Platforming East Asia: The Cultural Politics of Media from Print to Digital

Level: Upper-level Undergraduate/Graduate

Class Size: 15-30

Course Description

How has the digital revolution reshaped the creation and circulation of literature and other creative works in contemporary East Asia? Building on foundational theories of technology and media from scholars such as Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Kittler, N. Katherine Hayles, and Lev Manovich, this seminar explores how media-specific analysis has been taken up in recent scholarly work on China, Japan, and Korea, raising questions about how this research draws on classical media theories and develops locally inflected frameworks. We will examine how internet literature in China, Japanese cellphone novels, and Korean webtoons exemplify the platformization of creativity, situating these phenomena within broader conversations about social media, user-generated content, and emerging AI technologies. At the same time, we will look at earlier modes of literary production—such as newspaper serialization and mass-market anthologies—to understand what is new about digital-age platforms and how they transform relationships between authors, readers, and networks of circulation. Throughout the course, we will integrate comparative case studies and canonical theoretical frameworks to ask: What do these shifts in cultural production mean for how we study literature, technology, and society today?

Course Requirements and Grading:

Keyword Glossary –25%: From Week 2 to Week 9, you will contribute four keyword entries (one every other week) to the discussion thread on Canvas. For each assigned week, choose a keyword from the readings and provide the following: 1) a sentence or passage from the reading where the keyword appears or is central to the discussion, 2) a short paragraph (3–5 sentences) explaining the meaning of the keyword or the concept it represents, referencing the context of the course materials, and 3) a discussion question or comment about the keyword that you would like the class to consider, such as its implications, connections to other course themes, or critiques of the concept.

Multiple students may choose the same keyword, but your entry should reflect your own analysis and engagement. The class will be divided into two groups: when it is your group's turn to post, your entry is due by Monday, and when it is not your turn, you must post a substantive response (2–3 sentences) to at least one keyword entry by Wednesday. Your response can raise a question, provide further analysis, or make connections to other readings. To succeed in this assignment, choose recurring or theoretically significant terms (e.g., platformization, serialization, participatory culture) and engage thoughtfully with the readings and your peers. You will be graded on the clarity and depth of your entry, your engagement with the texts, and the quality of your comments on your classmates' contributions.

<u>Presentation –15%:</u> Over the course of the quarter, each of you will give a 10-minute in-class presentation. On your assigned week, select a creative work, artist, or content creator that aligns with that week's theme and readings. For instance, if the session focuses on Japanese cellphone novels (Week 5), you might choose a popular keitai shōsetsu; if we're discussing Korean webtoons (Week 6), you could highlight a noteworthy title from Naver or Kakao. Our overall course focus is on the history, sociology, and theory of platforms, so these presentations are your chance to engage in a closer textual or visual analysis. Feel free to draw from the assigned readings, but also feel free to be creative and bring in outside examples.

<u>Research Proposal – 50%:</u> Your final assignment for this course is to develop an 8–12 page research proposal exploring a topic related to the history or present of platform culture(s). You may choose to author this proposal individually or collaborate in groups of 2 to 3 students. The primary goal is to conceptualize a future research project that critically engages with issues raised during the course, whether focused on historical forms of platformization or current developments in digital cultural production.

Your proposal can be framed as a draft for a research paper, thesis chapter, or even a grant application. However, all proposals should include most of the following components:

1. **Project Description**: A clear overview of your project's goals, including the key research questions you aim to address and the expected outcomes.

2. **Literature Review**: A brief review of key texts, articles, and theories that establish the scholarly context for your project. This can draw from course readings (e.g., Kittler on media systems, Jenkins on convergence culture, or Bratton on planetary-scale computation) as well as independent research.

3. **Object of Analysis**: A description of the primary creative work(s), platform(s), or digital phenomena you plan to study, along with details about how you will access or acquire relevant materials (e.g., archives, web scraping, app interfaces, case studies).

4. **Research Questions and Challenges**: A summary of the main questions your project aims to answer, along with potential research challenges (e.g., accessibility of user-generated content, evolving platform interfaces, or data instability).

5. **Ethical Considerations**: A reflection on any ethical concerns your research may raise, such as preserving user anonymity, avoiding data misrepresentation, or maintaining transparency in the analysis of online communities and creators.

6. **Timeline**: A proposed timeline for completing different phases of your project, from research and data collection to drafting and final analysis. Include both short-term and long-term milestones.

<u>Attendance/Participation – 10%:</u> Attendance is mandatory and will be noted at the beginning of each class. Active and meaningful participation in discussions about the readings is expected.

Schedules

Week 1: Introduction – Situating "Platforming Culture" in East Asia

- Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (Selections)
- José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. (Introduction)
- Henry Jenkins. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press, 2006. (Introduction)

Week 2: From Print to Digital – Historical Forms of "Platformization"

- Christopher A. Reed. *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004. (Ch. 1–2)
- Friedrich Kittler. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. (Selections on the materiality of media systems)
- Ted Striphas. *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. (Introduction)
- Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. (pp. 90-100; 128-135; 180-191)

Week 3: The Digital Revolution in Publishing

- John B. Thompson. *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century.* New York: Polity, 2012. (Ch. 9 on digital disruptions)
- Lucy Suchman. *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987/2007. (Selections—thinking about user interactions)
- Marc Steinberg. *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Commercial Internet.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. (Chapter 4)

Week 4: Internet Literature in China – From Qidian to Jinjiang

- Michel Hockx. *Internet Literature in China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. (Introduction & Ch. 2)
- Jin Feng. *Romancing the Internet: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Heather Inwood. "What's in a Game? Transmedia Storytelling and the Web-Game Genre of Online Chinese Popular Fiction." Asia *Pacific: Perspectives, 11, no. 2* pp. 6-29 (2014)

Week 5: Japanese Cellphone Novels and the Keitai Shōsetsu Phenomenon

- Kelly Hansen. "Electronic Literature and Youth Culture," *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*, Routledge, 2016.

- Satomi Saito. "Narrative in the Digital Age: From Light Novels to Web Serials." *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*, Routledge, 2016.
- Gabriella Lukacs. *Invisibility by Design: Women and Labor in Japan's Digital Economy.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020. (Introduction, Chapter 5)
- Jim English. "Prestige, Pleasure, and the Data of Cultural Preference." *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (2016): 42–59.

Week 6: Korean Webtoons – Visual Culture and the Rise of Naver/Kakao Platforms

- Michelle Cho. "The Webtoon Boom in Korea: Contextualizing a Transmedia Cultural Form." In *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media,* edited by Jin Dal Yong, 75–95. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.

- Heekyoung Cho. "The Platformization of Culture: Webtoon Platforms and Media Ecology in Korea and Beyond." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 1 (February): 73-93.

- Dal Yong Jin. "Snack Culture's Dream of Big-Screen Culture." *Transmedia Storytelling in East Asia*, Routledge, 2020.

- Duffy, Brooke Erin, Catherine C. Eckert, and Amanda E. Svelnys. "The Nested Precarities of Creative Labor on Social Media." *Social Media + Society* 8, no. 3 (2022): 1–14.

Week 7: Social Media and User-Generated Content in East Asia

- Ian Condry. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. (Introduction)

- Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001. (Selections—conceptualizing "new media" forms)

- Anthony Y. H. Fung. "Fandom, Youth and Consumption in China." In *Youth Culture in Chinese Societies,* edited by Kai-wing Chow, 39–52. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015.

Week 8: Transregionalism and Global Flows – Circulations Beyond East Asia

- Koichi Iwabuchi. *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. (Introduction)

- Nissim Otmazgin. "A Tail That Wags the Dog? Cultural Industry and Cultural Policy in Japan and Korea." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (2011): 307-325.

- Nieborg and Poell. "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 11 (2018): 4275–4292.

Week 9: Platform Era: Politics, Regulation, and Censorship

- Nick Srnicek. *Platform Capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity, 2017. (Chapter 2, pp. 27–55)

- Thomas Poell, "Three Challenges for Media Studies in the Age of Platforms." *Television & New Media*, *21*(6), 650-657.

- Marc Steinberg, "From Automobile Capitalism to Platform Capitalism." *Organization Studies*, *43*(7), 1069-1090.

- Mark McGurl. *Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon*. London: Verso, 2021.

Week 10: Generative AI – Implications for Cultural Production and Criticism

- N. Katherine Hayles. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. (Selections—contextualizing AI & posthumanism)

- Kate Crawford. *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. (Introduction)

- Lev Manovich. "Automating Aesthetics: Artificial Intelligence and Image Culture," *Flash Art International*, n. 316, September–October 2017.

Week 11: Futures of Platformized Culture

- Benjamin Bratton. *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016. ("Cloud Layer," pp. 109–145)

- Xiao Liu. *Information Fantasies: Precarious Mediation in Postsocialist China.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019. (Conclusion)

- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011. (Selections—rethinking the future of software-driven culture)

Week 12: Student Presentation I

Week 13: Student Presentation II