy

Tania Lim

Compared to much-cited work on creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, 2013; Flew & Cunningham, 2010), creative cities (Florida, 2004; Markusen, 2014) and the creative economy (Howkins, 2001; Gasparin & Quinn, 2021), the growth of Southeast Asia's creative economies appears to rely less on organic aggregation of micro and small enterprises and more on governmental and quasi-governmental attempts to script and subsidise "creativity" as an economic strategy. In Singapore, creative labour is widely recognised as essential to the creative economy, but its mere presence has not translated into a self-sustaining ecology of firms or livelihoods; instead, policy-led funding, infrastructural investments, and regional diplomacy are repeatedly mobilised to "activate" creative potential. The paper conceptualises creative labour along two axes. Materially, it is situated in specific cultural and creative sectors, structured by employment status, and by working conditions shaped by projectisation, outsourcing, and platformisation. Discursively, creative labour is framed within Singapore's creative industries and Smart Nation agendas as innovative, entrepreneurial, and participatory, even as empirical and critical work points to precariousness, uneven bargaining power vis à vis corporates and platforms, and affective governance in an illiberal democracy (Kong, 2014; Kong & Woods, 2018; Fong, 2022; Fong & Lim, 2024). Singapore's creative labour market is being reconfigured by freelancing, platformisation, and digital economy logics, using ASEAN-wide perception-survey

data from 2024–2025 and a Singapore sub-sample of creative workers, read alongside ecosystem and critical cultural industries scholarship (British Council, 2025; Gross & Wilson, 2019). Gross and Wilson’s cultural ecosystems approach underpins the analysis: creative workers are treated as embedded in interlinked micro-, meso-, and macro systems that mediate opportunity, precarity, and bargaining power within an increasingly digitalised and regionalised urban economy. At the microsystem level, the paper examines how workers across different organisational locations—freelancers, SME workers, large-firm employees, and public/education professionals—combine digital tools, soft skills, and self-branding to navigate volatile project markets. At the mesosystem level, it interrogates how IP regimes, funding architectures, and digital platforms shape the distribution of risk and reward. At the macrosystem level, Singapore’s creative economy appears to enjoy “high awareness and relatively strong institutions” within the wider ASEAN creative economy and Smart Nation policy frameworks, positioning the city as a regional digital creative hub. The paper advances two research questions of broader relevance to creative labour debates beyond the West. First, how do Singapore’s creative workers, differentiated by organisational location, experience and negotiate the intersection of regional neo-globalisation logics (i.e. policy desires for ASEAN integration, China’s rise, and platformised markets) and the nation’s own smart urbanism projects that promote data-driven performance and “participatory” digital infrastructures? Second, what are the implications of this conjuncture for creative risk, autonomy, and livelihood security? By bringing Southeast Asian survey data into dialogue with critical work on creative/Smart Nation policy and its brand of media governance, the paper argues for a more cautious, empirically grounded approach to creative economy strategy—one that moves beyond celebratory narratives of creative labour towards a renewed concern with cultural industries institutions, labour conditions, and regional power asymmetries.

Institutional Dynamics of Media Work in Asia: Education, Policy, and Labor in Comparative Perspective

Chair • Joanna Luisa Obispo

From Classroom to Artists' Room: Institutional Pathways and Precarity in Philippine Media Work

Joanna Luisa B. Obispo

This paper examines how media careers in the Philippines are structured through the interaction of higher education, recruitment practices, and industry norms, drawing on interviews with television networks, universities, government agencies, and creative workers. While recent policy frameworks such as the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act (PCIDA) position higher education institutions as key pipelines for a globally competitive creative workforce, actual transitions from education to media work remain uneven and precarious. Entry into broadcasting and film is less determined by formal credentials than by portfolios, informal networks, workshops, and internal training programs operated by major broadcasters. Internships and university practicums function as critical gateways, but they also operate as extended auditions that reproduce inequality and insecurity.

Conceptually, the paper builds on scholarship that frames institutions as ambivalent mediators positioned between participation and precarization (Gielen et al., 2018), and on East Asian creative labour studies that caution against universalizing Western models of creative work (de Kloet et al., 2020). The paper argues that Philippine media work is governed by a hybrid institutional regime: formally expanding education and policy infrastructures coexist with highly informal, networked recruitment systems and project-based labor. This tension places the burden of risk and skill completion on early-career workers and reinforces precarity, even as demand for media content grows. The paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how media work is institutionally organized across Asian contexts marked by flexible governance, uneven professionalization, and persistent precarity.

Eligibility as a Career Filter: Exploring Hiring Standards and Pathways into Cultural and Creative Work in China

ZHANG Jiayi

This paper examines how recruitment in China's state-owned cultural enterprises and public cultural institutions structures access to "creative" careers. I argue that entry into state cultural work is filtered through bureaucratic and ideological gatekeeping rather than assessed primarily through creative merit. Drawing on recruitment notices and administrative criteria circulated through municipal human-resources systems, alongside sector-specific credentialing regimes (e.g., broadcasting/hosting examinations), I show that hiring combines major–position matching and professional skills with non-creative requirements such as nationality, political-ideological qualifications, age ceilings, health conditions, English credentials, and location-based eligibility (e.g., hukou or residence permits). In some posts, gendered preferences also appear explicitly. These layered requirements institutionalize a state-centered definition of the "appropriate" cultural worker and shape access to stable, high-status positions tied to *bianzhi* ("iron rice bowl") competition. Conceptually, the paper reframes recruitment as a key mechanism through which the state organizes creative labor markets and regulates the boundaries of cultural production.

Developing Work-Ready Media Talent: Creative Media Education and Indonesia's Vision 2045

Agnes Siwi Purwaning Tyas

"New Engine Growth" is one of Indonesia's key strategies for achieving its vision of becoming a developed country by 2045, emphasizing digitalization and human resource development. Within this agenda, the creative media and multimedia sector merits close examination due to its expected contribution to economic growth and employment. Indonesia's broadcasting sector is considerably large—estimated to be roughly twice the size of Japan's—with individual broadcasting offices employing approximately 400–500 personnel. Employment in this sector is dominated by individuals with higher education qualifications, most commonly bachelor's degrees. Media-related occupations within the information and communication industry are also among the higher-paying jobs; according to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data from 2025, wages in

this sector are nearly twice the minimum wage.

Responding to the growing potential of digital and media industries, universities have increasingly introduced specialized multimedia programs, with enrolments accounting for approximately 20–30% of total students in some institutions. Multimedia education is offered across public universities, private universities, and specialized higher education institutions. Public universities remain the most prestigious providers and offer both academic and vocational programs. However, distinctions between bachelor's programs—traditionally research-oriented—and vocational programs emphasizing practical skills have become less pronounced following curriculum reforms introduced in 2020. Fields of study range from broad disciplines such as Visual Communication Design, Multimedia Engineering Technology, and Communication Studies to more specialized programs including Game Technology, Broadcasting Production Management, Film, and Animation.

Communication and media-related programs contribute a substantial share of graduates entering the workforce, accounting for approximately 10–30% of total graduates annually. Employment outcomes in this field are consistently strong. Based on tracer studies conducted by various universities between 2021 and 2025, 75–90% of graduates are employed shortly after graduation, while 95–100% are working in positions relevant to their field of study. Most graduates secure employment within one to three months after graduation, indicating rapid absorption into the labor market. Many students—particularly in communication and creative media programs—are recruited even before completing their degrees by television networks, mass media organizations, digital media enterprises, and public relations agencies.

These outcomes reflect sustained government efforts to bridge the gap between higher education and the labor market. Central to this strategy is the “link and match” approach, implemented through the tetrahelix model, which promotes collaboration among government, industry, higher education institutions, and communities. Industry participation includes internships, scholarships, grants, research collaboration, on-the-job training, and practitioner-led teaching. Higher education institutions are also encouraged to implement initiatives such as Kampus Merdeka, Kampus Berdampak, and Wirausaha Merdeka. To further strengthen students' practical competencies, many programs now require a final project in the form of a practical or creative product.

Gendered Labour in Screen Industries

Chair · Ka-Wei Pang

The Gendered Workplace and Coping Strategies of Women in Taiwanese Film and TV Productions

Jocelyn Yi-Hsuan Lai

Feminist studies of cultural and creative labour have explored gender inequality within cultural and creative industries, as well as the coping strategies of female workers who face gender inequality, gendered work segregation, and sexism in the global North (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015). These issues in the creative industries of East Asia and Taiwan remain significantly understudied. Adopting an ex-centric approach to studies of creative labour (Alacovska & Gill, 2019), this article examines the working conditions of female workers entering creative jobs dominated by men on Taiwanese film and television production sets, together with their coping strategies. This article asks the following questions: Is the working environment on Taiwanese film and television production sets gendered? How is it gendered? What difficulties do women working on these sets face? What are their strategies to deal with the difficulties? How do they perceive Taiwanese gender policies and legal reforms following the local #MeToo movement in 2023? What subjectivities have they discursively constructed when coping with their difficulties? Following a qualitative approach, the article collects data through interviews and long-term correspondence with policymakers, researchers and professionals familiar with Taiwanese film and television productions. The findings suggest that Taiwanese female workers adopt very individualised strategies, and that their subjectivities align with postfeminism or neoliberal feminism, the gendered form of neoliberalism identified by Western feminist scholars. Some women who have managed to become leaders do not perceive gender inequality, whereas those still striving in their careers consistently highlight its existence. At present, these women engage either in individual forms of empowerment or in small support groups. Such groups may potentially evolve into women's alliances and take actions; however, they need to be informed about the relevant legal and institutional frameworks to address these issues. Given the slow

development of trade unions in Taiwan's film and television industry, workers remain unfamiliar with labour protections and regulations. Labour education with a gendered perspective is urgently needed to make workplaces more equal in Taiwan's film and television industry.

Writing to Stay: Continuity Work, Ageing, and the “New Pragmatics” of Screen Labour in Malaysia

Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim

This paper examines how ageing Muslim women screenwriters (50+) in Malaysia navigate the future of screen work at the intersection of precarious commissioning, domestic care responsibilities, and shifting industry expectations. While global scholarship on creative labour has historically focused on Euro-American centres and youthful, "mobile" workers, this study highlights late-career trajectories in a specific Asian locale where established writers increasingly move from credited authorship toward "writer-for-hire" roles. These roles centre on proposal development and the preparation of supporting documentation for public-service commissioning and government-linked funding routes. Rather than treating this shift as an occupational decline, the paper analyses it through the concept of continuity work. This captures the labour required to keep projects and professional identities viable across repeated cycles of pitching, revision, and institutional negotiation. In the Malaysian context, experienced women are frequently positioned as stabilising actors who "tidy up" development processes such as mentoring younger creatives, translating creative ideas into institutionally legible formats, and absorbing the emotional and temporal costs of iterative feedback. This "new pragmatics" of screen work reveals how veteran women manage the temporal constraints of ageing and care while preserving a sense of professional belonging in a thinning market. The study employs a multi-method qualitative approach designed to capture the "hidden" aspects of creative labour. Firstly, it draws on semi-structured qualitative interviews with veteran women screenwriters and selected industry intermediaries (producers and commissioning editors). These interviews focus on the "everyday" of creative survival, specifically how care responsibilities and the ageing process influence project selection and negotiation strategies. Secondly, the research employs artefact analysis of "shadow documents," including pitch decks, treatments, and compliance narratives, that precede production. Where ethically accessible, these artefacts are traced to identify how "faith" and

"institutional integrity" are scripted to meet organisational sensitivities. Finally, the study incorporates policy analysis of Malaysian creative economy guidelines (e.g., FINAS and RTM mandates) to contextualise how state-driven funding models necessitate the specific "translation labour" performed by these veteran writers. By foregrounding ageing and care as central analytic categories, the paper contributes an Asia-situated account of media work that challenges the "white, middle-class, male" prototype of the creative worker. It highlights how the industry's structural costs, including the erosion of authorship visibility and the downward redistribution of creative risk, are disproportionately borne by veteran women who perform the gendered "housework" of the creative pipeline. Ultimately, the paper seeks to foster inter-Asian dialogues on how precarity is negotiated in regions where familial and religious structures fundamentally shape the labour market.

“Powerful sound”: gendered film sound and female film sound practitioners in Chinese filmmaking

Ze Gong

Contemporary Chinese film sound production is a male-dominated field, where significantly fewer women occupies senior sound roles. While gender inequality in filmmaking has been widely discussed, research has largely focused on above-the-line creatives, leaving the gendering of below-the-line labor, particularly film sound work, underexamined. Responding to this gap, this article investigates a gendered aesthetic of film sound, and how gender operates through the aesthetic value that define professional recognition within the field.

Drawing on a production studies framework, this study combines analysis of industrial texts, including interviews, trade discourse, and professional commentary, with close attention to practitioners' accounts of sound work. This article approaches gender as embedded within everyday production practices, evaluative criteria, and aesthetic hierarchies. This methodological approach allows for an examination of how gendered assumptions shape what kinds of sound are valued, who is recognized as an authorial practitioner, and how labor is distributed and interpreted within film sound production.

The article argues that a dominant sound aesthetic in contemporary Chinese commercial cinema, often described by practitioners as “powerful sound”, functions as a gendered hallmark of professional competence and authorship. “Powerful sound,” associated with loudness, impact, scale, and spectacle, is widely treated as a signature of high-end, contemporary film sound practice. While the production of such sound is not technically restricted to male practitioners, the article demonstrates that women’s contributions to these soundscapes are systematically under-recognized. Female sound practitioners are frequently positioned as responsible for subtler and less audible sonic elements, such as ambient sound design. However, the very production of these subtle film sound is critical to contemporary film sound design in a context where the effect of immersion is almost as equally as important impact. In this way, the discursive popularization of powerful sound emphasizes the gender imbalance because it rewards man-like film sound work and yet failed to acknowledge other forms of work that women are more typically assigned to do. Through this process, a gender habitus of sound is formed, in which women are implicitly distanced from the sounds most closely associated with authorship, authority, and industrial value. As a result, female sound practitioners are marginalized, that their labor is rendered less visible, less audible, and less likely to translate into professional recognition or leadership opportunities. By foregrounding the gendered aesthetics of film sound itself, this article contributes to feminist production studies by showing how inequality is reproduced through evaluative norms and sonic hierarchies, rather than through exclusion alone.

Independent Women Musicians and Creative Collaborations in Creative Industries in India: Defining Sisterhood Collectives

Neha Jindal and Swapna Gopinath

The Independent music scene in India is evolving fast with digital spaces offering opportunities for musicians to express their creativity and find an audience for their work. Platformization and digital content creation, along with the burgeoning DIY (Do-It-Yourself) culture, have enabled the growth of indie musicians in India. We seek to explore the place of women musicians occupying the independent music scene, their evolution over time, and their struggles and journeys within the socio-cultural context, as India moved towards embracing a neoliberal ethos.

This work studies the journey of select female musicians, forming bands to produce music, and the complex dynamics at play in such formations, to germinate the idea of sisterhood collectives as a force that acts as a support system for female indie musicians. As independent artists, as women content creators, they play multiple roles, both online and offline. Their collaborative work is an act of strength, as they reiterate their decision to remain within the space of indie music, refusing to give in to the stereotypes, to the trends, alongside remaining distinct and exercising their freedom to express themselves. Though their habits have similarities largely due to their class position and urban identities, they are unique and different as artists. So, can these sisterhood collectives be studied as another form of resistance? The attempt is to comprehend the affective formations that result in creative collaborations that seem to work like sisterhood feminist groups, but our interviews have revealed that they are distinctly different. We use in-depth interviews and study them using Critical Discourse Analysis as the research methodology. This work will add meaningful insights into the critical studies being done on Creative labor within India and the larger context of the Global South.

Platforms, Hierarchies, and Precarity

Chair • Kai Khuin Liew

Looking Down to Get By: Contempt, platformisation, and Precarity in Vertical Short Drama production.

Pengnan Hu

Vertical short dramas—typically 1–2 minutes long and largely backed by Chinese platform companies—have gained global popularity in recent years and are rapidly reshaping the landscape of global audiovisual content production. Yet a key question remains: do these new formats generate meaningful employment opportunities, or do they instead intensify the precarity already embedded in creative labour?

Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in London, Bangkok, and China, as well as my own experience working as a script localiser for leading vertical short drama companies translating Chinese-language scripts into English, this article examines how audiovisual practitioners navigate a form of work they often openly disparage. For instance, in London, one producer self-mockingly described vertical short dramas as “the recycling bin of the film and television industry”—a space that absorbs those struggling to find work, while simultaneously being treated with disdain as inferior to “proper” film and television. I argue that such widely shared attitudes of contempt do not merely reflect an existing cultural hierarchy, but are actively weaponised by practitioners as they confront a different cultural production model. The article analyses how practitioners’ dismissive attitudes toward short dramas reveal ongoing transformations in cultural hierarchies and production logics. I focus on two recurring forms of “looking down.” The first emerges in transnational production contexts, where Chinese companies hire production teams in Europe and the US to shoot. On these sets, local crews often project an image of Chinese screen industries as technically and aesthetically “backward,” interpreting the exaggerated plots and non-realist logic of short dramas as evidence of incompetence, while overlooking the fact that these aesthetics are integral to short drama and

widespread across global subcultural media forms. The second form of contempt stems from practitioners' limited understanding of what platformised short drama production actually entails. Many assume that "mindless" viewers are easy to satisfy, yet they often struggle to understand what mobile audiences actually care about. For instance, across multiple sets in both the UK and Thailand, producers and directors struggled to decide how to allocate limited resources between Chinese producers and local production teams. One recurring conflict I observed at every shooting site I visited concerned costume design because, in vertical formats, where the human body dominates the frame, costume becomes especially significant, while crews are often habituated to cutting costs in this area.

By examining these two contempt-laden discourses, this article shows how practitioners negotiate both the challenges of transnational collaboration and the emergence of new production practices associated with vertical short dramas. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on creative precarity, global production culture, and the reconfiguration of audiovisual labour in platform-driven media economies.

From 'Bureaucrats' to 'Creators': How Streaming Services Transform Labour in the Korean Television Landscape

Taeyoung Kim

This study examines how US-based streaming services are changing the ideas of creativity and work culture in the Korean television industry. In many Western television contexts, work is characterised as freelance, precarious, short-term, and hierarchical, with skills needed only during the production process (Johns 2010: 1074; Swords and Johns 2024: 626). In contrast, a large part of the Korean television industry was driven by in-house production teams at three terrestrial television networks, KBS, MBC, and SBS, whose staff were permanent, full-time employees of the broadcasters, where the work environment was characterised by salary step systems, lifelong employment without fear of dismissal, and reasonable welfare packages. While most technicians and writers were freelancers with poor remuneration and temporary contracts, in-house production crews not only had access to performers exclusively contracted to television networks but also benefited from infrastructure such as studio facilities and relationships with

executives who approved projects. Much of their creativity was shaped by seniority, organisational logic, collective memory, and tradition, unlike that of their Western counterparts, who were often asked to demonstrate their creativity, assert their rights, and see their work as commodities and self-enterprises (Ursell 2000: 818).

In this context, the entry of two pay-television networks (JTBC and TVN) in the early 2010s, and later Netflix and Disney+ into the production scene in the late 2010s, have brought about fundamental changes to labour conditions within the television industry. While the two pay-television networks hired producers from well-established television networks with successful careers and offered higher salaries, the changes brought by streaming services are more fundamental, prompting many television producers to leave their jobs and establish their own production studios to seek more opportunities across different channels and platforms. As they seek more opportunities, income, and ways to express their creativity beyond organisational hierarchies, they voluntarily become precarious self-entrepreneurs—bottom-up processes—despite being discouraged by their seniors and TV network executives. Such changes in television labour require different explanations from traditional Western views of creative labour, as television networks are still regarded as lifelong workplaces, given media workers' unionisation and the benefits of strict labour laws that make layoffs very difficult, reflecting the country's labour market.

Drawing on the tradition of production studies, which examines how changing experiences and structures within the cultural industries appear across different production activities (Druick and Deveau, 2015, p. 157), this study is based on interviews with 33 television producers and industry practitioners. Interviews are valuable for understanding how the production environment is reshaped by exploring unique organisational structures, professional practices, and power dynamics through a bottom-up approach (Banks, Conor & Mayer, 2016, p. x). The findings will shed light on how increased industrialisation, along with the entry of new players and the globalisation of television production, not only causes restructuring at the macro level but also redefines creativity and individual work cultures at the micro level.

Mediating Platform Nationalism: The Production of Mango TV's Documentary Pomegranate Blossoms in China

Xinru Li

This article examines the rise of platform nationalism in contemporary China through an ethnographic study of the production of Pomegranate Blossoms (Shiliu Huakai), a documentary series produced by Mango TV. Launched in 2019 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, the series documents the cultural traditions, particularly marriage customs, of China's 56 ethnic minority groups while promoting the state narrative of the Chinese nation as "one family." As the digital arm of Hunan TV, a provincial broadcaster highly popular among mainland Chinese youth and often rivaling CCTV in ratings, Mango TV occupies a pivotal position in China's media ecology. Pomegranate Blossoms achieved substantial viewership (54.898 million for Season One and 68.387 million for Season Two) and received two national awards, underscoring its political and symbolic significance. Drawing on 15 months of fieldwork (October 2019–December 2020), including 12 months of participant observation across three Mango TV production teams (documentary, entertainment, and human resources), 34 semi-structured interviews with producers of varying seniority, and three months of audience-side research in a county with high Mango TV viewership, the study investigates how platform nationalism operates in situ. Methodologically, it combines Geertzian "thick description" with Critical Media Industry Studies, supported by rigorous ethical protocols, including anonymization and compliance with UK and Chinese research regulations. Conceptually, the article defines platform nationalism as a distinctive mode of mediating national identity through digital infrastructures, where state ideological governance converges with platform logics such as algorithmic curation, data governance, regulatory compliance, and commercial competition. In doing so, it extends existing scholarship on cyber-nationalism and digital nationalism, which has largely focused on user-generated expression, by foregrounding how platforms shape the circulation, experience, and governance of nationalism through everyday media labor. Within China's platform ecosystem, this takes the form of a state–platform symbiosis: Mango TV functions as a state-aligned streaming infrastructure that integrates market-oriented strategies (e.g., exclusive content policies and subscription models) with ideological mandates such as

promoting “cultural confidence” (wenhua zixin). Empirically, the article demonstrates that platform nationalism thrives in ambiguity. Rather than operating as a purely top-down imposition or a participatory grassroots phenomenon, it unfolds as a contingent and situational process. Producers must constantly interpret shifting and opaque political boundaries, informally described as “red lines,” while balancing ideological expectations, audience metrics, and algorithmic visibility. Three interlocking tensions emerge from the ethnography: the mobilization of ethnic diversity to reinforce national unity; the rivalry between digital platforms and traditional television networks as platformization reshapes the political economy of ideological production; and the recalibration of national belonging through discursive shifts from “motherland” (zuguo) to “homeland” (jiayuan), blending Confucian familialism, territorial nationalism, and platform logic. Through ethnographic portraits of two young interns—Jie, a “performative patriot,” and Hua, who adopts strategic silence—the article illustrates how individual media workers negotiate ideological pressure, platform incentives, and personal agency. Overall, the study reframes platform nationalism as an infrastructural politics of sovereignty: a contested terrain co-produced by state power, platform architectures, and everyday labor practices in China’s platform society.

A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Fireworks (A Professional Life Shaped by Policy Phases)

Jasmine Ng

Executive Director, Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals

From a ground perspective as a Singapore media production professional of over 3 decades and as a first-hand beneficiary of many Singapore government policies and grant support initiatives for the arts and media, I give a personal, anecdotal review of where and how state interventions in bolstering the Singapore cultural media landscape have succeeded or fallen short. The talk discusses how the city-state's success as a creative media hub is one that runs on the logic of metrics and on outsourcing much creative labour. I conclude with how creative workers in the media industry can help the state reimagine how we measure and pay for cultural success and envision the Big Picture.

Negotiating Change: Media Labor, Education, and Advocacy in Indonesia's Creative Industries

Chair · Yearry Panji Setianto

Panel Description

This roundtable examines the changing conditions of media work in Indonesia as a critical case within broader debates on media labor in Asia. Against the backdrop of declining advertising revenues, economic uncertainty, and accelerating technological change, including Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), the session brings together practitioners, educators, and scholars to reflect on how these structural shifts are reshaping media industries and labor relations in Indonesia. By combining policy-oriented perspectives, industry experience, educational insights, and labor advocacy, the roundtable highlights how precarity, institutional constraints, and uneven power relations are experienced and negotiated by media workers in the Southeast Asian context.

Eva Danayanti, Indonesian Program Manager at International Media Support (IMS), draws on her extensive experience in media development and policy advocacy to discuss the Local Media Summit as an experimental platform for fostering collaboration among local media organizations. She critically reflects on the transfer and adaptation of media innovation models from Europe to Indonesia, demonstrating how structural limitations, such as weak financial governance, limited access to training, and constrained managerial imaginaries, shape local media's capacity to innovate. Her intervention foregrounds the gap between global media development discourses and the everyday realities of local media workers in Asia.

Putut Widjanarko, a film producer and co-founder of the Madani Film Festival, contributes an industry-based perspective on labor conditions in Indonesia's film sector. Drawing on his professional experience, he examines the paradox between the rising popularity of local films and the persistent precarity faced by film workers. He highlights how sponsorship dependency, project-based production models, freelance labor, and high production costs reinforce unequal labor relations, illustrating how creative success in Indonesian film industries does not

necessarily translate into improved worker welfare.

Diyah Ayu Karunianingsih, currently the Head of Department in the News Production Management at Sekolah Tinggi Multi Media, Yogyakarta, reflects on the role of higher education institutions in shaping future media workers. Based on her pedagogical experience, she discusses how universities are increasingly pressured to align curricula with industry demands, producing graduates who are 'job-ready' yet embedded in unequal industry–academy relations. Her contribution situates media education as a key site where labor expectations, skills formation, and power asymmetries in Southeast Asian media industries are reproduced and contested.

Yearry Setianto, a journalism lecturer at Universitas Multimedia Nusantara and a media labor researcher, focuses on the role of professional organizations and labor unions in protecting media and creative workers. Drawing on the cases of Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) and Serikat Sindikasi, he analyzes their strategies in labor rights advocacy, training, and collective action. He argues that while these organizations play a crucial role in raising awareness of labor rights, their capacity to respond to technological disruptions, particularly Gen AI, remains limited, further exacerbating worker precarity in Indonesia's media and creative sectors.

Overall, the roundtable presents Indonesia as a key site for understanding media work in Southeast Asia, where technological change, labor precarity, and institutional power intersect in ways that resonate across the region's media industries.

Geopolitics, Transnationalism, and the Body of Screen Labour

Chair · Eva Cheuk-Yin Li

The good, the bad and the in-between: Three types of internationalization and labour embodiments in Thai film/media industries at post-pandemic crossroads

Wikanda Promkhuntong

Discourses on film and media internationalisation have focused on the flow of products, funding, and innovative technology. This paper contends that different types of ‘internationalisation’ in the post-pandemic/platform-era Thai film/media industries are most felt through the embodiment of screen labour. Their embodied responses to industry circumstances, in turn, reveal the corporeal organisation of physically and sentimentally divided film/media sectors that intersect at certain times through solidarity and labour migration. Based on industry observations and interviews with 45 screen workers across different sectors, job roles, and experiences from 2022 onwards through different research projects, the paper reflects on three types of ‘embodied internationalisation’. The first is expanded from ‘The New International Division of Cultural Labour’, which took off since the 1980s, with many Cold War films shot in Thailand, and grew significantly since the 2010s with state tax incentives and the interconnected tourism industry (Promkhuntong 2022). The embodiment of internationalisation can be found in vastly different standards and labour protections compared to local productions, as further evident in the practices of an American streaming company with a local office that funds local originals in the 2020s. During the pandemic, workers employed by these international productions highlighted better health and safety protections, working hours, and the ability to sustain themselves in no-work conditions, which contributed to the wider call for creative labour unionisation (Promkhuntong 2024). The second idea of internationalisation began at the distribution and fan levels within Asia, encompassing genre films and, most recently, Boys Love (BL) and Girls Love (GL) series. Major Thai studios and media conglomerates grew by expanding into Southeast and

East Asia, particularly China, with dedicated in-house staff on payroll developing new skills and talents, and content diversity brought in through partnerships with experienced contractors. The unprecedented success of the Thai BL/GL series during the pandemic led to the rise of small- and medium-sized start-up production houses, initially self-financed with limited management experience. This landscape contains high exploitative working conditions and financial disputes, especially for young freelancers (Promkhuntong 2025). The low-entry access for work that pays low wages also echoes the situation of freelance film crews hired for short commercials/online projects, as payments are negotiated down due to the devaluation of digital content. The last type of internationalisation draws attention to migratory creative practitioners comprising established professionals and aspiring early-career workers who craft their projects with a sense of artistic ownership and advocacy that depend on the funding and markets outside Thailand, particularly international film festivals. With limited opportunities, workers often have multiple jobs with film/series/service production companies, cultural or educational organizations or outside screen industries altogether to sustain their livelihood. The different laboured bodies across these forms of film/media internationalisation reveal gaps in structural integration, parity of participation, uneven degrees of care and support, as well as the limits of solidarity within the broader Thai and international screen industries after the pandemic.

Fantastical Spaces and Bodies in Motion: Forging Aesthetic and Technological Connections in East Asian Coproductions

Hye Jean Chung

What are the parameters of Korean cinema? To answer this deceptively simple, multifaceted question, this paper focuses on the possibilities afforded by East Asian coproductions by making further inquiries: What kinds of transnational connections are forged by the combined efforts of nationally diverse film industries? What kinds of new genres and aesthetic forms are created in the liminal spaces across national and regional borders? How are digital technologies and networks utilized in coproduced film projects? If a Korean film production is shot on location in China, what kinds of logistical frictions arise and how can the collaborative efforts among multinational industry professionals help overcome them? This paper proposes to think through

these questions by focusing on the ambitious coproduction project, *The Restless* (Joongcheon, Jo Dong-oh, 2006). This film was produced at a time regarded as the South Korean film renaissance. During this period, the Korean film industry made rigorous efforts to expand the transnational scope of film productions. One strategy to reinforce the globalizing force of the local film industry was geographical expansion through overseas location shooting and coproductions with China. Another strategy was benchmarking Hollywood by investing in blockbuster film productions and the development of digital technologies. The large-scale fantasy film, *The Restless*, can be situated in the intersection of these joint strategies. This film is set in AD 924, at the end of the Unified Shilla Dynasty in premodern Korea, but the main setting is "Joongcheon," the netherworld between Heaven and Earth where dead souls linger for 49 days while waiting for reincarnation. An analysis of the film's production history reveals the collaborative efforts among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese talent, traces of which remain in the visual aesthetics of the film. Much of the on-location shooting took place in studios and real locations in China. The promotional material for the film accentuated the transnational aspect of location shooting and East Asian coproduction, as well as emphasizing the technological expertise and talent of Korean visual effects artists. I propose that this case study elucidates how evolving ecologies and technologies of film industries helped to formulate and visualize the expanded possibilities of transnational collaborations. This paper also examines how this film (and others) provided a visual equivalent of the mythical yet tangible idea of "East Asia" and "East Asianness" through the fantastical spaces and bodies in motion depicted in this film.

Media State Entrepreneurialism and Platformization in Location Shooting: Local Bureaucrats as Media Workers in Guangdong Province, China

Xu Hua

While much scholarly work on government intervention in China's film and media industries has focused primarily on national-level constraints and policies, the impact of local (provincial and municipal) governments on media work and creative labor within their jurisdictions has been largely overlooked. This research seeks to address this gap by investigating contemporary

developments in Guangdong province, where local authorities have undertaken substantial initiatives to establish the region as a premier destination for location shooting. I propose that these initiatives exemplify what I term “media state entrepreneurialism”: a process through which local governments build on their longstanding tradition of fusing with local economic development, especially in urban reconstruction (Wu 2024; Hsing 2010), and expand it into the film and media sectors. In this process, local governments not only reshape their institutional roles but also recast civil servants as media workers who actively support essential below-the-line activities in film and television production. Notably, in Guangdong, these interventions are coordinated via WeChat, an infrastructuralized media platform (Plantin and de Seta 2019), and are closely intertwined with the ambition to promote local tourism.

Drawing on an analysis of cultural policy documents at both national and local levels, I identify a general trend toward granting local governments greater autonomy and incentives to develop regional film and media industries. Within this context, Guangdong distinguishes itself not only by providing financial support for locally produced film and television projects but also by establishing Location Shooting Assistance Centers (LSACs) at both provincial and municipal levels. These LSACs offer cross-departmental support to film and television practitioners, including a range of below-the-line services normally supplied by local private companies, effectively transforming government personnel into a distinctive category of media workers. My fieldwork and interviews conducted at the 2025 Guangzhou Film Expo further reveal that these supports are coordinated through digital platforms embedded in WeChat Mini Programs, which function as comprehensive portals for location shooting applications, industry policies, recommended sites for scouting and location shooting, and local government services. Moreover, within these multifaceted media services, I identify the emergence of an internalized tourist gaze shaped by the rise of daka culture and film-induced tourism (Tan 2022, 376-380). Collectively, these findings shed light on how media state entrepreneurialism in Guangdong is transforming both the nature of media work and the broader dynamics of creative labor in China’s regional film and television industries.

The Potentials and Precariousness of Transnational Stardom: Chinese K-pop Idols

Meicheng Sun, Kai Khiun Liew

Since the late 1990s, K-pop (South Korean popular music) has globalized to encompass concurrently local, regional, and Western markets. Personifying this phenomenon has been the increasingly multinational makeup of K-pop idols as part of the industry's efforts to expand its talent pool and consumer reach. Beginning from the efforts of K-pop idols like BoA and TVXQ to enter the Japanese market by producing Japanese language contents in the early 2000s, within a decade, the profiles of K-pop groups have diversified to include Chinese and Japanese nationals, and even a Chinese spinoff from the K-pop group EXO (EXO-M, M means Mandarin). By the 2020s, in prominent groups like (I)dle, TWICE, and BABYMONSTER, Koreans are no longer the overwhelming majority. XG, a K-pop group based in Seoul, comprises entirely Japanese nationals. In this respect, the transnational creative labor of these artistes collectively produces heterogeneous or multi-layered celebrity images to cater to different markets.

However, behind its celebratory global image, such labor often threads on highly precarious cultural and geopolitical terrains that artistes find themselves navigating. Placed as both concurrently the members of their group, and often default representatives of their countries, K-pop artistes are often subjected to micro-scrutiny for any potentially insensitive acts that can be magnified as “national affronts”. In addition, their mere presence may also be the subject of episodic geopolitical relations.

With Chinese artistes in the K-pop industry as a case, this topic examines the precarity of labor in the increasingly globalized K-pop industry. As South Korea's neighboring country and one of the earliest adopters of K-pop, China not only provides a huge market for K-pop but also a great number of K-pop talents. Since Geng Han debuted in Super Junior in 2005, at least 72 artistes of Chinese descent have debuted as K-pop idols. In this way, studying K-pop idols of Chinese descent helps understand how the idols present their identities to balance the South Korean, Chinese, and global markets at the same time.

When Chinese K-pop idols present their Chinese identity, it not only meets the expectations of the Chinese government and their Chinese fans, but it also allows the K-pop idols' self-expression and the K-pop companies' maintenance of profits from the Chinese market. However, such presentations may bring compliments or trigger backlash in other K-pop markets. When both individual K-pop idols and global K-pop fans actively make use of various digital media and traveling opportunities for K-pop-related practices, the issue of K-pop idols' multi-layered identity presentations has become increasingly significant. Overall, the precarity and uncertainty of Chinese artistes in the K-pop industry reveal the limitations of transnational inter-Asia connectivity and the prospects of fostering a regionally more cosmopolitan regional cultural citizenship.

Production Cultures, Affect, and Regulation

Chair · Nur Kareelawati Abd Karim

Reworking the Hierarchy of Influences for Film Production: Indonesian Horror as an Empirical Anchor

Annissa Larasati

Indonesian horror is commercially central yet heavily regulated, and its long history of casting women as embodiments of fear coexists with the underrepresentation of women in key creative roles behind the camera. This paper offers a framework contribution rather than a textual reading: it develops a production lens that is adapted from media sociology to explain how off-screen structures become on-screen form. The central claim is that recurring figures such as the “vengeful woman/ghost” should be approached not only as a representational trope, but as an industrial outcome stabilized through layered decision-making across the production environment. To make these layers operate, the paper adapts Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996, 2014) hierarchy of influences model for film production and reframes it as a production-ecology approach. Films are treated as the convergence of forces that meet from development through post-production, where ideas are repeatedly negotiated rather than simply “expressed.” One practical illustration: when a woman screenwriter pitches a female protagonist as the hero in Indonesian horror, her premise is shaped by producers’ and directors’ notes, market assumptions about “what sells,” and day-to-day coordination with department heads, which often occurs within male-dominated crews. What reaches the screen is the outcome of serial negotiations that can dilute, redirect, or at times, sharpen creative intent.

Within this adapted hierarchy, individual-level influences include the backgrounds and characteristics of creative workers (gender, experience, networks), the values and beliefs they bring to work (including views of propriety and the genre), and the ethical frames they apply in practice (research and representation, on-set safety and care, and decisions around depicting gendered violence). The routine-practices level is specified through the interaction of

inputs/suppliers (scripts, IP, financing, talent agencies, and classification authorities such as Indonesia's censorship film board), processors (production units that transform inputs into a film), and audiences (distributors, platforms, festivals, critics, and audiences). These interactions generate practical rules such as genre conventions, schedules, and workflow norms that standardize production under cost and market constraints.

At the organizational level, production houses and platforms structure greenlighting, budgets, hiring, and approvals, often producing anticipatory self-censorship as workers internalize “what the organization wants.” The industry/institutional level extends beyond any single company to include regulators, unions, funding bodies, festivals and markets, critics and press, and state agencies; it is conceptualized through both an institutionalist lens (mapping relations with power holders) and a field-theoretic lens (negotiations among adjacent fields and forms of capital). Finally, the social-system level names the wider sociocultural common sense, such as gender norms, propriety, and market beliefs, that flows downward into industry rules, organizational notes, and routine story choices.

By expanding the hierarchy of influences into film-production terms, the framework provides a map of where constraints harden into “normal” practice and where filmmakers, as creative labourers, can contest, negotiate, or reroute the pathways that shape Indonesian horror.

The Cruel Optimism of Hunan TV/Mango TV in China: Program Producers and Their “Social Pain Points”

Chris K. K. Tan

This paper offers a rare glimpse into the working conditions of TV program-producers at the highly restricted Hunan TV/Mango TV (HMTV), a leading state-owned provincial satellite TV station and its online streaming platform in China. Despite the promise of social prestige and professional opportunities, HMTV producers face four problems (popularly called “social pain points”) of low status within the organization; limited work autonomy; violence of flexible work; and an inability to meet social expectations. Using Berlant’s (2011) concept of “cruel optimism” to explicate on ethnographic fieldwork data gathered from these producers prior to onset of Covid-19, we reveal how producers cope with their challenges through various strategies, such as

enduring their hardships; resigning to seek better work; and producing contents that address widespread social anguish. These producers' experiences reflect national sentiments of working precariously in a neoliberal economy. In a post-pandemic moment of even greater economic uncertainty, these experiences highlight the urgent need for equitable, stable, and humane labor in China.

Manufacturing Queer Fantasy: New Perspectives on Production Practices and Affective Economies in Asian Contexts

Eva Cheuk-Yin Li, PANG Ka Wei

This paper introduces the concept of the “queer fantasy economy” as a novel analytical framework for examining the production, representation, and reception of queer media in Asia, with the Thai Y-series drama industry as a case study. The Thai Y-series, encompassing both boys love (BL) and girls love (GL) dramas, has achieved remarkable transnational popularity, extending from Asia to Latin America since the 2010s. In the 2020s, it has rapidly evolved into a significant cultural and economic force, gaining state recognition and incorporation into Thailand's soft power strategy. In the meantime, it remains subject to recurring critiques of “queerbaiting”, the practice of suggesting queer representation without fully realising it (Brennan, 2019). This critique is particularly salient within its transnational fandoms. Yet, we argue that such critiques often overlook the Y-series' contributions to queer visibility and advocacy.

Drawing on digital ethnography and in-depth interviews with transnational Sinophone fans, this paper interrogates the applicability of this Euro-American framework to the production and representation of queer media content in Asia. We highlight how the Y-series industry's production practices draw on inter-Asia pop-cultural references, including Japanese yaoi/yuri trope and K-pop shipping culture, as well as the strategic use of khujin (imagined couples) to manufacture and commodify queer fantasy, shaping affective economies and fan engagement (Baudinette, 2023; Jirattikorn, 2025). It further explores how regulatory regimes, market imperatives, and informal labour practices intersect to create both opportunities and precarity for media workers (Promkhuntong, 2025). Far from idealising the Y-series industry, our “queer fantasy economy” framework moves beyond Euro-Americentric critiques by situating queer media

production within the specific socio-political and economic contexts of Thailand and the broader Global South. It foregrounds the dual role of Y-series as both a site of creative worldmaking and a commercial enterprise, revealing how queer fantasy operates as both affective and economic capital.

As Peter A. Jackson (2011:24) argues, “the anti-capitalist, anti-commodification arguments of some queer critics in Western liberal democracies undervalue the importance of the market as a space of queer autonomy in authoritarian Asian societies.” Fourteen years later in the seminar “Semicolonial Queer: Imperialism, Capitalism, and Media in Thai Gender and Sexual Studies,” Jackson reaffirmed this position, emphasising that commercial and digital media will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping Thai queer cultures (Jackson, 2025). By situating these dynamics within Thailand’s broader creative economy, its distinctive genderscape, and wider gender/sexual politics in East and Southeast Asia, this paper argues that the “queer fantasy economy” framework illuminates forms of affective and intimate labour that remain undertheorised in dominant Euro-American theories of creative labour and queer media representation. We argue that the queer fantasy economy fosters new forms of advocacy, visibility, and professionalisation for queer media workers, while simultaneously exposing the tensions and negotiations in the commodification of queer affect. This approach offers a nuanced lens for comparative media studies and enriches our understanding of creative labour in contemporary Asia, as well as in regions where civic space for gender and sexual diversity is constrained or diminishing.

Soft Power and Soft Regulation: Singapore Creative Communities

Juan Foo and Laura Kee

Labour precarity in the film and media workforce has become an increasingly visible concern within policy, industry, and academic discussions. In Singapore, initiatives focused on skills development, professional standards, and worker well-being reflect a growing recognition that media labour conditions require sustained attention. Despite these efforts, freelance media workers continue to experience financial, contractual, and safety vulnerabilities. This paper suggests that these challenges are best understood not as policy shortcomings, but as outcomes shaped by the way labour governance has evolved within Singapore’s media ecosystem. The

paper examines the role of soft regulation in the governance of media labour, asking whether it represents an intentional policy approach or an adaptive response to institutional mandates and industry structure. Agencies such as the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) operate within clearly defined remits that prioritise industry development, standard employment relationships, and established models of collective representation. Within a highly fragmented, project-based media industry characterised by multiple employers and freelance work arrangements, these remits shape the forms of intervention that are currently possible. The paper explores how advisory guidelines, industry-led standards, and individual capacity-building have become central mechanisms of labour governance. While these approaches offer flexibility and responsiveness, their cumulative effect is that responsibility for managing risk — including income volatility, workplace safety, and contractual security — often rests with individual workers. This is not framed as a deliberate displacement of responsibility, but as a structural consequence of how institutions, markets, and employment forms intersect. Situating Singapore within broader debates on labour precarity and collective organisation in small, state-managed media economies in Asia, the paper highlights the need for stronger alignment between policy intent, community commitment, and resource consistency. Rather than advocating for a singular regulatory solution, it argues for sustained coordination across institutions, industry stakeholders, and worker organisations. By strengthening shared frameworks and ensuring continuity of support, soft regulation may evolve from a stopgap response into a more stable foundation for improving media labour conditions.

Film Cultures, Curation, and Cinematic Labour

Chair · Gerald Sim

Before the Platform: Cinephilic Writing and Cultural Labour in Republican China

Jiahua Olivia Lin

This paper examines cinephilic writing in Republican China. While scholarship on creative labour often focuses on contemporary, digital, or Euro-American contexts, this paper brings attention to early film-related labour in China, where writing about cinema could be both a passion and a profession. Drawing on archival sources such as the Eastern Times, Pingbao, and Shenbao newspapers, I explore how writers in Republican China engaged in paid film criticism and commentary, which could supplement income or launch intellectual careers. According to my research, some writers even provided false information regarding film history. These commercial dimensions complicate the assumption that (amateur) cinephile labour is always devoted to low or unpaid work, showing instead how early media work operated within market logic.

Additionally, early cinephilic writing obscured social hierarchies by the norm of using pseudonyms and anonymous bylines. These conventions conceal the writer's gender, class, and educational background. Who had the means to write about cinema? Who could circulate as a legitimate critic? And whose perspectives were marginalised or erased?

The circulations of those writings rely on urban environments such as Shanghai teahouses, mobile cinemas, and gardens. These venues also shaped distinct viewing and writing practices that differed from Euro-American models of cinephilia based on art cinema and institutionalised film culture. Apart from treating cinema as an art form, cinephiles in Republican China responded to film as spectacle, social event, and moral discourse.

Finally, this paper aims to recognise the early Chinese cinephilic writing as a legitimate and under-examined form of media labour. Their work translates cinematic experience into discourse, negotiating the boundaries of taste, and participating in the symbolic construction of cinema and cinephilia. By highlighting this historical formation, this paper contributes to the symposium's goal

of expanding the conceptual and geographic scope of media work in Asia. I also suggest there is a genealogical connection between early film writing and today's platform-based cinephile practices. By doing so, I aim to challenge linear histories of cinephilia and media labour that centre on the West or the digital present, offering a more layered, comparative perspective on creative work in Asia instead.

Feminine Leadership and Collaborative Working Culture in the New Wave of Tibetan Nomadic Cinema: A Case Study of Desta Kyi

Wen Gu

This paper examines the filmmaking practice of Desta Kyi, an emerging Tibetan woman filmmaker, focusing on how kinship networks, community mentorship, and affective labour shape her directorial agency. A daughter of a well-known Tibetan comedian who attended a Tibetan high school in her home county of Guide before studying filmmaking at Minzu University of China in Beijing, Kyi returned to Tibet to pursue filmmaking career in Xining city by participating in the broader Amdo's nomadic filmmaking community led by the late Pema Tseden. This regional filmmaking operates within a non-industrialised film environment where production relies heavily on informal support systems. As a sole woman filmmaker within the Amdo filmmaking community, Kyi is both working within and challenging dominant male-centred authorship paradigms in Tibetan cinema by drawing on her strengths in intimate communication, patience, and care for her casts and crews, who are also her relatives. This subtle form of 'affective labour' with no monetary return but reciprocal help when needed exemplifies an alternative form of media work outside the industrial system. Grounded in interviews and semi-autobiographical ethnography along with frameworks from feminist production culture (Mayer 2017; Banks 2018) and post-authorship theory (White 2015; Maule 2008; Verhoeven 2008; Promkhuntong 2023), the paper discusses how Kyi's authorship is fostered through a shared and relational practice rather than an individualistic creative vision during the making of her 2022 feature film, *Over the Mulam River*. The paper examines how Kyi and her long-term producer, Suonam Gyal (a disciple of Kyi's father and an elder brother of Lhapal Gyal, another Tibetan director who is an apprentice of Pema Tseden), brought families and friends to support Kyi's filmmaking. At the same time, Kyi

went on to support the filmmaking of Loden, another Tibetan filmmaker, particularly by getting an elderly Tibetan non-actor to perform when he refused to participate without explanation. The paper demonstrates that Amdo's kinship and Kyi's affective labour are not only logistical necessities but also strategic responses to complex gendered relations and economic precarity. The paper also reflects on my evolving role as a researcher who became friends with the director and later a co-producer during the film's post-production and film festival participation, and on the importance of incorporating personal lives into the research, including considering Kyi's role as a single mother making a film about Tibetan children with her extended family. Altogether, the paper seeks to broaden the understanding of Tibetan cinema by offering a model for sustainable, community-driven media work in non-industrial contexts, shaped by characteristics of Tibetan nomadic culture. Situating within the broader discourse on gender, labour, and authorship, the paper offers new insights into how Tibetan women filmmakers navigate and reshape the contemporary cinematic landscape while simultaneously de-westernising the discourse around authorship and collaboration.

Cinematic diplomacy, civil society and collaborative engagements: The role of the Singapore Film Society

Teck Fann Goh

Discussions about cinematic diplomacy have largely centred on the initiatives of government-affiliated organisations in leveraging films to advance policy objectives. This paper contributes to this conversation by reorienting cinematic diplomacy from government-led strategies to civil society practices, recognising grassroots contributions as central, not peripheral, to the development of film culture and international cultural relations.

This paper examines the role of the Singapore Film Society (SFS) as a significant civil society actor in shaping Singapore's cinematic diplomacy. It argues that SFS reveals a form of collaborative cinematic diplomacy through long-term engagements with embassies, cultural institutions, film companies, and industry professionals. Such collaborations, rooted in relational ties, create alternative access to international cinema, particularly films that fall outside mainstream distribution in Singapore. Drawing on interviews with SFS professionals and a case

study of collaborative programs with their Japanese counterparts, the paper demonstrates how SFS functions as a cultural intermediary in organising film festivals, programming films, negotiating access to content, and cultivating critical public conversations. It is through working within, and often around, the constraints of funding, stakeholder needs, and licensing that SFS engages in meaningful practices of cinematic diplomacy. Highlighting SFS reframes creative work as co-produced by civic organisations whose legitimacy is rooted in their embeddedness within cultural communities. The paper, therefore, makes visible a different layer of cinematic diplomacy sustained by civil society actors whose practices of curation, mediation, and care are important, yet often overlooked aspects that make festivals diplomatically sustainable platforms for international dialogue.

Organising Sinophone Queer Screenings in the UK: Cultural Labour, Transnational Collaboration, and Diasporic Contexts

Yang Wu

This paper explores Sinophone queer film screenings in the UK as sites of fragmented and transnational cultural collaboration, focusing on how queer films' exhibitions are organised, sustained, and circulated through informal, affective, and often precarious forms of cultural labour in the diasporic context. Drawing on the framework of "Queer Asia as method" (Ge et al., 2025), this paper situates these screening practices within overlapping circuits of diasporic mobility, state censorship, and global queer imaginaries that shape the condition of Sinophone queer media work.

Using the MINT Chinese Film Festival—an emerging Sinophone and queer-focused film festival in the UK—as a provisional case study, the paper examines the archival and embodied traces of curatorial and organisational practices through which queer film screenings are coordinated across borders. Rather than treating film festivals primarily as sites of representation or memory-making, it approaches MINT as a node of transnational cultural circulation, where event organisers, curators, volunteers, and filmmakers engage in intermittent, informal, and often volunteer-based forms of cultural labour. The paper explores how these fragmented collaborations enable the circulation of films, skills, and affect while navigating constraints such

as funding precarity, limited institutional support, and shifting cultural economies.

Methodologically, the paper draws on participant observation, interviews, and archival research to examine the everyday practices of organising and experiencing queer film screenings. By foregrounding fragmented and transnational forms of collaboration in Asian and diasporic contexts, it contributes to Sinophone queer cultural studies by shifting attention from cultural productions to the labour and organisations that sustain their circulations. It also intervenes in film festival studies by challenging approaches that systematically privilege formal and institutionalised events. The paper proposes an alternative understanding of queer media work as relational and precarious, sustained through uneven and often contested networks of care, commitment, tension, and power.