

The Return of the Pre-Digital World?

Digitally Mediated Nostalgia in Korea

Program

27 August 2026
THURSDAY

9:15-9:30 – Welcome

Dean, Faculty of Arts
Head of Department
Organizer

Session 1

Chair: Andreas Schirmer

9:35-10:05

Olga Fedorenko

The Inconvenient Bookstore: Newtro Culture as Postdigital Nostalgia at Seoul Book Bogo

Seoul Book Bogo (서울책보고, also known as Seoul Book Repository), a cultural space opened in 2019 in a renovated warehouse stocked with 130,000 second-hand books, presents itself as an “inconvenient bookstore”—one where the pleasure of searching, the haptic encounter with worn volumes, and the atmosphere of accumulated print culture are explicitly foregrounded as its value proposition. Its soaring arched bookshelves, meanwhile, have become a fixture of Seoul’s social media landscape, circulating widely as backdrops for atmospheric photography. This paper reads Seoul Book Bogo as a paradigmatic space of postdigital culture, where the newtro aesthetic is produced through the interplay of physical encounter and its digital remediation, generating what this paper frames as postdigital nostalgia.

Drawing on postdigital media theory and urban ethnographic observation, I suggest that Seoul Book Bogo stages curated nostalgia for the analog: a choreographed encounter with second-hand books in which their textual function is largely incidental, and their material, sensory, and spatial properties—texture, scarcity, historical residue—are the primary objects of engagement and affect. The space’s self-described “inconvenience” is itself a postdigital gesture, aestheticizing the friction of pre-digital search in an era of instant digital retrieval.

At the same time, an analysis of the bookshop’s digital traces—in social media and the blogosphere—reveals that the visibility, legibility and desireability of this analog encounter is achieved to a great extent by digital mediation. The hashtag #서울책보고 yields over 14,000 Instagram images, many of which feature the shop’s iconic tunnel arches and book-filled walls. Digital remediation is crucial to

constituting the newtro sensibility that makes such spaces culturally intelligible and commercially viable, circulating images, affects, and meanings that transform a warehouse of old books into a site of postdigital nostalgia—the longing not so much for a past temporality as for an experience imagined as normalized in that temporality and perceived as lacking in the contemporary digitally saturated media ecology. This, the paper suggests, is what the newtro aesthetic is fundamentally about.

This case study contributes to the conference’s inquiry into digitally mediated nostalgia in South Korea, and more broadly to theorizing postdigital materiality: how analog media forms persist and gain new cultural value through aesthetic, spatial, and performative resignification in digital environments. Seoul Book Bogo suggests that nostalgia for the material culture of “pre-digital” reading is among the signature cultural productions of the digital age itself.

Olga Fedorenko is Professor of Anthropology at Seoul National University. She received her PhD from the East Asian Studies Department at the University of Toronto and previously taught at New York University. A scholar of Korean Studies and media anthropology, she examines how media-related practices reflect broader sociocultural transformations in contemporary South Korea. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *positions: asia critique*, *City & Society*, *Journal of Korean Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *InterAsia Cultural Studies*. Her monograph *Flower of Capitalism: South Korean Advertising at a Crossroads* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2022) analyzes the tensions between advertising freedoms and obligations in post-millennial South Korea. Her current projects include an investigation of analog media’s resurgence in highly digitized South Korea, questioning conventional narratives of technological progression and exploring how material media create distinct social spaces and experiences.

10:10–10:40

Ksenia Chizhova

Letterforms Cursive and Square: Korean Typography, Nostalgia, Archive, 1970s-2020s

What are the most representative letterforms of the Korean script? This question had preoccupied Korean calligraphers and typeface designers in the long twentieth century. The main contenders are the curvy letterforms of the palace-script (kungch’e) developed among elite and royal women in the seventeenth century and the square letterforms of the mid-fifteenth century Korean publications, such as the *Correct Sounds to Instruct the People* (Hunmin chŏngŭm).

Both became prototypes for the most widely used Korean typefaces. During the typographic developments of the early twentieth century, the angular typeface (called “Kodik” or “Gothic” in Korean) became associated with the typographic modernity, brought to Korea through Japan. During the 1930s, this typeface started to dominate the printed pages of such newspapers, as *Tonga ilbo* and *Chosŏn ilbo* because it achieved better harmony with the main Sinographic typeface that was produced in Japan and was then commonly in use.

This momentum was, however, reversed in the 1970s when Korean typeface designers, especially those who belonged to the new Hangeul generation, wanted to turn back to the earlier, cursive letterforms of the Korean script and use them as specimens for shaping indigenous typographic technology. This was a form of cultural nostalgia, a desire to reshape an indigenous typographic history that hitherto was dominated by the Japanese technology and Japanese letterforms.

This paper traces the tensions between these competing formal paradigms and situates them within the broader cultural history of Korean typography. It concludes by examining the archival afterlives of the work of Ch’oi Chŏngho (1916-88), Korea’s most influential twentieth-century type designer. His hand-drawn prototypes for cursive typefaces—sentimental, material tokens of the presence of a human designer in the largely digital typographic culture of the present—have recently become objects of renewed scholarly and curatorial attention. Yet the uneven survival and dispersal of these materials—many of which are preserved in Japan rather than Korea—reinscribe the very colonial entanglements that this typographic turn sought to overcome.

Ksenia Chizhova is an Associate Professor of Korean Literature in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University. After becoming interested in seventeenth-century Korean calligraphy, she is now working on a book project provisionally entitled *Women in the Media History of the Korean Script: 1600–2000*. This book traces the technoaesthetic history of the Korean script and the influence of the palace script at its crucial nodes: in modern calligraphy, mass mobilization art, typography and contemporary graphic design.

[10:40–11:00 — Coffee break]

11:00–11:30

Kenichiro Higuchi

Dialects in Digital Korea: The Character of Linguistic Nostalgia

This paper examines the shifting status of dialects in South Korea in relation to digitally mediated nostalgia. In recent years, dialects have gained increasing visibility in media and social platforms, where they are often recontextualized as cultural resources. At the same time, certain linguistic varieties, such as Jeju, are framed as endangered and placed under regimes of preservation. This divergence cannot be explained by linguistic features or speaker numbers alone, but is better understood in relation to language policy, historical experience, and media environments. South Korean language policy has long centered on the standardization of a national language, particularly in the post-liberation period. This framework positions the standard language within a normative regime, while dialects are increasingly managed within a cultural regime. This distinction shapes not only domains of usage but also how different linguistic forms relate to the past and whether they can become objects of nostalgia.

This paper focuses on the contrast between Jeju and mainland dialects such as those of Gyeongsang and Jeolla. Jeju, often regarded as a distinct language, has undergone rapid decline and is primarily treated as an object of preservation. By contrast, Gyeongsang and Jeolla dialects are widely disseminated through media and social platforms, where they function as markers of regional identity and character. To account for this divergence, the paper approaches nostalgia as a process through which certain linguistic forms are recognized as belonging to the past. In digitally mediated environments, not all circulating forms equally acquire this “pastness.” Gyeongsang and Jeolla dialects can evoke recognizable scenes and personae even in fragmentary use, making them readily reinterpreted as signs of a shared past. By contrast, linguistic forms that depend heavily on contextual knowledge or are embedded in socially restricted domains are less easily recontextualized, and therefore less likely to be incorporated into circuits of nostalgic recognition. Jeju provides a salient example of this tendency. Through this comparison, the paper investigates how the conditions under which languages become meaningful as “past” are shaped by policy frameworks, historical trajectories, and media environments.

Kenichiro Higuchi is a professor of Korea Studies and Comparative Culture Studies at Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Nagoya, Japan. His research focuses on language policy, historical sociolinguistics, and cultural resource studies, with particular attention to South Korea during the period of U.S. military government (1945–1948). His work examines the gap between institutional frameworks and linguistic practices, as well as the limits and effects of attempts to regulate language use. More recently, he has explored how language is reconfigured as a cultural resource and how certain linguistic forms become visible or invisible in contemporary mediated environments.

[Lunch]

Session 2

Chair: Olga Fedorenko

13:15–13:45

Tetiana Vodianytska

K-Drama Universe and Curated Past, Adulting and Second Chances Through the Prism of Nostalgia in *Hospital Playlist*

This paper investigates how nostalgia for the 80s–2000s is represented in the *Hospital Playlist* television series. *Hospital Playlist* presents us with a new kind of protagonists: 40-year-old professionals who gained enough social standing in the hierarchical Korean society to turn their attention not only to work, but to pleasure. This sets the framework for nostalgia: five doctors resurrect a band in which they played while at medical school, which enables them to relive the emotion in a contemporary setting where they have more agency and also have a grounding experience that helps navigate challenges of the midlife.

Hospital Playlist is anchored in the “here and now”, the “here” being South Korea and the “now” being the years in which two seasons of the series are set, 2019–2021. Anchoring is achieved in particular through references to other cinematic works popular at the time, such as *The Parasites* or *Squid Game*. These references place characters in the same cultural context as the viewers. *Hospital Playlist* also exists in the universe populated by other popular K-drama pieces that are by themselves nostalgic, for instance, the *Reply* series (through minor connecting characters, guest starred by the same actors).

Notably though, *Hospital Playlist* does not sufficiently reflect the circumstances of the COVID pandemic, which is surprising for a medical series, which leads us to the conclusion about the curated nature of its “here and now”. The past as presented in the series is also curated, as the university years are shown idealistically as the “good old times” that forged lasting bonds between the characters. Exercising their nostalgia through music, the protagonists maintain the connection with their true values and true selves, while also enjoying the confidence they have gained over the years. This paper contributes to scholarship on contemporary Korean television culture, portrayals of friendship in popular culture, and nostalgia as a genre.

Tetiana Vodianytska is a Ukrainian Korean studies scholar and interpreter working with English and Korean. She holds an MA in Korean Linguistics from Mokpo National University in South Korea and an MA in Korean and English Translation and Interpretation from Kyiv National Linguistic University in Ukraine. She currently teaches Korean language, interpreting, and translation at Kyiv National Linguistic University, works as a freelance interpreter, and is pursuing doctoral research.

13:50–14:20

Bonnie Tilland

Nostalgia for Pre-digital Mothering in South Korean Television Dramas *Reply 1988* and *When Life Gives You Tangerines*

In the late 2010s, after the so-called “feminism reboot” in South Korea, exhausted new mother Kim Jiyoung stared blankly from movie screens to meet the gaze of exhausted South Korean women audiences, before becoming yet another popular Korean Wave media example overseas. The film *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (2019) was based on the best-selling biographical novel (2016) of the same name by Cho Nam-joo, which treats “everywoman” Kim Jiyoung’s postnatal depression as a complex manifestation of the cumulative effects of gender discrimination over decades in South Korean society. It is the experience of becoming a mother herself that forces Jiyoung to confront gender equality. While the book and film were criticized by some for promoting anti-natalist feminism in a country struggling with an ultra-low birthrate, the story takes aim at patriarchal society rather than the institution of motherhood. The film in particular joins other recent South Korean film

and television examples that move backwards and forwards through the last sixty years of South Korean motherhood ideology in order to grapple with how to heal the family, and by extension, the self.

While figures of the sacrificing, scheming, and strategizing mother appear in numerous film and televisual texts, this paper examines nostalgia for eras of motherhood gone by in popular television dramas *Reply 1988* (tvN, 2015) and *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (Netflix, 2025). *Reply 1988* is set in a Seoul residential neighborhood in the 1980s, and though it is about teenage friends and neighbors it is equally about their families, and in particular about the close-knit community of mothers. *When Life Gives You Tangerines* is set largely during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s on Jeju Island and Seoul, and devotes considerable attention to relationships between mothers and daughters during South Korea's rapid development and urbanization period. These recent television dramas go beyond simply a retro aesthetic to engage with changes in mothering ideologies and the generation gap this creates. Pre-digital mothering during South Korea's developmental regime is represented as full of hardship and sacrifice, but while "education fever" links mothering then and now, pre-digital mothering is shown to be less intensive in terms of everyday management of children's schedules and multi-tasking between Kakao groups to strategize over educational choices. This paper argues that after a shift between the single-minded *ch'imat param* (skirt wind) of the PTA mother in the developmental decades, the paradigm shifted to "management mother" multitasking, which currently drives an impulse to rediscover pre-digital modes of mothering and create a "sensory mothering" model. Sensory mothering is rooted in the embodied experiences of mother and child, and nostalgic media about mothering helps access these experiences and feelings. This paper examines nostalgic media as sensory mediator both through close readings of the two dramas and analysis of interviews with twenty-first century South Korean mothers about generational differences in mothering and mothering ideology.

Bonnie Tilland is a university lecturer in Korean Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands. Her research has focused on gender and family, media, and the senses and affect in South Korea. She received her PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Washington and was previously associate professor in the East Asia International College at Yonsei University Mirae campus. She has published in *Korean Studies*, *Acta Koreana*, *The Journal of Korean Studies*, and *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, among others. She is working on a book tentatively titled *Sensible Mothering: Shifting Maternal Subjectivity in South Korea*.

[Coffee break]

Session 3

Chair: Joshua Van Lieu

14:45–15:15

Sunyoung Yang

Do Algorithms Dream of Curated Pasts?

Platformed Nostalgia and Subject Formation in Hyperconnected Culture

This paper examines how algorithmically organized social media feeds shape nostalgia not simply as a private emotion, but as a platform-conditioned mode of memory and affect. Rather than treating nostalgia as an individual longing for the past, I ask how non-human actors, especially algorithms embedded in platform logics of ranking, recirculation, and recommendation, actively participate in producing the past as a desirable, emotionally legible object in the present. In this sense, nostalgia is not only felt by human users; it is also formatted, amplified, and distributed through computational

systems that govern visibility and repetition. Platforms such as Facebook and TikTok offer especially visible examples: from Facebook's explicitly engineered "Memories" feature to TikTok's #nostalgiacore ecosystems, algorithmic systems do not simply store the past but selectively resurface, aestheticize, and intensify it as a socially shareable affective formation.

Focusing on the recirculation of past worlds across contemporary platforms, I examine how social media feeds in South Korea turn archival fragments into shared atmospheres of longing. Through selective resurfacing and aesthetic remediation, these fragments reappear not as stable historical records but as highly legible, affectively charged signs of another way of inhabiting time. What circulates, then, is less the past itself than a platform-readable image of slowness, tangibility, and diminished saturation, one that acquires force precisely in contrast to the pressures of hyperconnected life.

Building on work in digital memory and nostalgia studies, this paper argues that algorithmic recirculation complicates the idea of the autonomous remembering subject. If feeds increasingly structure what returns, what sticks, and what becomes emotionally resonant, then human actors appear less as sovereign agents of memory than as subjects formed within infrastructures of computational selection. I ask what kinds of subjectivities emerge under these conditions, and how platformed nostalgia for imagined past worlds both registers discontent with the present and helps shape imagined futures. In this sense, the past functions not only as an object of longing, but as a mediated critique of the present and a speculative horizon for rethinking digital life.

Sunyoung Yang is a cultural anthropologist and Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona. She earned her PhD. in Anthropology from the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on the social impact of the Internet and emerging technologies, especially in South Korea and the Asia-Pacific region, with particular attention to youth, labor, and gender. A founding member of the Haja Center (Seoul Youth Factory for Alternative Culture), she has also contributed to regional Internet initiatives through Asia Pacific Next Generation (APNG), the Internet Society, and participation in the Internet Governance Forum. Her long-term project is to conduct ongoing participant observation and write the real-time social history of contemporary technological transformations, including the Internet, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. Her first book, *Online Gender Wars Made in Korea: Anonymous Online Communities, Misogyny, and Feminist Activism*, is forthcoming with Routledge.

15:20–15:50

Yoon Walker

Nostalgia Without Experience: Prosthetic Memory, Digital Media, and the Re-production of the Pre-digital Past in Contemporary South Korea

In contemporary South Korea, young Koreans in their twenties and thirties are increasingly drawn to cultural forms and material objects from decades they never lived through. Television dramas such as the Reply series, the "halmeonieal" trend blending grandmother-era aesthetics with millennial sensibilities, and the revival of digital cameras among Generation Z all point to a striking cultural phenomenon: the enthusiastic re-production of a past that is not one's own. Far from being a marginal or subcultural tendency, this retro turn has become a defining feature of mainstream popular culture, circulating widely across digital platforms and consumer markets alike.

This paper examines this phenomenon through the lens of Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory - memories acquired through media exposure rather than lived experience - arguing that the contemporary digital media environment has fundamentally transformed both how such memories are formed and how they are subsequently circulated. While Landsberg's original framework, developed in the context of twentieth-century mass media such as film and television, emphasized the consumption of artificially acquired memories, this paper contends that platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have introduced a crucial new dimension: the active re-production and recirculation of prosthetic memories by those who never experienced the original. In this sense, digital media does not merely transmit the past — it enables its users to become co-producers of a shared, if imagined, collective memory.

Drawing on three case studies: the *Reply* drama series as a site of narratively mediated memory, the halmeonieal trend as an aesthetic and commercial re-appropriation of an earlier generational sensibility, and the revival of early digital cameras as a material and sensory re-enactment of the pre-smartphone era, this paper explores how prosthetic memory operates across different cultural registers. In doing so, it considers what this phenomenon reveals about the relationship between media, memory, and generational identity in contemporary South Korea, and why the pre-digital past has become such a compelling imaginative resource for a generation that has known only the digital present.

Yoon Walker is a PhD candidate in Korean Studies at SOAS University of London. Her research focuses on human rights and public memory building in contemporary Korean society. Alongside her primary research, she is developing a new line of inquiry into the cultural dimensions of memory and commemoration, with a particular interest in how media and popular culture shape collective remembering in South Korea. This paper represents her first foray into the study of nostalgia and retro culture as sites of memory production, bringing her background in historical approaches to public memory to bear on contemporary phenomena in Korean popular culture. She is especially interested in the intersections between generational identity, digital media, and the re-production of the past in everyday cultural practice.

[Coffee break]

Session 4

Chair: Andreas Schirmer

16:10–16:40

Patrick Vierthaler

Nostalgia for the Dictator? Right-Wing Whitewashing of the Autocratic Past in Digital South Korea

The late 2010s–early 2020s mark not only a time in which South Korean soft power — popular culture and consumer electronics — reached new global highs. Ever-increasing inequality, urbanization, economic concentration, and record-low birthrates laid bare a society polarized not only along regional and generational lines, but increasingly also by gender. In this context, South Korea’s contemporary history has been both glorified as the “Miracle of the Han River” and excoriated as “Hell Joseon.”

Political scientists and historian alike have highlighted the 1990s–2000s as a transitional period from autocracy to dictatorship. According to standard literature, a two-time regime change is usually seen as proof for successful democratization. Despite this, reactionary right-wing politics intensified just around this moment in time. While Park Geun-hye, the daughter of former dictator Park Chung-hee, was eventually ousted from office following a corruption scandal, this did not result in the (prematurely heralded) death of the old establishment. Instead, a sharp turn rightwards occurred after 2017, culminating in Yoon Seok-yeol’s martial law declaration of December 2024. For almost two years, the major conservative party has since failed to fully distance itself from this attack on democracy.

In a decade in which cultural productions such as the *Reply* series have fed a nostalgia for an allegedly “simple” past, right-wing efforts to narrate the autocratic era as a period of stability and economic growth have also intensified. This presentation seeks to juxtapose this apparent discrepancy of “Global Korea” and a nostalgia for the Cold War past. To map the particularities and degree of right-wing influence on society forty years after democratization, this presentation focusses on two controversies during this period: the Chun Doo-hwan memoirs (2017), and the “Rhee-Park School”, a right-wing afterschool care that sparked controversy in 2024. Through juxtaposing right-

wing revisionism with cultural nostalgia, the presentation will provide a picture of a society trapped between celebrating its achievements and overcoming its past.

Patrick Vierthaler is Assistant Professor for contemporary history at Kyoto University Hakubi Center of Advanced Research / Institute for Research in Humanities. His research focusses on social constructions of the autocratic past in democratic South Korea, particularly the relationship between academia, mass media, politics, and memory activists. His recent publications have dealt with the Korean War in national history museums (*Shirin*, 2026), August 15 in South Korean commemoration culture (*Korea Journal*, 2025), or the memorialization of Syngman Rhee (*Korean Studies*, 2024) and Kim Koo (forthcoming). His work on the biography of Francesca Donner-Rhee (2020) has received wide attention. He is currently preparing a monograph (in Japanese) to be published with Nagoya University Press.

16:45–17:15

Juliette Schwak

The emergence of post-growth nostalgia in contemporary South Korea

Do South Koreans express discontent with economic development, and do they build alternative futures? Korea has experienced accelerated modernization, as it has transformed from an impoverished rural society into a leading economy in a few decades only. The limits of this development are acute: hypercompetition, high suicide rates, low fertility rates, and an overall social crisis of late industrialization. In parallel, expressions of nostalgia for the pre-modern past have flourished in consumer practices and popular culture in Korea. They are mostly contemplated as a cultural phenomenon but if nostalgia expresses regret towards a pre-capitalist past, it also belongs to the field of discontent with capitalism and can shape citizens' future mobilizations. Therefore, where, how and why is nostalgia expressed in contemporary Korea? And what are its political economic consequences, in and beyond Korea? Combining sociological and political economic frameworks, I document the expressions of nostalgia among Korean citizens and analyse if and how nostalgia can be a source of mobilization. Through a combination of survey research and semi-structured interviews, this project explores the role played by nostalgia in mobilizing for alternative futures. This paper is part of an ERC Starting Grant comparative project on post-growth nostalgia in contemporary East Asia.

Juliette Schwak is Associate Professor at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, and Principal Investigator of the ERC Starting Grant project PENEIA, "Longing for an Economic Past? Political economic nostalgia in East Asian societies" (2026-2031).

[Dinner]

28 August 2026

FRIDAY

Session 5

Chair: Joshua Van Lieu

9:45–10:15

Lee Chae-Eun

The Paradoxical Coupling of High-Tech Bodies and Analog Souls: The Digital Nostalgia of Virtual Idol PLAVE

“Why does the most futuristic technology gain narrative vitality only when coupled with the most nostalgic music?” — PLAVE, one of the most prominent boy groups in the contemporary K-pop scene, is a “virtual idol” group utilizing state-of-the-art motion capture technology. Their virtual bodies are realized through precision motion and facial capture sensors, cameras, and specialized suits. Built on the Unreal Engine—typically used in high-end gaming and filmmaking—their proprietary system has seen continuous upgrades in real-time rendering since their debut. Intriguingly, despite this futuristic veneer, PLAVE’s music is characterized by a “retrospective” orientation. They evoke the cultural affect of South Korea’s late 1990s to early 2010s—the era of first and second-generation K-pop. Diverging from the current trend of using English lyrics for global appeal, PLAVE focuses on Korean lyrics to manifest a distinctly local emotionality. This nostalgia for early Korean pop culture extends beyond music into their narrative world-building. PLAVE’s visual aesthetics follow the early 2000s Korean girls’ comics (sunjeong manhwa), recreating the idealized image of a “first love” in a 3D space. Their representative tracks feature time-traveling narratives where members seek to “save” one another by returning to the past. Objects like public phone booths, old bus stops, and CRT monitors serve as direct metaphors for nostalgia. Their promotional content parodies variety shows from the 2000s, and their reliance on “radio-style” communication evokes a sense of “slow waiting” and analog intimacy. PLAVE stands as a definitive case of “analog memory restoration through high-tech graphics.” As a fifth-generation K-pop group, they embody a powerful paradox: using futuristic technology to experience a return to the roots of K-pop. This paradox offers a “restoration of memories” for the 30-40 age cohort and a “retro freshness” for the 10-20 generation. By re-translating past cultural affects through advanced technology, PLAVE acts as a bridge between generations. Their success suggests that the most artificial technology can become a paradoxical gateway for the most natural humanism. PLAVE proves a universal cultural axiom: while the Form (Technology) progresses, the Essence (Storytelling) returns.

Lee Chae-Eun is a senior researcher at the Humanities Research Institute of Sogang University. Her research focuses on Korean performance studies, with particular attention to pansori, cognitive narratology, and the transformation of traditional Korean performance in contemporary media and popular culture. She received her PhD with a dissertation examining pansori as a composite art form from the perspective of embodied and semiotic processes. Her work explores the continuities and recontextualizations linking traditional performance genres with contemporary forms such as K-pop and street dance. Her recent publications include studies of the adaptation of “Sarang-ga” from Chunhyang-ga in post-2000s K-pop and the recontextualization of traditional culture and arts in Bumsup’s Dream Boundary (몽경).

10:20–10:50

Jeremiah Estela Magoncia

Newtro Masculinity: Digital Mediation and the Reconfiguration of Korean Male Aesthetics

In recent years, South Korean popular culture has witnessed a marked proliferation of retro and “newtro” aesthetics that reanimate the material and visual culture of the late twentieth century. While nostalgia has often been theorized as a mode of cultural memory (Boym, 2001), its contemporary manifestations in Korea are inseparable from the infrastructures of digital mediation that enable the continuous circulation, curation, and recombination of the past. This paper examines how such digitally mediated nostalgia operates within the visual construction of masculinity in K-pop, a domain where gendered aesthetics are highly stylized and globally circulated.

Drawing on qualitative visual discourse analysis, the study analyzes selected music videos by SHINee, NCT U, SEVENTEEN, CIX, and CORTIS. These cases foreground retro aesthetics through references to pre-digital material culture, including 1980s–1990s fashion, analog visual textures (e.g., VHS effects, film grain), and objects such as cassette players and film cameras. The analysis focuses on four dimensions: fashion and styling, cinematography, analog objects, and modes of masculine performance.

Theoretically, the paper situates these representations at the intersection of nostalgia studies and gender theory. Following Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, the study argues that K-pop visual culture predominantly mobilizes a reflective mode, wherein the past is stylized rather than faithfully reconstructed. At the level of gender, it engages with Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, suggesting that retro aesthetics enable the reconfiguration of dominant masculine norms into softer, more affectively expressive forms. Furthermore, drawing on platform theory (e.g., Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck), the paper emphasizes how digital infrastructures, particularly YouTube and social media, facilitate the circulation and recontextualization of nostalgic imagery, transforming it into a flexible aesthetic resource.

The paper proposes a typology of newtro masculinity encompassing reconstructed, stylized, and fragmented forms. It argues that digital media do not simply preserve the pre-digital past but actively reassemble it, enabling new configurations of masculine identity that are both historically referential and distinctly platform-native.

Jeremiah Estela Magoncia is a faculty member at Ateneo de Manila University, where he teaches Korean language, Korean Studies, and media production. His research engages with Korean popular culture, digital media, and visual culture, with particular focus on masculinity, aesthetics, and platform-mediated cultural practices. His current work examines the global circulation of K-pop and the role of digital platforms in shaping cultural identities and audience engagement. He has presented research at international conferences, including work on global pop groups and digital pedagogy in Korean language education.

[Coffee break]

11:15–11:45

Emily Hall

If I Can’t Find Tteokbokki, I Will Invent It! — Ersatz and Motivational Nostalgia in Fantasy Isekai Webtoons

Ersatz nostalgia, coined by Arjun Appadurai, is a manufactured longing for a past not personally experienced or a time that never truly existed, which often serves as a refuge from the stress of the present and a longing for a simpler era. This concept is illustrated in the popular fantasy subgenre of Isekai (Isegye)—narratives where contemporary protagonists are reincarnated, transmigrated, or portalled into another world. These webtoons often feature an overworked, lonely, and abused Korean protagonist, who represents the disconnection, anxiety, and pressures of modern life. Through transportation or reincarnation, they are conveyed into an ahistorical quasi-European or East Asian setting within the Joseon Dynasty period (1392-1897) where modern technology is non-

existent or limited, often replaced by magic. While still facing story-driven hardships, the characters experience wealth, power, and companionship often seen as unattainable in the modern world. The most traditional sense of nostalgia, as coined by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688, is expressed in the desire for return, a homesickness for one's motherland. While some stories feature characters who wish to return and others wishing escape, this is primarily reflective of the toxicity of the characters' backstory in Korea and not on Korea as a country. Instead, Korean characters often display nostalgia for Korean cultural products, technology, food, friends, and sometimes family that can vary from wistful to extreme melancholia. Nonetheless, rather than viewing this loss of homeland or its desirable features as an unrecoverable event, most Isekai protagonists actively attempt to return to or recreate the desired items or relationships. Thus, nostalgia can inspire the protagonist to introduce a close replicant of contemporary Korean culture or technology for a business or to gain favor with key characters, which also results in immediate praise, wealth, and popularity for the protagonist—leading to a greater sense of belonging. In this paper, I argue that the Isekai journey represents a form of ersatz nostalgia, which can act as a refuge from modern life for the protagonist and readers alike. Furthermore, I explore how nostalgia, as a motivational spirit, provides a space for the protagonist to turn the ersatz experience felt in the bittersweet feeling of nostalgia into a real experience for the character, while reinforcing and spreading a shared Korean cultural connection between the reader and protagonist.

Emily Marie Anderson Hall (PhD, History, University of Washington) is a lecturer on Korean pop culture, manhwa, literature, and history. Currently, she is an independent scholar residing in Malta while preparing her dissertation, "Kim Sŏnghwan's 'Mr. Kobau': Editorial Cartoons as Genre Weapons in South Korean Search for Democracy, 1945-1972," for publication.

[Lunch]

Session 6

Chair: Kyou-Dong Ahn

13:15–13:45

Eunyoung Song

Retrotopia in the City: Nostalgia and Urban Retro in Seoul

This presentation examines the emergence of the urban retro phenomenon in South Korea, focusing on how the spaces of Seoul from the 1960s and 1970s are summoned, reinterpreted, and revalorized in contemporary culture. Often described as "Newtro," the material landscapes of the city—aging alleyways, industrial districts, and modest residential neighborhoods—have emerged as the most compelling retro images, particularly through social media. These spaces enable a uniquely Korean mode of retro in which the past is sensorially experienced within the contemporary metropolis, transforming retro consumption into a marker of urban sophistication.

Focusing on neighborhoods such as Euljiro, Mullae-dong, Mangwon-dong, and Seongsu-dong, this presentation analyzes how districts formed during early industrialization have been reimagined as cultural hotspots over the past decade. Euljiro's printing alleys, rebranded as "Hipjiro," Mangwon-dong's "Mangridan-gil," and the industrial landscapes of Mullae-dong and Seongsu-dong exemplify this shift. The discovery of "Instagrammable" urban scenes in these spaces constitute a collective practice that transforms formerly neglected environments into sites of aesthetic and economic value, signaling a broader reconfiguration of the relationship between past and present in urban experience. To explain this phenomenon, the presentation draws on the concept of nostalgia, particularly as theorized by Svetlana Boym, alongside the notion of retrotopia.

proposed by Zygmunt Bauman. For older generations, retro urban spaces evoke lived memories of industrialization, communal solidarity, and economic growth. The 1960s and 1970s represent a formative period, and retro operates through the selective restoration of a relatively recent and familiar past, offering emotional stability amid ongoing social change.

For younger generations, retro produces a form of “virtual nostalgia”—an affective attachment to a past not directly experienced. Through curated urban environments and their circulation on social media, these spaces become aesthetic resources. This reflects a broader shift in the valuation of Korea’s modernization: urban remnants once dismissed as outdated are now reinterpreted as embodying a modest and authentic beauty, often framed as the “traces of time.” Retro thus becomes a medium through which younger generations negotiate national history and arrive at a form of cultural self-affirmation.

And urban retro must be understood within the dynamics of contemporary modernity. Rather than a simple return to the past, it operates through an interplay between the cutting-edge and the obsolete. Practices of remodeling—selecting and recombining fragments of the past with contemporary sensibilities—demonstrate how “Newtro” functions as a form of remake that repurposes the past in alignment with present cultural demands.

Finally, the presentation situates urban retro within the framework of “retro-gentrification,” emphasizing its entanglement with commercialization and spatial restructuring. Drawing on Sharon Zukin’s analysis of gentrification as a struggle over urban authenticity, this study examines how the aestheticization of aging neighborhoods generates new cultural and economic value. While retro-oriented regeneration challenges wholesale demolition, it is also driven by tourism and capital accumulation, raising critical questions about commodification and displacement.

By integrating nostalgia, retrotopia, and gentrification, this presentation argues that urban retro in Seoul is a complex socio-spatial process that simultaneously produces authenticity and serves as a strategy of urban branding and economic development.

Eunyoung Song is currently a research fellow at Yonsei University, Seoul. She has received her PhD in Modern Korean Literature and Urban History from Yonsei University. She is the author of *서울 탄생기: 1960-70년대 문학으로 본 현대도시 서울의 사회사* [*The Origin of Seoul as a Modern City: Its Social History through 1960s and 1970s Korean Literature*] (Seoul: Purūn Yōksa, 2018). Her research examines Korean urban, youth, and popular culture from the 1960s to the 1990s, integrating approaches from literary studies, urban history, and cultural studies. She has published on these topics in peer-reviewed academic journals.

13:50–14:20

Tin Nok Li

Not a Just Image, and Not Just an Image: Photography and Social Meaning in Korea's Instant Photo Booths

Despite the prevalence of smartphones with advanced camera technology, instant photo booths remain a remarkable part of the popular culture in South Korea, particularly among the MZ generation in trendy urban neighborhoods such as Hongdae and Seongsu in Seoul. Commonly known as “Life Four-Cut” (insaeng ne-k’öt), these booths are found in abundance throughout the city and continue to attract steady streams of young visitors. This paper investigates why young Koreans embrace this retro photographic practice and how they perceive it, arguing that its appeal lies less in traditional photographic concerns such as image quality or convenience than in the unique social experiences and material objects it produces.

Drawing on personal observations and conversations with Korean MZ generation members, this paper examines how photography in these spaces operates in different ways from conventional understandings of the medium. Rather than functioning as a passive tool for recording and documenting reality, photography in these instant photo booths actively constructs it. Within the

intimate, enclosed space of the booth, the act of taking photos, animated by playful backdrops, props, poses, becomes a social happening in itself, fostering bonding, intimacy, and a heightened sense of togetherness among users. The photo booth thus transforms an otherwise ordinary photographic act into a vivid, memorable shared experience that extends beyond the images produced. Furthermore, the physical photo strips produced through this process continue this social function outside the booth. As tangible, visible artifacts that can be exchanged, displayed, and kept, they serve as enduring material markers that affirm and reinforce relationships in everyday life. Drawing on MacDougall's (2006) argument that photography does not merely reflect reality but actively produces it, this paper contends that Korean photo booths function as sites of social reality construction. Photography here operates simultaneously as a social event and a material object, shaping, amplifying, and giving concrete form to human relationships.

Tin Nok Li is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of International Studies at Seoul National University. Her doctoral research focuses on encounters between Western missionaries and Koreans during the late Joseon dynasty. She holds a BA degree in Journalism and Communication and an MA degree in Korean Studies. These foundations have led her to participate in a range of projects on diverse social and cultural phenomena. As an amateur photographer, she has recently developed an interest in visual culture in Korea across both historical and contemporary contexts.

[Coffee break]

Session 7

Chair: Andreas Schirmer

14:45–15:15

Somin Chung

The Representation of Fortune-Telling as an Analog Practice: Case study of the Global OTT Survival Show *Battle of Fates*

This study examines the cultural implications of how fortune-telling as an analog practice is represented and consumed as global content in the digital media environment focusing on the global OTT Disney+ show *Battle of Fates*. Broadcasted in early 2026, it is a survival reality program that hybridizes Western and traditional Korean fortune-telling techniques, where participants compete in the interpretation of fate using tarot reading, shamanic divination, and horoscopic eight-character (Saju Palja) divination. This study sheds light on the paradox of why a global OTT platform representing cutting-edge digital media has revived pre-digital analog practice of fortune-telling. Korean shamanism possesses a structure of the resolution of grievances that interprets and relieves contexts of injustice and suffering. Horoscopic eight-character divination analyzes the flow of qi and fortune based on yin-yang and the five elements, weaving fragmented life events into a connected narrative. Distinct from religious soteriology, these secular ethical systems maintain enduring cultural vitality in contemporary Korean society rather than being entirely replaced by organized religion as seen in many other countries. They have long served as local knowledge for predicting uncertain futures and seeking face-to-face consolation through relational and therapeutic practices. Specifically focusing on the representation of shamanic divination and horoscopic eight-character divination, this study traces how the tradition of Korean traditional fortune-telling practices is converted into a competition narrative on a global platform within global distribution networks. By conducting a structural analysis of the program's survival competition format, a narrative analysis of its episodes, and a critical discourse analysis of the participants' utterances, this research analyzes how these traditional practices are mediated and commodified into a transformed spectacle within digital capitalism.

Somin Chung is currently serving as a Tenure-track Researcher in Korean Language and Civilization at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, where she teaches Korean literature and Korean language. She holds a PhD in Social Studies Education and an MA degree in Korean Language Education as a Foreign Language from Inha University, South Korea. Her research interests span Korean language pedagogy, Korean literature, and cultural studies.

15:20–15:40

Blanka Ferklová

Shoko's Smile and Letters

This paper explores the nostalgic features evoked in Choi Eun-young's award-winning short story collection *Shoko's Smile* (Syoko ūi miso). The title story was first published in 2013, and the collection appeared in book form in 2016, now almost a decade ago. Choi Eun-young, born in 1984, belongs to the millennial generation, yet her work makes striking use of communicative practices that have already become partly obsolete or are now used only rarely. Just as older films and television series often surprise contemporary viewers with home telephones and public phone booths, where characters must make urgent calls at critical moments, *Shoko's Smile* employs a similarly time-marked medium: personal correspondence by letter.

In the story, letters no longer function in the manner of the classical epistolary novel, as a primary means of revealing information and advancing the plot. Rather, they become symbols of sustained emotional connection across distance and time. The nostalgia of *Shoko's Smile* is therefore driven largely by letters and by the associated idea of pen-pals or pen-friends, while presenting this motif on several interrelated levels.

The paper discusses the dynamics between traditional postal communication and modern electronic communication, showing how these contrasts affect the reader and evoke a sense of a lost “golden” analogue era. It will also draw on a small teaching-based survey conducted during the summer semester, when the opening story of the collection was read and translated by students from the BA and MA programs at Palacký University Olomouc and Charles University Prague within the framework a seminar possible thanks to an LTIK grant. The survey examines differences in the perception of nostalgia between teachers from the millennial generation and students in their early twenties, and opens a broader discussion of how nostalgia depends on the recipient's own media experience.

Blanka Ferklová, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Korean Section of the Department of Asian Studies at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. She teaches Korean language courses, translation, and interpreting. Her current research interests include the institutional history of Korean Studies in the Czech Republic and the scholarly legacy of earlier generations of Koreanists. As a linguist, she works on Korean ideophones and empirically investigates aspects of Czech learners' acquisition of Korean as a foreign language.

15:45–16:15

Cho, Hyun-soul

The Return of Nature and Trot: Depoliticized Nostalgia in Korean Television

South Korea's controversial 2009 media-law revision, railroaded through by the then-ruling Hannara Party, paved the way for four channels — JTBC, Channel A, TV Chosun, and MBN — to be licensed as general-programming channels. They began broadcasting on cable in December 2011. In this new environment, MBN's documentary/reality program *I Am a Natural Person* and TV Chosun's singing competition *Mr. Trot* became emblematic success stories, spawning numerous similar formats. The concept of these programs reveals more than a commercial strategy to raise viewer ratings by stimulating nostalgia among middle-aged Koreans; it also points to a depoliticizing function: viewers are invited to turn away from present realities — through fantasies of escape into a premodern world embodied by the “natural person,” or through the romanticization of colonial-era modernity. By

analyzing the political unconscious reflected in the nostalgic indulgence of Korea's middle-aged generation — caught in a form of cultural lag amid the transition to a twenty-first-century digital society — this paper seeks to open a less familiar path toward a broader understanding of contemporary Korean society.

Cho Hyun-soul is professor for Korean oral literature at Seoul National University. He graduated in Korean Literature at Dongguk University. From 1995 to 1997 he lived and worked in Beijing. He earned his PhD in 1998 at Dongguk University for a comparative study on Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchurian and Korean myths. From 2009 to 2010 he was visiting professor at the Department for East Asian Languages and Cultures of the University of Notre Dame du Lac (Indiana). A leading scholar in his field and the author of numerous academic publications, Professor Cho is also dedicated to sharing his expertise with a wider audience — through books, radio programs, and essays — with a particular focus on lesser-known Korean myths, legends, and folktales.

Conclusion

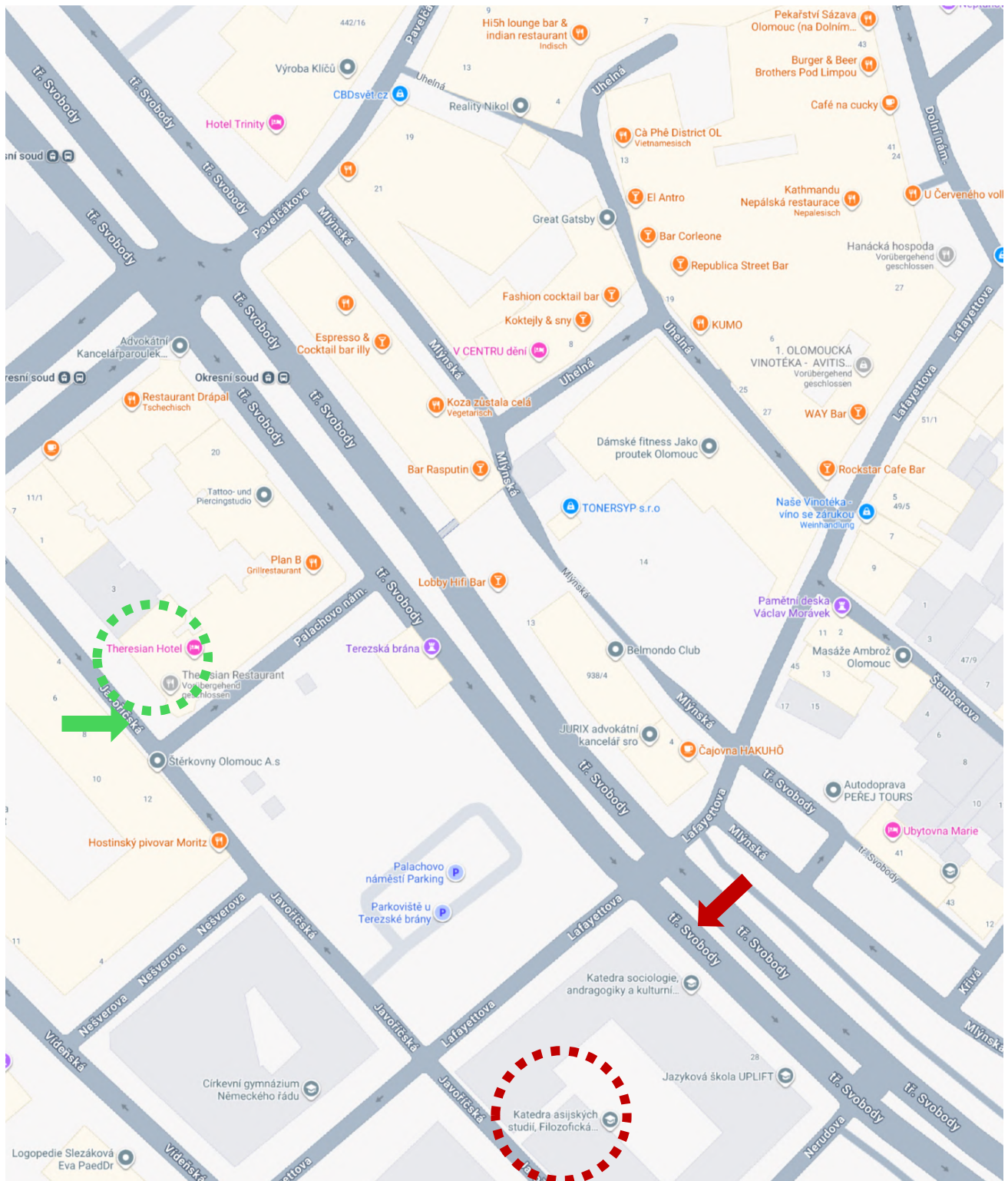
[City Tour]

[Dinner]

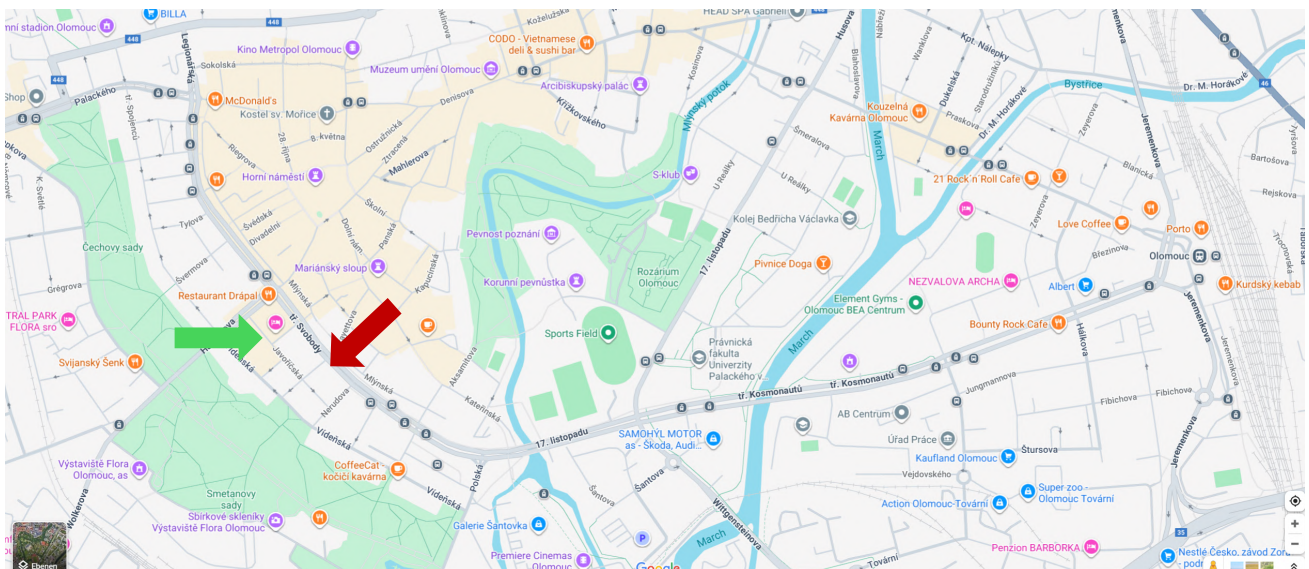
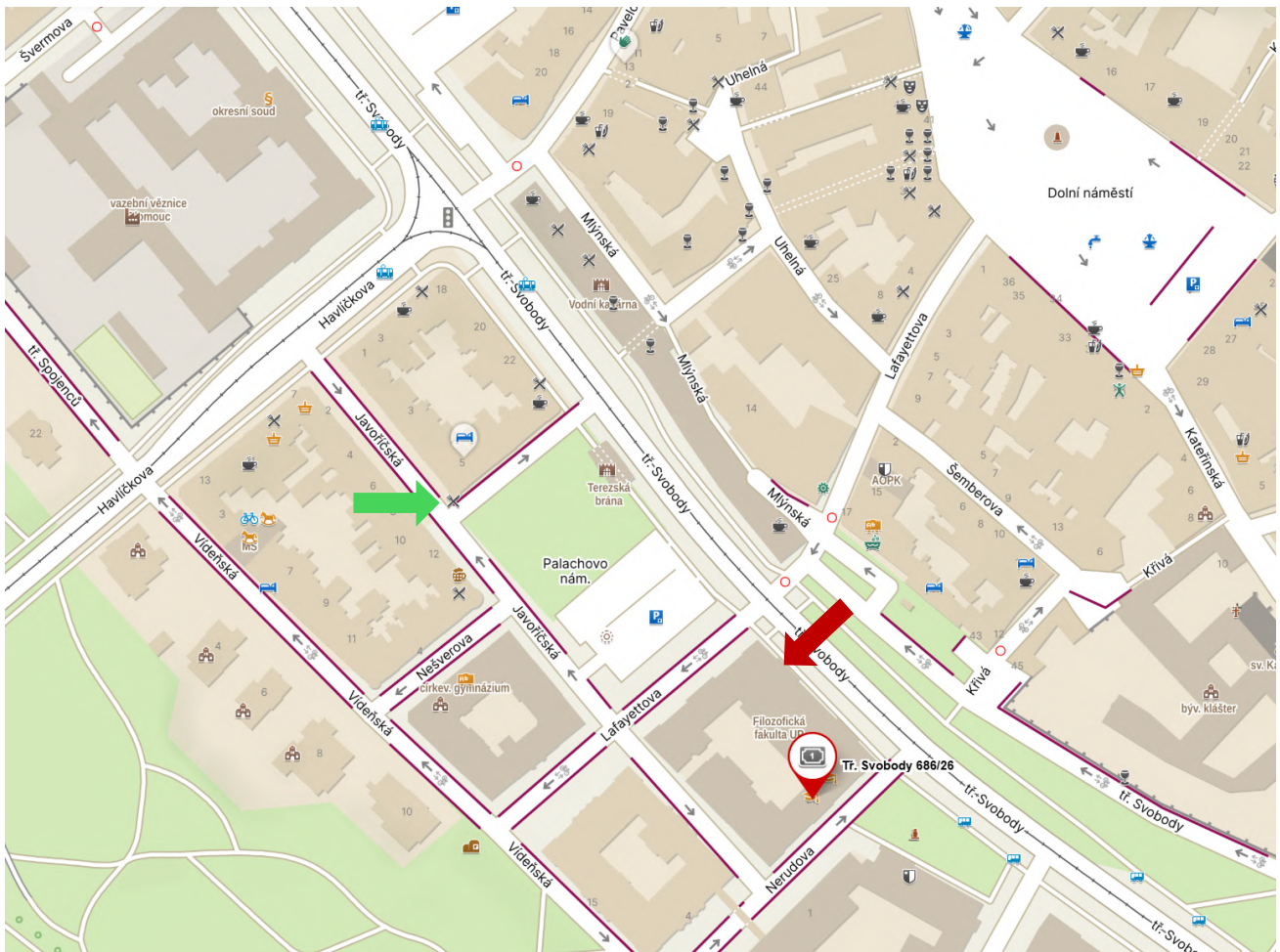


The logo of the ongoing “Digital Humanities for Korean Studies” project
at Palacký University Olomouc

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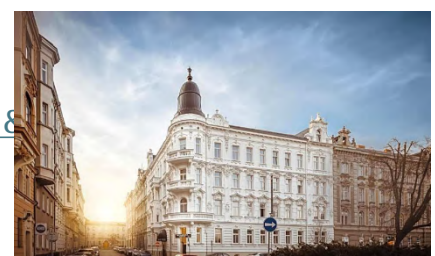


Hotel & Venue



Hotel:

Rooms, wellness and conference area | Theresian Hotel &





Venue:

Department of Asian Studies
 Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc
 tř. Svobody 26
 779 00 Olomouc
 Czech Republic

Basic information about Palacký University Olomouc:

<https://www.upol.cz/en/university/basic-information/>

Basic information about the Department of Asian Studies at Palacký University Olomouc:

<https://kas.upol.cz/en/>

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How to get from the railway station to the Theresian Hotel:

The tram stop is located directly in front of the station building, and you do not need to cross the tram tracks. When you come out of the station, your tram will depart to the right.

There are two possible routes to reach the stop *Okresní soud*.

Lines 3, 4, or 6 take you through the city center; the ride is slightly longer, about twelve minutes, but you will pass some of the main sights.

Lines 1 or 7 go around the center; the ride is faster, about seven minutes, though less spectacular.

But the trams run frequently, so waiting times are short, and you may simply decide which option to take depending on which line comes first.

Tickets can be purchased at vending machines or the kiosk on the platform.

How to get from Prague Airport (Václav Havel Airport) to Olomouc Main Station (Olomouc hlavní nádraží):

From the airport, take the Airport Express (AE) bus directly to Praha hlavní nádraží (Prague Main Station). The bus stop is just outside the arrivals hall, the ride takes about 35 minutes, and tickets can be bought from the driver.

From Praha hlavní nádraží, take a direct train to Olomouc hlavní nádraží.

Trains run frequently. The journey takes a little over two hours — usually between 2 h 15 and 2 h 30, depending on the connection. Note that there are various providers (ČD, RegioJet, Leo Express), and tickets are not interchangeable — for example, a ČD ticket will not be accepted on a Leo Express train.

Tickets can be purchased at the station or online.

If you would like any concrete assistance with booking, please feel free to contact the organizer.