

Winter 2025

**Media and Environment in Asia**  
EAST 477

Prof. Yuriko Furuhata

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Office hours: on Zoom Wednesday 10:00 am-11:00 am and by appointment

**Course Description**

The seminar explores the intersections of Environmental Humanities, Asian Studies, and Media Studies through a critical lens. It covers, among other topics, the layered histories of settler colonialism, imperialism, resource extraction, ecotourism, and the roles of technical and elemental media in mediating knowledge about the land, water, air, soil, and built environments.

The development and use of modern media technologies – from communication, transmission and processing of information to recording and storage of images and data – such as maps, photography, telephone, computers, and smartphones are inseparable from histories of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism in Asia and Asian diasporas. From the invisible networks of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth signals that connect our smartphones, speakers, and laptops to the energy-intensive data centers powered by fossil fuels to the toxic cycle of producing, shipping, and disposing of consumer electronics, the technologies that we call “media” today are deeply entangled with our “environments.” The accelerating pace of climate change, in particular, forces us to rethink our mediated relationship with both natural and human-made environments.

The seminar expands the parameters of “media” beyond the traditional definition of the mass media of communication, transmission, and information processing. It also approaches “Asia” more inclusively beyond three nation-states that dominate in the study of East Asia (Japan, China, and Korea) by engaging with colonial histories of migration, displacement, occupation, and kinship across the Asian continent and the islands in the Pacific with an eye toward histories of Indigenous communities and nations in the region.

**Objectives**

The seminar is designed to foster dialogues between East Asian Studies, Media Studies, and Environmental Humanities. I invite you to be attentive to the methodological, theoretical, historical, and political resonances and dissonances across some of the readings. The assignments are designed to help you develop and hone your reading, writing, research, and oral presentation skills to act effectively across a range of academic genres of performance, thinking, planning, writing and presenting.

**Readings**

Readings will be available on myCourses.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### **1) Participation**

**10 %**

Please complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to participate thoughtfully and actively in class discussion. The weight of your grade for participation will be determined holistically considering your participation in class discussions during the weekly class in person as well as conversations taking place online on myCourses. I understand that there are many types of challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic affecting each of us in a unique manner.

### **2) Weekly Reading Responses**

**20 %**

In preparation for class, please write a short one-paragraph response (approx. 200 words) to the readings assigned for the given week and post it on myCourses by **10:00 pm on Wednesday**, the night before our scheduled class meetings on Thursday. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to identify and articulate the main threads of arguments and/or key issues from the readings before you come to the seminar.

You can frame your responses around questions raised by the texts or difficulties in reading them. For instance, you may point to passages in the text that you find difficult to understand and/or wish to discuss further in class. Never hesitate to ask a question, even if you think it's basic or trivial! Your responses will be graded holistically for your ability to articulate key issues and questions across weeks.

### **3) Midterm Research Proposal for Your Final Paper**

**20%**

The aim of this assignment is to write a research proposal for the final paper.

Write a 4 pages (approx. 1000 words) research proposal for your final seminar paper, including the following components: 1) an introduction that explains how your chosen example or topic relates to the issues of media and environment covered in the seminar; 2) a thesis statement that leads to the hypothetical "argument" of your paper, organized in dialogue with **at least 2** readings from the course (required or recommended) plus 2-3 outside scholarly sources; 3) a brief summary of the two main readings from the course with which you want to engage in dialogue, and their relevance to your project.

The goal of this assignment is to develop an analytical framework and a hypothetical argument for your final paper, with preliminary research on your chosen topic/object. If you are writing a 10-12-page paper, you may have an intro (1 page), three sections of the body of your analysis (around 3 pages each), and a conclusion (1 page). The proposal should anticipate half or 2/3 of the structure of this final paper mapped, leaving some sections to be developed later.

Please choose one of the options to frame your research project.

**Option #1:** Choose an object that is *not* commonly seen as a form of media, and make a case as to why this object deserves to be analyzed as a type of media – that is, an agent or vehicle of communication, transmission, storage, and visualization by following the example of Liam Cole Young's analysis of salt. In the traditional communication studies sense, media often means mass media (e.g. cinema, telephone, radio, television, the Internet, and social

media). But, the challenge here is to think beyond this narrow definition of media to explore environmental, ecological, geological, and elemental conditions of an object that may operate as the medium or conduit of communicating and processing information, storing information, transmitting and transporting data and other things, acting like photographic surface, or filmic screens, recording and storing traces, acting like an archive, etc.

Some of these potential objects could be things such as the coal, oil, water, rare earth minerals, and metals that fuel our electricity and power our digital gadgets, or things like medicinal plants, fungi, fossils, forests, rivers, star maps that navigate sailors, or animals like homing pigeons that deliver messages.

**Option #2:** Choose a more “traditional” example of media of communication, visualization, documentation, transmission, archiving, and processing of information, such as photographs, maps, archival records, films, television, videos, and so forth, which are related to the environmental impact of colonialism, imperialism, militarization, resource extraction, mining, infrastructure development, and other forms of territorial control over the lands, seas, rivers, forests, mountains, and sky. You may choose, for example, a set of archival films related to the development of a dam, a port, an airport, a military base, etc. You may find some documentary videos that address issues of environmental justice and Indigenous rights, or, following Erin Huang’s example, look at a set of satellite or drone images used to monitor what is on the ground. The goal here is not simply to focus on the “content” of these images and records, but to analyze how they are produced in relation to the geopolitical and political conditions that affect the control over the soil, water, air, etc.

Regardless of which options you take, I also invite you to think critically about the material and environmental conditions of the object you pick in relation to the issues of geopolitics, environmental justice, settler colonialism, imperialism, racism, citizenship, class, and other structural and historical conditions in Asia and Asian diasporas.

### Tips

- Think of your chosen readings from the course as your “**interlocutors**” whose arguments, ideas, and key concepts will help you frame, conceptualize, develop, and support your own analysis. Treating these authors as your interlocutors means that you will need to introduce and explain the relevance of their ideas to your own project.
- If possible, pick an example or topic that relates to the political, economic, and sociocultural conditions in Asia and/or Asian diasporas, including the histories of colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, and migration.
- Make sure to briefly summarize the main arguments or analyses presented in the readings you chose to engage; you may build upon, supplement and/or critique their approaches. You can draw on your weekly reading responses for such summaries.
- As you summarize, analyze, or criticize ideas from other theorists, make sure to provide *full citations, including page numbers*, either in the Chicago or MLA style. Failure to provide appropriate citations will affect your grade.
- Please submit a **Word** version (not a PDF) so that I can offer my feedback using the comments function.

The proposal is due on MyCourses on **March 14 (Friday), 11:00pm.**

**4) In-Class Presentation of Your Proposal: on March 13 (Thursday) 10 %**

Prepare a 5-minute class presentation on your proposal for the final seminar paper. To facilitate this presentation, I suggest that you come up with a “pitch” and a preliminary “argument” that persuasively frames the relevance of your proposed topic/example to the course and discuss your paper generatively with course readings (see above). *Please practice and time yourself so your presentation will not go over 5 minutes.* You will then have another 5 minutes of Q&A.

The goal of this assignment is to help you develop oral presentation skills and skills to succinctly articulate your argument. If you’d like, you can share an audio-visual image (e.g. a screen capture from a video, a photograph, a map, a flow chart, etc.) or PowerPoint slides to aid your presentation in advance by posting them on the “Discussion” page on MyCourses. Feedback from the class on your presentation could be included in your Research Paper Proposal.

**5) Final Research Paper 40 %**

You will write a research paper based on the feedback you receive on your proposal and presentation. Depending on the feedback, you may modify your argument or choose different readings from the course. To further develop your proposal, you should **engage with one more reading** from the course which you did not include in the midterm proposal. These three readings will be your “interlocutors” to frame, develop, and support your analysis. You should also reference 2-3 external scholarly sources from outside the course as well.

The total length of the paper should be 10-12 pages (approx. 2500-3000 words) pages, excluding the bibliography.

- Please make sure to provide *full citations, including page numbers*, either in the Chicago or MLA style. Failure to provide appropriate citations will affect your grade.
- Please submit a **Word** version so that I can offer my feedback using the comments function.

The deadline for the final submission of your final paper via MyCourses is **April 17, 11:00 pm.**

**ChatGPT and other generative AI/Machine-Learning tools**

Since this is an upper-level seminar, I prohibit using generative AI tools for any writing assignments you do for this class. The objectives of this class are for students to learn how to read and articulate their understanding and synthesis of texts in their own words. Developing critical thinking is one of this class's main objectives; using machine learning tools like ChatGPT directly goes against this goal (and these tools are prone to hallucinations and misunderstandings of texts). Using generative AI tools such as ChatGPT in writing assignments and presenting them as your own work will be considered **plagiarism** (on which, see below). However, using spelling check and grammar correction tools such as Grammarly is permitted.

NOTES:

- (1) In accord with McGill University's [Charter of Students' Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives." (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009).
- (2) McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#)" (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information).
- (3) In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- (4) If you require accommodations due to special circumstances, challenges, or disabilities, please notify both the professor and the Office for Student Accessibility and Achievement as soon as possible. The OSAA provides a broad range of support and services to assist students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. (1010 Sherbrooke Ouest, Suite 410, 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD) (<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>)).

McGill University (Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal) is situated on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst many First Nations including the Kanien'kehà:ka of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg. We recognize and respect the Kanien'kehà:ka as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today.

*\*This is a draft schedule. Readings may change.*

## SCHEDULE

### **January 9. Introduction**

### **January 16. The Anthropocene Epoch**

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (Winter 2009):197-222.
- Kyle Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," *Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies* (Routledge, 2020), eds. Brendan Hokowhitu, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Chris Andersen, and Steve Larkin, 52-64.
- Hi'ilei Julia Hobart, "Atomic Histories and Elemental Futures across Indigenous Waters." *Media+Environment* (2021), 3.1.

#### Watch at home

- *Rise: From One Island To Another* (Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna, 2018)  
<https://vimeo.com/289482525>

### **January 23. Colonial Archives of the "Human"**

- Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 1-42.
- Tao Leigh Goffe "Guano in Their Destiny": Race, Geology, and a Philosophy of Indenture," *Amerasia Journal*, 45.1 (2019): 27-49.
- Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519. no. 7542 (2015), 171-180.

### **January 30. Geological and Elemental Approaches to "Media"**

- Liam Cole Young, "Salt: Fragments from the History of a Medium," *Theory, Culture & Society* (2020):1-24.
- Jussi Parikka, "Deep Times and Media Times: A Descent into Ecological Materiality of Technology," *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, eds. Erich Hörl (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 169-192.
- Yuriko Furuhashi, "Archipelagic Archives: Media Geology and the Deep Time of Japan's Settler Colonialism," *Public Culture* 33.3 (September 2021): 417-440.

#### Watch at home

- *Rare Earthenware* (2015) by Unknown Fields  
<https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/rare-earthenware-how-much-toxic-waste-was-produced-to-make-your-electronic-devices/>

### **February 6. Islands, Satellites, and Aerial Vision**

- Nozomi Nakaganeku Saito, "Bone and Coral: Ossuopower and the Control of (Future) Remains in Occupied Okinawa." *American Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2022): 567-589.
- Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific," *Cultural Geographies* 20.2 (April 2013): 167-184.
- Erin Y. Huang, "Ocean Media: Digital South China Sea and Gilles Deleuze's Desert Islands," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 7.2 (Fall 2021): 177-203.

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Watch at home

*Operation Castle* (1954) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfbHwj71k48>

**February 13.** Class Canceled. Please work on your midterm proposal.

**February 20. Mushrooms, Whales, and Seaweeds**

- Anna Tsing, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species: For Donna Haraway,” *Environmental Humanities* 1.1 (2012), 141-154.
- Lisa Yin Han, “Ocean Pacemakers: Cetacean Telemetry and Ocean Health.” In *Deepwater Alchemy: Extractive Mediation and the Taming of the Seafloor*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 123–154
- Melody Jue, “The Media of Seaweeds: Between Kelp Forest and Archive,” *Saturation: An Elemental Politics*, edited by Melody Jue and Rafico Ruiz (Duke University Press, 2021), 185-204.

**February 27. Transborder Circulations**

- Gyewon Kim, “Unpacking the Archive: Ichthyology, Photography, and the Archival Record in Japan and Korea,” *Positions* 18.1 (2010): 51-87.
- Eleana J. Kim, “Birds,” *Making Peace with Nature: Ecological Encounters along the Korean DMZ*. Duke University Press, 2022, 87-118.
- Medak-Saltzman, Danika. "Transnational Indigenous Exchange: Rethinking Global Interactions of Indigenous Peoples at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition." *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010): 591-615.

**March 6:** No Class. Spring Break.

**March 13.** In-class workshop to present your midterm proposals.

**March 14.** Submit your midterm proposals on MyCourses.

**March 20. Environmental Struggles on Borderlands**

- Salimjan, Guldana, “Ecotourism as Racial Capitalism: Ecological Civilisation in Settler-Colonial Xinjiang.” *Inner Asia* 25, no. 1 (2023): 91-110.
- Nimrod Baranovitch, “The 2011 Protests in Inner Mongolia: An Ethno-Environmental Perspective.” *The China Quarterly*, no. 225 (2016): 214–33.
- Alisi Telengut, “The Fourfold: Reclaiming Animism.” *Public* 35, no. 69 (2024).

**\*Guest presentation by Prof. Alisi Telengut** (Concordia University). *More information regarding Prof. Telengut’s visit, including the location, will be announced in class.*

Screening as part of Prof. Telengut’s presentation

*Baigal Nuur - Lake Baikal* (2023) 9 min

*Vitruvian Moth* (2023) 1 min

*The Fourfold* (2020) 7 min

*Tears of Inge* (2013) 4 min

*Tengri* (2012) 5 min

**March 27. Slow Violence and Radioactive Contamination**

- Daniel Cuong O’Neill, “Ecomedia in the Wild: Camera Traps, Geiger Counters, and Radioactive Boars.” *Critical Inquiry* 49, no. 3 (2023): 337-358.
- Mukherjee, Rahul. “City Inside the Oven” Cell Tower Radiation Controversies and Mediated Technoscience Publics.” *Television & New Media* 18, no. 1 (2017): 19-36.
- Rob Nixon, “Introduction,” *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard UP, 2011), 1-44.

**April 3. Smog and Water Scarcity**

*\*We will use the second half of the seminar for a wrap-up session*

- Mél Hogan, "Data Flows and Water Woes: The Utah Data Center." *Big Data & Society* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1-12.
- Weixian Pan, “Under the Dome: Un-engineering Digital Capture in China’s Smog.” *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4, no. 1-2 (2017): 13-32.

**April 10. In-class Workshop on Final Research Papers.**

**April 17. Submit your final papers on MyCourses.**