

Guest Editors' Introduction

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“Textual Materiality in Korea, Premodern to Postmodern,” a special issue of the *Journal of Korean Studies*, seeks to ground the study of Korea, past and present, in the materiality of texts, while refining its theorization and historicization. Technological developments of the recent decades have prompted renewed academic interest in inscriptional media and their innovations as they are negotiated against new technological possibilities, institutional histories, and sociocultural contexts. We aim to shift the focus of critical inquiry from textual interpretation toward infrastructures of textual transmission; performativity of material forms, including the work of the body and the senses; and the efficacy of writing technologies in reproducing power relations and social arrangements.

To focus on textual materiality is to refine our understanding of signification in relation to the material infrastructure of textual creation and transmission, materiality of the signifier, and embodied performance involved in textual production and transmission. As Bill Brown has written, the recent critical turn toward re-materialization counters the Cartesian mind/body split that is mirrored in the distinction and hierarchy of materiality and signification.¹ Along these lines, we pursue a materialist understanding of the textual form, in which a leaflet, a calligraphic piece, a stone rubbing, or a poster are defined through the skills, materials, and social context of their production and circulation, rather than their textual and idiomatic convention. This special issue takes inspiration from several approaches that foreground materiality without seeking reconciliation among competing perspectives. New materialism engages phenomenology by focusing on “the signifying effects of matter itself”² while attentive to “an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable.”³ Archeological inquiries into materiality of communication foreground layered technological mediations which are constitutive of readable

objects.⁴ At the same time, textual materiality can be approached in a critical historical-materialist sense, as political-economic forces that shape textual production and consumption,⁵ which inspires us to turn our “attention to the dense causes and effects of global political economy and . . . questions of social justice for embodied individuals.”⁶ Surely, these materialisms capture very different aspects of textual materiality, and the special issue leverages these diverse approaches to illuminate the entanglements of the textual and the material in the Korean context.

This special issue traces the theme of textual materiality in a *longue durée* perspective, tuning into different historical inflections of material textual practices. Combining studies that cut across the watershed divide of the twentieth century, this issue builds a conversation across the historiographic clusters of “premodern,” “modern,” and “contemporary” Korea. Rather than constructing a genealogy of textual materiality across these periods, we prioritize conceptual connections to derive theoretical insights from considering a variety of material cultural practices. Contributors explore how literary and nonliterary texts—Buddhist sutras, Confucian biographies, South and North Korean propaganda messages, campus grievances, and sci-fi novels—are shaped by available materials, technologies, and practices of their use that organize production, circulation, and reception of textual artifacts. This approach allows us to consider writing with a brush and writing on a computer outside the framework of technological modernization, and it grounds each as a historically specific mode of meaning production and communication.

STUDIES OF TEXTUAL MATERIALITY IN EAST ASIA

Studies of textual materialities opened multiple avenues for rethinking the coordinates of writing, signification, and culture in East Asia, premodern, modern, and postmodern. The main premodern East Asian art form, calligraphy, functioned as a political and cultural technology that far exceeded a merely textual dimension. John Hay shows that calligraphic practice conformed the perfectly composed writing body to a socially productive ethical norm.⁷ Thomas Lamarre analyzes the transmedial materiality of Japanese poetry, where its visual, calligraphic aspect and its interaction with patterned paper are as central to meaning-making as linguistic signification.⁸ Reginald Jackson, similarly, reads calligraphic performance as a kind of body writing: the description of disintegrated calligraphy within *The Tale of Genji* creates an imprint of a decaying body augmenting the aesthetics of loss the text conveys.⁹ Calligraphy as inscriptional practice, thereby, is inherently bound with questions of bodily discipline and synesthetic reading experience.

Body itself can function as an inscriptional surface and a signifying device that creates the text of culture. Angela Zito, studying eighteenth-century China, illustrates how bodies, objects, and texts were mutually implicated in the construction of culture through Confucian ritual performance.¹⁰ In Dorothy Ko’s eloquent

description, foot-binding figures as a “civilizing mnemonic device”¹¹ and “a form of female bodily inscription” alongside the textual realm monopolized by elite males.¹² The efficacy of the body, text, and material object blends in the realm of Buddhist merit-making. Yuhang Li shows how women in late imperial China used different media to depict the object of their devotion—painting, embroidery with plucked hair, dancing, as well as clothing and jewelry constituted alternative mimetic media.¹³ Indeed, Charlotte Eubanks and Eugene Wang have described the intermediality of East Asian Buddhist culture that blended physical remnants, sensual experience, sacred objects, and enshrined texts.¹⁴ These scholars expand the range of medial contexts, in which inscription and meaning-making take shape, situating the human body as an integral mimetic device and inscriptional materiality.

The development of print technology complicated the landscape of East Asian writing practices. The importance of the material form of the book—the use of illustrations, layout features, the relationship between the woodblock carving and the original manuscript calligraphy, as well as the social spaces convened by manuscript and print editions, and the modes of bodily interactions between the reader and the book—is explored in two edited volumes, one by Cynthia Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, and the other by Judith Zeitlin, Lydia Liu, and Ellen Widmer.¹⁵ The latter volume brings together studies that stretch over a millennium, bridging the “modern” and “traditional” periods of Chinese history and considering the interaction of text with nonwritten media, such as maps, opera, and film.

Within scholarship on Japanese literary and visual cultures, Mary Elizabeth Berry and Robert Tuck have demonstrated the significance of print culture to emerging forms of national consciousness in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the nineteenth century, respectively.¹⁶ Seth Jacobowitz and Nathan Shockey deliver a materialist analysis of technological infrastructures in modern Japan, with Jacobowitz delineating the “discourse networks” that shaped Japanese modern literature and modern subjectivities,¹⁷ and Shockey examining the formation of “typographic imagination” among writers and readers amid new modes of publication and circulation.¹⁸ The history of the development of new printing technologies is complicated by the studies of Peter Kornicki and Hoyt Long, who note the persistence of handwriting in the age of print.¹⁹ Within the Chinese context, the material and technological history of the typewriter is illuminated by Thomas Mullaney, who traces “the social construction of technology, the technological construction of the social, and the fraught relationship between Chinese writing and global modernity.”²⁰

In Korean studies, while there is prolific scholarship on media content, media uses, and media technologies, the questions of how technologies and materialities shaped production, distribution, and reception of texts has received limited attention, albeit the few available studies suggest that this line of inquiry can yield intriguing insights. In the pre-twentieth-century context, Peter Kornicki and Suyoung Son consider the development of Korean literary and publishing culture

within the broader milieu of East Asian scriptural and print materiality,²¹ and Young Kyun Oh has traced more local and texturized trajectories, such as the woodblock print history of a Korean moral primer.²² The emergence of new material genres of writing and their implications for the identity politics of male elites has also been discussed by Hwisang Cho, who focused on epistolary prose,²³ and Maya Stiller, who studied elite graffiti made during travels to Mount Kūmgang.²⁴ The role of the body and senses in the constitution of writing and reading practices of Chosŏn Korea has been traced within the learned literary Chinese culture of the male elites and within the domain of elite vernacular Korean manuscript-making and calligraphy: Si Nae Park excavates the written representation of the tutor's voice as aide in literary Chinese learning,²⁵ and Ksenia Chizhova outlines the semantic range of women's vernacular calligraphy that linked aesthetic dimension with productive bodily discipline, which was also required for women's domestic work.²⁶

To turn to scholarship on modern Korea, Jina Kim has examined how the materiality of textual artifacts enabled formation of modern perceptions among Korean newspaper readers in the early twentieth century;²⁷ Robert Oppenheim has revealed its critical role in allowing a political response to the displacement of Korean writing from the public sphere in the early colonial period;²⁸ and the material-economic aspects of early modern textual production and publishing have also been examined in the works of Michael Kim.²⁹ Focusing on the period shortly after the division of the peninsula into North and South Korea, Sonia Ryang has considered the ideological control over language that became crucial to the North Korean state program to cast language into a regimented performative repertoire that would align the people with the party line.³⁰ Close to the concerns with the materiality of the signifier prioritized in this special issue, the actor-network theory was deployed to explore the agency of paper artifacts in Oppenheim's study of the negotiations among human and nonhuman actors, including competing planning documents, that led to the construction of the high speed railway to Kyōngju³¹ and in Oxana Rakova and Olga Fedorenko's examination of the role of Post-it notes in unsettling South Korean corporate hierarchies.³² The issues of materiality have also surfaced in the analyses of digital media technologies and their adaptations to local social norms as well as their role in enabling international popularity of South Korean cultural content in the studies by Dal Yong Jin, Larissa Hjorth, and others.³³ This special issue aims to build on those diverse analyses by training theoretical attention on the problem of materiality, traversing the pre-modern/modern divide, and yielding theoretical insights for understanding both Korea and textual materiality.

SPECIAL ISSUE THEMES

An immediate entry point into the problem of textual materiality are technological developments that are materially constitutive of written texts, writing bodies, and

mediated subjectivities. Texts are bound to particular material vehicles, whose affordances shape textual production, circulation, and reception. Pushing against hermeneutic approaches and the long neglect of the formative influence of media technologies in societal change, early approaches to textual materiality underscored the causal role of inscription/media technologies.³⁴ Many scholars of media, however, reject the tendency toward technological determinism that techno-materialist analysis might invite in favor of more dynamic and dialectical approaches whereby media technologies are understood as arising out of specific historical contexts and then interacting with other social forces to reproduce and sometimes enable other social phenomena, such as nationalism.³⁵ Such approaches are attentive to media affordances yet foreground local histories and historical meanings of media forms. In this vein, contributors explore formal and functional properties of textual medialities as having significant consequences for meanings and uses of texts themselves while dynamically situating them within larger contexts.

Those concerns link to the theme of relationship between differently mediated texts—remediation and intermediality. That many texts are located intertextually and need to be examined together with complementary texts to grasp their full implications is a well-established point. What this special issue foregrounds is that many texts rely on a combination of material carriers, chosen to suit a variety of inscriptive intents, that have their own politics. Jeongsoo Shin shows that stele rubbings acquire distinctive meaning from their material origin, circulating as works of art, collectibles, and historical sources in the nineteenth century networks of China-Korea literati friendship. Similarly, Hwisang Cho's article shows how distinct materialities of different funerary texts commemorating Confucian literatus T'oegye Yi Hwang (1501–70)—the tomb notice buried in the grave, the epitaph inscription on a tombstone stele, and paper records of deeds—provide different inflections of the scholar's memory. Cho, however, argues that those various medialities are ultimately subordinated to those texts' "addressivity"—the anticipated audience of readers for the book into which all the funerary texts were eventually compiled. Other special issue contributors foreground distinctive features of each medium and prioritize the material agency of texts. The relationship between different media takes center stage in contributions that consider the implications of textual materiality in the moments when "old" paper media are ostensibly threatened by new digital technologies. Looking into the development of South Korean "techno-fiction" in the 1980s to 1990s, Dahye Kim situates this new literary genre as a product of the increasing informatization of society and explores the crucial role played by the computer in the realms of literary production and consumption. A product of these cultural and technological changes, the early online South Korean science fiction reorients the coordinates of the literary field and, Kim underscores, makes the practice of PC usage and digital writing increasingly commonplace. Olga Fedorenko considers South Korea's large wall posters (*taejabo*), a staple of protest culture on

university campuses, to track their metamorphosis with the advent of digital media technologies. She argues that it was the combination of those paper posters' material qualities, particularly the capacity for spatial presence, with their historical meanings that guaranteed their distinctiveness as a medium and lasting relevance even into the internet era. The problem of new media is also illuminated by Deborah Solomon, who details how, in colonial-era Korea, the introduction of *tūngsap'an*, a kind of portable mimeograph, allowed for new circulations of mass-printed government documents, seditious materials, and personal writings. Solomon's analysis speaks to the vast literature on how adaptations of technology are shaped by social contexts as much as their technological affordances.

Technological developments and adaptations of specific textual technologies are inseparable from local contests over wealth and power, so the problem of media technology and textual mediality is then a problem of political economy. In this vein, contributors explore formal and functional properties of textual medialities as having significant consequences and connecting to the problems of power, modernity, and imperialism, and their specific manifestations on the Korean Peninsula, such as the Cold War and neoliberal globalization. These political, economic, and technological coordinates, in other words, shape the conditions and forms of written expression. Seen in this way, a propaganda leaflet, discussed by Anna Jungeun Lee, becomes a site of materialist investment for the South Korean regime that stages its dream of the yet-to-come consumer paradise, while also functioning as a political claim of legitimacy dispatched across the DMZ in the 1960s and 1970s. The South Korean leaflets, then, highlight the tension between the stabilized geopolitical border and the ideological borders that continue to be an object of ongoing negotiation. Jae Won Edward Chung elaborates the materiality of the literary institutions and media platforms that shape the conditions of writerly life by analyzing the work of a contemporary South Korean writer, Yun Ihyōng, who decided to "put down the pen" in order to claim moral autonomy from the South Korean literary system.

The materiality of texts as artifacts raises the question of their performativity, namely, the way texts stage social action not only through words they carry but also through their material qualities, which enable discursive and nondiscursive processes. In particular, Seunghye Lee's essay considers the implications of the materiality of printed Buddhist incantations (*dhāraṇī*) from the eleventh to the fourteenth century in terms of their visual design as well as their artifactuality. In excess of their textual meanings, those artifacts, when inserted inside the abdominal caches of Buddhist icons, performatively consecrated statues. Rather than mere sutra words they were "objects of empowerment" whose material agency channeled the sacred presence of the divine. In Ksenia Chizhova's study, the performativity manifests through the operativity of the body within the coordinates of the text. As she shows, calligraphy, which was included in the North Korean mass mobilization apparatus in the 1980s, comprises corporeal symbolism and embodied discipline: the leaders' handwriting is rendered

charismatic and affectively potent, while the people's cultivation of calligraphy is linked to the articulation of political truth. As a result, North Korean political space is configured through an array of micro-gestures and hermeneutic cues delivered through calligraphic inscription that prompt political interpretation.

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Considered together, the articles in this interdisciplinary special issue bring into the limelight the complex linkages between the textual and the material, reframe textual artifacts as complex sociomaterial phenomena, and raise questions about specific entanglements of texts, media, bodies, and practices in their cultural-historical contexts. Hardly following a streamlined analytical approach, the articles included in this special issue offer idiosyncratic angles upon the historical and theoretical understanding of textual infrastructure. The tensions that surround the understanding of how texts *matter*, hence, become productive for new questions and approaches. We hope that this step toward materialist reading of textual cultures becomes part of a broader conversation that animates and reconfigures the study of Korea, premodern, modern, and postmodern, in light of broader theoretical and transhistorical connections.

NOTES

1. Brown, "Materiality."
2. *Ibid.*, 59.
3. Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 9.
4. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*; Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?*; Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*; Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*.
5. Williams, "Technology and the Society."
6. Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 32.
7. Hay, "Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy."
8. Lamarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*.
9. Jackson, *Textures of Mourning*.
10. Zito, *Of Body and Brush*.
11. Ko, "Footbinding as Female Inscription," 170.
12. Ko, "Written Word and the Bound Foot," 96.
13. Li, *Becoming Guanyin*.
14. Eubanks, *Miracles of Book and Body*; Wang, "Of the True Body."
15. Brokaw and Chow, *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*; Liu and Zeitlin, *Writing and Materiality in China*.
16. Berry, *Japan in Print*; Tuck, *Idly Scribbling Rhymers*.
17. Jacobowitz, *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan*.
18. Shockey, *Typographic Imagination*.

19. Long, "(II)Legibility and Handwriting in Meiji Letters"; Kornicki, "Manuscript, not Print."
20. Mullaney, *Chinese Typewriter*, 23.
21. Kornicki. *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*; Son, *Writing for Print*.
22. Oh, *Engraving Virtue*.
23. Cho, *Power of the Brush*.
24. Stiller, *Carving Status at Kŭmgangsan*.
25. Park, "Sound of Learning the Confucian *Classics* in Chosŏn Korea."
26. Chizhova, *Kinship Novels of Early Modern Korea*.
27. J. Kim, "Intermedial Aesthetics."
28. Oppenheim, "Writing Sŏkkuram."
29. M. Kim, "From the Age of Heroic Production to the Birth of Korean Literature."
30. Ryang, *Language and Truth in North Korea*.
31. Oppenheim, *Kyŏngju Things*.
32. Rakova and Fedorenko, "Sticky Notes against Corporate Hierarchies in South Korea."
33. Hjorth, "Being Real in the Mobile Reel"; Hjorth, "Snapshots of Almost Contact"; Jin and Yoon, "Reimagining Smartphones in a Local Mediascape."
34. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*; Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*.
35. Eisenlohr, "Introduction: What Is a Medium?"; Gitelman, *Always Already New*; Larkin, *Signal and Noise*; Mazzarella, "Culture, Globalization, Mediation"; Williams, "The Technology and the Society."

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