

學術對談

勞動、文化與社會的平台化

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推動和拉動因素的反應。不過，我認為結構才是更重要的。」——
克里斯托·阿比丁教授

「我傾向於把〔平台〕保持在一個比較概括的層面上……而且我傾向於讓這個概念保持一些模糊性，否則，你就無法涵蓋各種多樣性和差異性。……因為平台也是一種理想和模式。它不僅是政治經濟的一部分，也是道德經濟的一部分。」——尼爾斯·范多恩教授

Dialogue

Mapping the Platformization of Labor, Culture, and Society

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Abstract

The past decade has witnessed a burgeoning body of research on platforms and platformization in communication studies and other social sciences disciplines. Much work has been written about how platforms have transformed labor relations and cultural practices. This dialogue invites Professors Crystal Abidin and Niels Van Doorn to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of

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studying the platformization of labor, culture, and society. It took place after the two-day International Conference on Sustainability and Sustainable Media—which celebrated the 60th anniversary of the School of Journalism and Communication at The Chinese University of Hong Kong—in early January 2025. Both Professors Abidin and Van Doorn spoke at a panel titled “Sustainability and the Future of Work on Digital Platforms,” where they critically assessed various forms of inequalities and challenges facing the global communities of creators and platform workers. Building on their presentations and reflections on their longitudinal ethnographic research, they share their academic journey into internet culture and platform studies. Their conversation highlights how the fuzziness of the platform concept can be a generative starting point—rather than an obstacle—for theorizing the multifaceted negotiations between various actors in particular institutional and cultural contexts through interdisciplinary approaches. They also share practical tips for early-career scholars and graduate students navigating the field of platform studies.

克里斯托·阿比丁教授簡介及著作選

阿比丁 (Crystal Abidin) 是研究互聯網文化的人類學家和民族誌學者，尤其關注亞太地區的互聯網文化。她是科廷大學的互聯網研究教授、影響者民族誌研究實驗室 (Influencer Ethnography Research Lab, IERLab) 主任，以及TikTok文化研究網絡 (TikTok Cultures Research Network) 的創始人。她的著作基於澳大利亞研究委員會發現早期職業研究員獎項目 (Discovery Early Career Researcher Award Fellowship, Australian Research Council; DE190100789)，包括《TikTok 與青年文化》 (*TikTok and Youth Cultures*, 2022)、《兒童網紅：兒童如何捲入社交媒體名氣之中》 (*Child Influencers: How Children Become Entangled with Social Media Fame*, 2023)，以及即將出版的《跨文化網紅：規範和細節的全球仲裁者》 (*Intercultural Influencers: Global Arbiters of Norms and Nuance*, 2025) 和《引發在線爭議：注意力經濟如何變化》 (*Provoking Online Drama: How Attention Economies are Changing*, 2025)。聯絡方式見：wishcrys.com。

尼爾斯·范多恩教授簡介及著作選

范多恩 (Niels Van Doorn) 是阿姆斯特丹大學的新媒體與數字文化研究副教授，研究聚焦於在道德和政治經濟交叉點上實際存在的平台化形式。目前正基於「平台勞動」研究項目撰寫專著，該項目研究了數字平台如何嵌入到城市之中，在家庭和政府應對城市中日益加劇的不平等期間，維繫社會基礎設施的城市承載力亦面臨空前壓力。范多恩在這些話題上發表了大量文章，並希望作為《平台與社會》 (*Platforms & Society*) 雜誌的創刊編輯之一，推動平台研究領域的發展。

CA：克里斯托·阿比丁

NVD：尼爾斯·范多恩

CL：陳藝強、林健

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CL：是甚麼啟發你們投入與數字平台和互聯網文化相關的民族誌研究？你們的研究主要關注哪些議題？

CA：我是一名研究互聯網文化的人類學家。我出生的時候互聯網剛普及，所以我記得當年和父母一起買數據機，學習如何使用，用電話線撥號連接數據機上網，再到通訊埠，之後就進入了Wi-Fi無線上網的時代。我伴隨著科技長大，身為人類學家也很自然想要研究自己感興趣的東西。身為一名普通公民，我也很喜歡使用社交媒體，不僅經營個人社群，也將其用作工作或專業相關的用途。我認為，要在學術界保持可持續發展，你會想盡可能做自己喜歡的工作，因為我們已經有許多不得不做卻又不太享受的工作，比如行政工作，或者受資助者議程限制的研究調查。

NVD：做自己喜歡的事情非常重要，而我喜歡把與人交談作為切入更大的社會和結構性問題的起點。我認為從人們的個人故事和經歷出發是非常重要的。我沒有接受過人類學的訓練，甚至也不是社會學出身。我的專業訓練是在傳播學領域。但漸漸地，特別是在我的博士後期間，在人類學系同事的幫助下，我自學了如何進行民族誌研究。我發現我真的很喜歡。這是關於做你喜歡的那種研究，我認為這點非常重要，因為最終，相較於平台本身或平台勞動，我對人們為自己創造的生活更感興趣，以及有時如何因各種情況而失去這樣的生活。我想談論人們自己的生活，並以此作為切入點去探討更大的社會經濟問題。對我來說，平台可以是一個切入點，人也是。

CA：我是千禧世代中較為年輕的一員。對於我們這一代的很多人來說，互聯網是我們的「第三空間」或「第三場所」。我經常旅行，也經常搬家。我常問自己：每到一個新的城市，你要如何弄清楚新的交通系統與貨幣？在自動扶梯上該站在右邊還是左邊？開車時該靠右還是靠左？需不需要付小費？即使你旅行經驗豐富，這也可能會讓你感到困惑。但無論你走到哪裏，互聯網都是一樣的。你的互聯網就在那裏，你的社群就在口袋裏。有些平台可能會被防火牆阻隔，但你仍然明白這是一個相對穩定、讓人安心且受保護的空間。即使你的身體被帶到了不同的空間。社會有白天

和黑夜之分，但如果你無法融入主流生活，總有其他像你一樣的夜貓子，在你「清醒」的時候聚集在線上。所以，我發現互聯網上的空間對那些在某些空間不太適應的人，或者那些沒有機會輕易地紮根並讓自己的物理空間有家的感覺的人來說，是一種慰藉，也是一個非常好的空間。

NVD：我認為我們所研究的平台類型存在明顯差異。與克里斯托所說的有關，其中一個差異是，無論你身在世界何處，你的 Instagram 在某種程度上都會保持不變，但 Uber 或其他零工經濟平台並不總是一樣的。這也是我非常感興趣的一點：同一個平台公司如何在不同的國家推出服務，並且具有不同的介面功能和服務選項（以及不同的服務條款協議）。

CA：國家差異化。

NVD：是的。而且我想知道社交媒體平台在多大程度上真的有一個通用的介面。例如，Instagram 的介面對於在馬尼拉和紐約的用戶來說有甚麼不同？

CA：你的動態消息可能會不同，算法肯定也是不同的。但平台都知道你該去哪裏、人在哪裏，你該回覆的時間（何時開啟與結束對話）又或是在排隊時使用筆記本電腦或手機發訊息是否得體的社交規範——這些在某種程度上是全球通用的，而這相對令人放心。

CL：與克里斯托剛才所說的相關，你在今早香港中文大學 60 週年院慶國際會議「可持續性與可持續媒體」的發言中也提到了同質化和平台。平台似乎正在經歷「TikTok 化」或「Instagram 化」的過程，但平台也一直在變化：2016 年的 TikTok 和現在的截然不同。在設計、介面以及平台機制（如貨幣化）方面都有細微的演變。我們應該如何看待社交媒體平台非常偶然和不穩定的特質？我們該如何探討平台在不同的情境下的演變性質？我們可以採取哪些方法論或具反思性的方法論想像？

CA：我會回到社會學概論的基礎觀點。平台總是在變化，而我們總是在追趕。從最基本的意義上來說，平台不斷演化，與五年或十年前相比已經不同了。但當我們把平台放在社會脈絡中時，用戶也不同了。我在 20 多歲使用 Instagram 時，和現在 30 多歲的我已經

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不是同一個人了。作為一個越來越活躍的消費者，我已經發展出了不同類型的能動性，並改變了我抵抗或使用平台的方式。在社會層面上，會發生主流化或亞文化化的過程。TikTok 很長一段時間以來都被稱為「年輕人的軟件」。它之前是 Musical.ly 的一個迭代版本，但後來疫情爆發，世界衛生組織委託這個軟件上的年輕人推廣並普及安全洗手的做法。公司、新聞機構、政治人物和祖父母輩都參與了進來。

因此，當平台文化發生轉變時，無論是成為主流、遊走於邊緣，還是被邊緣化，它也會改變人們對它的看法，並改變平台擁有者對各種推動和拉動因素的反應。不過，我認為結構才是更重要的。五年前，我們關注的是區塊鏈、去中心化網絡和聯邦網絡等技術。現在到了2020年代中，我們關注的是人工智能，以及這種智能操縱我們或失控的可能性。隨著新的知識變得容易取得，我們已經從關於算法是否一個黑箱的討論中取得了很大的進展，而且這種知識更新的速度還在不斷加快。

NVD：的確。

CA：作為學者，我們培養人們開發這些技術，並塑造相關論述。我們提出的問題更加精細入微，這也意味著我們對平台的研究方式也與以往不同。

NVD：但在某種意義上，不變的是平台的不透明性。我們對平台仍有很多不了解的地方，而這真的很讓人懊惱，因為這也是我們一直試圖追趕的部分原因。平台總是佔據主動權，然後我們試圖去研究它。如果平台推出了新功能或其他改變時，人們就會嘗試去使用。這突顯了記錄的重要性以及所面臨的問題。進行長期的、最好是多方面的研究是很重要的。我知道這是一種特權，因為你需要大量的資金和時間。但我認為我們需要更多這樣的研究，尤其是與零工經濟和平台勞動相關的研究。目前有太多以勞動過程為導向的快照式 (snapshot-type) 研究，這些研究專注於不穩定性、控制和剝削等問題。這些建基於世界不同地區的平台勞動快照固然重要，但仍只是快照而已。正如你所說，平台在不斷變化。它們在不同空間存在差異，並且會隨著時間而改變。為了深入了解

這些問題，你需要有充足資金支持，進行更長期且多方面的研究。接下來就出現了記錄的問題。當我使用不同軟件時，我一直盡可能把體驗記錄下來。當我用這些軟件叫外賣或僱用家庭清潔服務時，我截了很多圖，也儘量把營銷材料和電郵收集起來。我盡可能記錄下所有內容，因為很有可能它們最終不會被保存到網路時光回溯器 (Wayback Machine)。與此同時，我們更多利用回溯器。我想說的是，希望未來能有更多進行長期研究的空間。我們需要認真思考如何記錄我們在互聯網上和介面中看到的內容，以及平台不斷推出的不同類型的功能，因為它們一直在進行嘗試。從政治或政策角度來看，也存在一個問題：我一直在與政策制定者和平台公司交流，當你拿著受訪工人的親身經歷質問平台公司時，他們要麼否認，要麼聲稱這是一個「黑箱」，要麼說「我們不再那樣做了，我們已經改變了」。同樣，你一直在追趕，而在政治和政策方面，要在這些不斷變化「有本事就來抓我」類型的平台上取得進展是非常困難的。我認為這個問題沒有明確的解決辦法，因為這就是研究的本質。我們的進展非常緩慢，尤其是論文發表的速度。所以我認為我們總是會落後，但重要的是進行記錄，然後反思我們能夠收集和掌握的東西，並構建一個相關事件發生的故事。在此基礎上，我們可以嘗試推斷在特定的制度環境或國家背景下將會或可能出現的情況。

CA：當平台老化和衰退時，令人沮喪的是那種無可奈何的感覺——事情就是這樣；無論它們如何變化，我們都會固執於這些感受。但令人欣慰且充滿希望的是，用戶具有能動性，並且在顛覆或抵抗方面富有創造力。你會看到各種非原設計用途開始大量湧現，人們以創造性的方式將這些平台用於原設計之外的目的。這讓你充滿希望，即儘管存在「大公司」和「大平台」的議程，用戶總是能找到反抗的方法。接下來，就是公司和平台去追趕，思考如何審查、修改和限制他們的用戶。我一直在關注那些處於邊緣的用戶。當我們在平台上經歷老化和衰退時，會有沮喪的情緒，但當你看到所有那些反抗時，也會看到希望，我非常欣賞這一點。

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NVD: 是的，的確如此。你確實會看到類似的對剝削的反抗，以及在零工經濟中重新平衡權力的嘗試，儘管我必須說權力不平衡的現象相當嚴重。你經常看到的是，零工工作者開發或使用的那些小技巧、工具和替代軟件會被平台收編。很多這樣的創意被收編後，又由他們試圖應對的平台反饋給他們——我似乎又給了個消極的回答，但這就是平台的變化方式。回到最初的問題，平台並不只是因為想改變而改變，而是與我們的行為相關，它們不斷分析正在發生的事情，試圖為了各種目的(如廣告、交易成本或其他方面)進行優化，它們是從自己的角度出發，而不是為了工人——也就是那些投入時間並創造價值但回報甚微的人。對於零工工作者來說，交易成本實際上相當高。還有一個問題是，平台試圖阻礙反抗，而這又推動了平台的變化。作為研究人員，我們必須試圖理解並記錄這些反抗形式以及所引發的變化。我其實很好奇，除了不斷地進行採訪和截圖之外，克里斯托是如何進行記錄工作的。

CA: 我記錄了數以百萬計的照片、截圖、筆記、授權文件，因為平台實在瞬息萬變。我們記錄時更要巧妙地隱藏自己的研究意圖。就像我今天在演講中提到的，我不得不放棄我的專業相機，避免看起來就像是和我的研究對象(網紅)在競爭。一直用手機拍照就沒問題，因為這已是一種慣常的行為。除了記錄之外，有時候，如果我來不及把某件事寫下來，我會打開語音備忘錄，「假裝」在打電話，但實際上是在錄下我的現場筆記。

但我認為，作為一名民族誌學者，我年輕的時候記憶力更好。隨著年齡增長，我更善於制定策略去決定收集哪些資料以及如何收集，但這只是第一階段。第二階段則是在真正進入編碼或分析等細節之前，弄清所有事物在時間脈絡中的關聯性，並留意實地的重要情境。總的來說，從事田野工作的民族誌研究者在很大程度上依賴於「感受」氛圍。例如，如果我們十年後再見面，我可能還記得〔此刻訪談桌旁的〕這個廣告板上的三幅商業圖文，以及〔冰箱在〕背景持續的嗡鳴。在短時間內有大量的感官信息輸入，這就是為甚麼民族誌學者如此依賴身體去感受並與世界互動。

CL：如今，「平台」在商業領域和學術研究中都變得很模糊，你們會如何概念化這個詞？以你的研究經驗為例，我們應當如何讓這個詞在對實際勞動經驗或創作者文化的學術探究中持續發揮作用？

CA：有一個可能有助於討論的旁注。我所在的大學以其無窮的智慧，設立了一些所謂的「平台」，指的是大學的價值觀和抱負，比如「賦能平台」和「未來平台」。對他們來說，一個「platform」——就像中文裏的「平台」——基本上是一個舞台，一個讓你決定去放大某些事物的途徑。然而，他們也借鑒了平台的隱喻，包括其結構、治理以及我們在其中的參與。它不再只是關於價值觀、使命和信仰，而是一個我們同意參與的結構。這裏有一個連貫的組織架構，即使唯一的組織形式只是一個網站，上面寫著「這就是我們所在之處」。但這是借鑒了企業用語，讓自己看起來更有組織、更有結構，有一種光鮮亮麗或穩定的表象。它讓人們接受這樣的說法：「是的，我現在在這裏，我作為一個基層個體做出貢獻，創建一家初創企業，並參與到一個已經建立的系統中。」這讓他們能帶著一點盲目的信任投入其中。我能看到那個隱喻的價值。

我是科廷大學的影響者民族誌研究實驗室主任，我們團隊在2023年曾和一個多文化、多語種的優秀團隊合作。那年我和郭佳寫了一份題為〈中國市場中平台化的創作者話語〉（“Platformed Creator Discourse in Chinese Markets”）（Abidin & Guo, 2023）的報告。簡而言之，我們已經厭倦了人們說：「哦，網絡明星、影響者……他們跟『網紅』都是一樣的。」取決於你所在的平台不同，「網紅」這個詞可能合適，也可能不合適。取決於你身處大中華地區的城市層級（從一線到四線），以及你的產品和實踐，「網紅」有不同的價值，或者它可能只是一個空洞的能指。我們可以通過很多方式研究這個問題，例如媒體報導分析和檔案回顧。我們甚至可以研究平台以及它們改變話語的方式，而這就正是我們所做的。我們覺得，雖然人們對這些不同的詞有自己的通俗用法，但平台想要爭奪控制權，讓某些詞比其他詞更主流。例如，過去你被稱為「用戶」，而現在稱你為「創作者合作夥伴」，這讓你感覺你不是在被「剝削」去提供免費勞動和內容，而是在與平台「合作」。

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從本質上講，行為本身仍然是一樣的。你在自願提供用戶生成的免費內容，但話語讓你覺得這是自願的，就好像這是平等的。

對於你的另一個問題，我認為我們可以梳理出平台過去背著用戶「偷偷摸摸」改變設計元素的所有方式，但這需要很多學科進行系統性的研究，比如網絡考古學家、檔案學家和歷史學家。如果我作為一個人類學家想要研究這個問題，我想知道：在零工經濟文化的「輝煌時代」，人們有甚麼感受？那時的樂觀情緒是怎樣的？用現在年輕人的話說，那時的「氛圍」(vibes)是怎樣的？為甚麼人們覺得那是這個現象的「高潮」、巔峰時刻？隨著這個行業的衰退，人們的情緒又是怎樣的？文化是如何轉變的？人們的反應有何不同？我認為這些短暫的體驗或反思無法用一張截圖或通過回溯器記錄下來。你必須在當下將其捕捉下來，然後再回顧。這樣做的價值在於，你可以將這些體驗與平台實際宣佈的內容、記者推測的基層情緒等進行相互印證。

NVD: 是的，實際上正是那些張力和矛盾很重要，作為一名研究人員，這些也是非常值得報道的內容。我不覺得平台是一個模糊的概念有甚麼問題。對於我們的《平台與社會》期刊來說，這其實是一個非常好的起點，我們也確實想要培育這一點。

CL: 關於平台概念模糊性的評論來自不同的學科。例如，林健的書稿最近收到了評論，說：「平台已經成了一個熱門詞。每個人都在談論平台。你為甚麼不直接談論中國互聯網，而要談論中國平台呢？」當然，我們知道平台不同於舊時「軟件」的概念。討論從軟件到平台的轉變是如何發生的，以及在這個過程中出現了哪些新特徵，這是很重要的。你們的研究和著作是否也有意強調你們正在研究平台？你們認為平台作為技術實體或拼裝體 (assemblages) 仍然重要嗎？

NVD: 如今我非常明確地表示我研究平台和平台化。但從我的職業生涯角度來看，這也是一種策略。過去很多年，當人們問我「你是做甚麼的？你懂甚麼？你接受過怎樣的訓練？你在哪裏研究？」的時候，我常常感到非常尷尬。有時我會猶豫，但表明我研究平台和平台化為我提供了一個基礎，或者一個讓別人了解我的參照

點。我知道人們會對此有一些概念。與此同時，正如你們今天所聽到的，最終，我對平台本身——無論它們是甚麼——都不太感興趣，我更感興趣的是它們如何作為一個墊腳石或切入點，用來思考特定的生活世界、結構性問題、不平等現象等等。所以我對最近在研究的「平台鄰近方法」(Van Doorn & Shapiro, 2023)感興趣，思考平台靈活且具有滲透性的邊界，以及平台如何進行邊界管理工作。這絕對不只是技術層面的問題。回到Helmond (2015)提出的網絡平台化——也就是讓網絡適合平台的過程，我感興趣的是，使網絡之外的其他類型的環境適合平台化意味著甚麼。如果我們不僅僅從軟件接口(application program interface, API)和數據等技術元素的角度去思考，那麼還需要調整哪些其他的社會、政策和環境層面，才能使它們適合平台化？這對於平台與外部事物之間的邊界管理有甚麼作用呢？如果你想要一個平台的定義，我最喜歡的是Bratton (2016)在《堆疊》(*The Stack*)中的十頁內容。那十頁的抽象概念化非常出色，這真的能讓你將他關於平台的想法應用到不同的領域或生活世界中。平台為事情的發生設定了場景，通常是以一種交易的方式。Bratton指平台為那些交易以及進行交易的人增加了價值，同時也為平台提取更多的價值。這通常是以一種掠奪性的方式進行的，但也並非完全如此，因為存在各種不同類型、具有不同商業模式的平台。我現在主要想到的是企業零工經濟平台，這總是與創造市場有關。邊界總是非常具有滲透性，而且有很多溢出效應，因為平台總是試圖吸收外部的東西並將其納入內部。它們策略性地處理邊界問題，因為它們不需要把所有東西都納入自己的領域，或者說「生態系統」。我說得很抽象，但這真的是關於邊界管理，以及外部(可能是一個城市、一個行業、一個社區或其他任何地方)會發生甚麼。一旦它變得適合平台化或與平台接軌，它可以呈現出許多不同的形狀、形式和發展軌跡。這取決於我們討論的是哪些行業和平台。我傾向於把它保持在一個比較概括的層面上，因為對我來說，這樣更有啟發性。而且我傾向於讓這個概念保持一些模糊性，否則，你就無法涵蓋各種多樣性和差異性。特別是當我們狹義地定義平

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台，堅持認為它們必須是可編程的、包含軟件接口或特定元素時，就更應保持概念的模糊性。對於某些問題和目的來說，這樣可能更有意義，但我也並不認為必須如此，因為平台也是一種理想和模式。它不僅是政治經濟的一部分，也是道德經濟的一部分。如果別的不說，它肯定有一種機遇的光環。通常，挑戰、問題和風險只是在稍後才會出現和被體驗到。但通常人們湧向的是一個充滿機遇的空間。這就是為甚麼我喜歡讓它保持有一點模糊性。

CA：我很榮幸有人把我介紹作一位平台研究學者，因為從事這方面的工作的都是一群非常受人尊敬的學者。但我從來沒有自稱過是平台研究學者，即使我確實在研究平台。我常說我是一名研究互聯網文化的人類學家。我甚至不會說我是一名研究網紅的學者，即使我的一部分工作聚焦於此，因為互聯網也包括社交媒體出現之前、網紅出現之前以及平台出現之前的時期。這也向任何與我交談的人強調了我的觀點，我關注的是互聯網作為一種現象或實踐，或者我關注的是文化。所以，更準確地說，我認為當這些公司收編網紅人物的行為模式，拓展到各種項目和合作夥伴關係中，試圖繞過中間商獲取收入和利潤，然後試圖規範對收入來源的控制時，平台以及我們現在所謂的創作者經濟的能見度和重要性變得更加突出了。這樣一來，你考慮的就不是網紅和社會文化關係，而是商業模式了。正是在這種收編的時代，平台開始突顯出來，因為網紅是由平台培養的，並被引導得像創作者那樣思考。

然而，很多創作者的實踐方式並不像網紅那樣。他們更少依賴個人權威或擬社會關係 (parasocial relations)，而更多地依賴他們的內容。人們不需要太了解你的私人生活，或者在你的社群中擁有領導地位。相反，他們只是專注於娛樂。這就像是網紅文化的平台化，抹去了一些歷史，繞過了一些中間商，將重點放在創作者身上。最終，我真正關注的互聯網子集仍然是「網紅」，當中有創作者、網紅，還有所有邊緣化的人、一夜「爆紅」的人，或者那些「流量明星」，對吧？他們實際上並不突出，也不代表某個事業。他們只是在那裏吸引人們的眼球。甚至還有一些人只是被當

作迷因，他們既不是網紅，也不是創作者，但他們的形象在互聯網上被廣傳。我仍然把「網絡名人」視為一個總括性的概念，因為對我來說，這個概念具有持久性，容納了所有這些事物的演變，包括未來十年可能出現的任何事物。

CL：這也引出了跨學科研究的問題。從本質上講，平台研究是跨學科的。尼爾斯，你在《平台與社會》的開篇文章中也提到，平台研究正在變得碎片化 (Chen et al., 2024)。這對你們來說意味著甚麼呢？這也涉及你的自身定位 (positionality)，以及你們想要面向怎樣的學術受眾。你們如何在這個跨學科且碎片化的平台研究領域中找到方向呢？

NVD：這並不總是容易做到的。回到那篇發表在《平台與社會》上的文章 (Chen et al., 2024)，你以前研究互聯網，然後研究社交網站，接著研究社交媒體平台，對吧？但後來我們進入了一個漫長且仍在延續的時期，平台突然間成為了我們生活、工作、各行各業以及經濟等幾乎每個層面的一部分。就在那時，來自各種學科、研究這些領域的學者們也開始注意到並聚焦於平台。他們的研究塑造了新興的平台研究領域，發表在不同學科的期刊上，例如《環境與規劃、經濟與空間》(Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space)、《城市研究》(Urban Studies)、《組織研究》(Organization Studies)、《國際政治經濟學評論》(Review of International Political Economy)。平台領域正在興起，但方式是碎片化的。基於作為編輯的抱負，我們覺得需要一個匯集不同平台研究成果的地方。這個領域在一定程度上可能會保持碎片化，這也沒關係，我們只希望至少有一本專門研究平台和平台化的期刊。

CA：這是一個「領域」與「學科」的問題。當我在一個領域開展研究時，我會與很多學科之外的人合作。無論是網紅研究、名人研究、創作者研究、零工經濟、平台經濟，或者不管你想怎麼稱呼它，我認為我們都有不同的責任和研究議程。當你定位自己是某個領域的專家時，你要確立參考依據並深入研究。然而，你也至少需要具備一兩門核心學科的知識，以幫助闡明相關概念。但你的責任

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是確保這個概念與多個學科相關，這樣人們就可以把你的深入研究作為一個參考依據。但是當你從不同學科的角度把它作為一個研究話題或主題來探討時，就像過去兩天關於可持續性的話題，你的工作是在你所屬學科框架內重新構建和研究這一現象。你不是這個話題的專家，而是一位學科專家，試圖闡明我們如何以不同角度看待這個問題。

所以我認為，領域專家，或者自認為以領域為基礎的學者，你們處於前沿位置。你們必須不斷捕捉新的事物，並設定參考依據和範圍。但學科專家也同樣重要，因為是他們確保所有這些研究都被記錄下來，形成系統，然後融入到我們的教學大綱中，或者將相關理論主流化到我們所研究的任何內容中。

在這兩天的會議中，我們聽到了幾十種關於可持續性的定義，這固然是件好事。但如果我們能有一個開幕主題演講，或者有一個關於現今可持續性領域是怎樣的評論，並給出相關的參考範圍，並再分別從我們各自的學科角度去探討，那就更好了。概念的模糊性並非問題，我反而看到了其中的價值，因為這意味著我們從不同的角度去進行研究。這也意味著研究內容是具有可持續性的，因為總會有人在研究某些方面。但也可能會出現一種競爭意識，也許有些學科會想要更多地「佔有」某些領域，無論是通過研究方法、定義還是途徑，或是在對話中固守單一學科議程而背離跨學科精神。我認為這種協商需要更具備包容心態和合作精神，而不是只想在某件事情或某個定義上打上自己的標籤，成為創造某個子領域的「權威」之類的。

NVD: 而且我們需要跨學科的對話。再回到「嵌入性」(embeddedness) 這個詞，我們往往仍然把平台看作是一個孤立的現象，或者是一個可供研究的獨立對象，就像我今天說的「零工經濟」一樣。但我們需要那些領域和學科專家向我們展示特定的平台化軌跡是如何發生的，以及它們是如何深深嵌入到現有的制度環境中的。然後，你可以從他們那裏學習，不斷擴展和質疑我們為理解平台概念的含義、弄清楚平台是甚麼或做甚麼而做出的努力。所以，保持概念的模糊性是有好處的。我想在這一點上我們是達成共識的。

CL : 平台研究總是會圍繞著一些關於治理 (**governance**) 的話題。有時候，尤其是在零工經濟的研究中，我們關注平台自身的治理以及對平台的監管。當涉及到創作者文化時，我們也會討論社交媒體是如何進行治理的，以及社交媒體應該如何被治理。但與此同時，我們也會討論創作者在治理過程中的權力。例如，我們會討論他們如何與自己的社群互動，以及他們如何在自己的在線文化和社群中發揮更大的影響力。在你們自己的研究中，你們是如何看待治理這個問題的呢？

CA : 很多優秀學者通過梳理政府與平台所發表的言論和政策，對治理開展了字面意義上的研究。對我來說，這又回到了界定範圍的問題上。2022至2023年，我與徐健、哈欽森 (Jonathon Hutchinson) 在《政策與互聯網》 (*Policy & Internet*) 策劃特刊，探討了亞洲的網紅監管、治理以及社會文化議題 (Abidin et al., 2023)。在這期特刊中，幾乎沒有一篇論文真正聚焦於「大政府」 (Big G) 的治理。出現的反而是基層治理的情況，例如八卦網站、Reddit 子版塊討論串、惡意評論博客和評論區，實際上才是在進行通俗意義上的治理。記者會注意到這些空間發酵和曝光的問題和醜聞，繼而撰寫報道。當公眾做出反應時，政府就會感到有壓力去採取行動——這就是治理。通常在亞洲語境下，東南亞諸國政府常被詬病為「家長式管控」或「懲戒過度」，我們往往預期治理是被動回應後進行的改善和發展，而非一種主動預防的建構。但如果政府是順應公民通過在線羞辱等自發性約束機制提出的訴求時，這種反應式治理反而感覺「公平」一些。

影響者民族誌研究實驗室在2023年也發表了一份名為〈亞太地區網紅監管基準〉 (“Benchmarking Influencer Regulations in the Asia Pacific”) (Abidin & Hong-Phuc, 2023) 的報告。我們研究了政府法規中對網紅、數字文化以及可應用於網紅的平台的相關規定。我們試圖弄清楚對網紅的特定看法是從哪裏來的？為甚麼政府明確界定「勞動」這樣的詞彙如此重要呢？如果是兒童從事家庭勞動，比如在家族企業中工作，那麼大多數政府在法規上就不會那麼嚴格，因為在東南亞，政府通常具有家長式作風，並且認為

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家庭是「社會的基本單位」。但是如果我們讓父母同時擔任孩子的監護人和僱主，這其中存在哪些盲點和差距呢？再舉個例子，對一些政府來說，在界定「童工」時考慮「時間」因素很重要，晚上10點之前可以工作，但10點之後就禁止工作。但是如果你是在家裏工作呢？如果使用社交媒體是你工作的一部分呢？誰來監督這些時間界限呢？我認為在整個亞太地區進行基準對比很重要，層層剖析，看看這些原則是從哪裏來的。最大的問題是，在這個地區，關於這部分內容，有沒有甚麼是普遍適用的或者具有地區特色的，能在我們研究平台治理時提供不同的見解呢？

NVD: 你說得對。在零工經濟和平台勞動的研究中，平台治理通常指的是政府監管。但我認為我們可以從創作者研究以及社交媒體研究等其他領域中借鑒一些思路。Gorwa (2019) 關於平台自身治理以及對平台治理的研究非常有參考價值。所謂的零工經濟只是一組非常不同的制度環境，嵌入在各種大多數是低工資的服務行業中。創作者具有很高的能見度，也很敢於表達自己的想法。他們有一定的影響力。當然，我這裏說的只是概括而言。但我的意思是，他們比很多零工工人更容易讓自己的聲音被聽到。我說的甚至不是出租車司機和快遞員，而是家庭清潔工和護理工。對他們來說，要讓自己受到關注並參與到任何形式的平台共同治理中要困難得多。此外，當提到「政府」這個詞時，我們通常會想到政府以法規的形式採取的改善或補救措施。但我們應該從更廣泛的意義上理解「治理」，這包括平台自身的治理。零工經濟研究通常從算法治理以及可能的服務條款協議的角度來討論這個問題。但治理過程中還有其他參與者。還有其他的行為者和條件經常被忽略，這又是因為我們主要狹隘地關注勞動過程，而沒有充分注意與平台相關的行為者。但回到問題本身，我確實認為，試圖從零工經濟平台掙錢的人，與創作者經濟和社交媒體經濟中的人，在社會地位上存在根本的差異，他們的勞動性質也不同。在創作者經濟中，這涉及到在線存在、敢於表達，並且爭取支持。同時亦因觸及面更廣、擴展得更快，風險也可能更高。零工工作者除非走上街頭抗議，否則不會有這樣的影響力，但同樣，這大多是男

性零工作者，例如出租車司機和外賣員會這麼做。這就是為甚麼當我們提到「治理」這個詞時，我們首先想到的是法規。但實際上存在著不同的環境。當我們談論平台工作時，我認為我們可以討論一些共同點，例如平台使用數據和算法的方式等等。這些算是基本的方面，但相關的產業、行動者和利害關係卻有著極大的差異。工作的性質不同，報酬以及資金來源也非常不同。

CL：兩位都在創作者文化或平台勞動方面做了豐富的研究。從更宏觀的角度來看，我們其實對平台研究和創作者文化越來越感興趣，尤其是在我們這個地區。例如，許多來自中國的新學者和學生也發表了大量關於這些問題的中文研究成果。對於那些剛進入這個領域的新人，你們有甚麼建議？你們想和他們分享哪些經驗教訓？

CA：我喜歡這個問題。如果我是專門對亞太地區或全球南方的學生說，也就是非美國中產階級的學生，我會告訴他們要對自己的研究有信心。雖然你可能需要闡述你所研究的特定平台或現象的參考範圍，而且人們可能會把你的研究當成另一個「文化案例研究」而不予重視，但不要輕視自己的學術成果。儘管存在這些誤解，但我們都能從這個地區具有文化細節和比較性的研究中受益。我認為很多學生一開始都有非常具體、獨特且小眾的興趣點，因為那正是他們感興趣的地方，這很好。但隨著他們研究的深入，學生們覺得自己需要變得越來越「主流」，說他們認為「主流學術界」或白人學者會說的話。所以，自信是很重要的。

如果我是對一般的研究生說，我會說閱讀很重要。我覺得我們都很渴望在社交媒體上自我宣傳、展示和包裝自己。這也是無可奈何的事，如今的就業市場就有這樣的要求。但我們寫得還不夠多。而且即使我們寫了，閱讀的範圍也不夠廣。所以當我們研究新現象時，最終想出了一些「華麗」的詞彙，卻沒有回頭思考理論、框架或概念方面的問題，也沒有考慮哪些研究問題是重要且有價值的。如果你創造了一個新術語，那很好，但：它的概念基礎是甚麼？目的是甚麼？有甚麼影響？之前人們都寫過哪些相關的內容？我覺得我們沒有足夠的時間去閱讀。對研究生來說，關

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鍵績效指標 (Key Performance Index, KPI) 似乎是參加會議、發表論文和寫作。舉個例子，你讀了十本書也不會得到認可或公眾的讚賞，但你可以輕易地讀完流行文化記者寫的十篇短小精悍的文章。但這些通俗媒體文章的嚴謹性、深度和目的往往是不足夠的。所以，要多閱讀。

NVD: 我也希望我能讀得更多。另外，如果你對某個特定的話題感興趣，你需要專注於這個話題。堅持研究這個話題，看看平台在更廣闊的脈絡中是如何參與其中的。另一件事是主動聯繫更資深的學者。聯繫我們！我注意到尤其是學生們不太會這麼做。主動聯繫並把你的研究成果發送過來。當然，我們不可能有時間讀過所有作品，但至少介紹一下自己，並與在這個領域耕耘更久且你非常欣賞其工作的人對話，從而完善你的想法，這是非常重要的。

CA: 我認為主動聯繫資深學者真的很重要，要積極主動，就像所謂的「尊老敬賢」一樣，打個比方，就是要尊重前輩。但與此同時，篩選一下你想聯繫的人，因為有些學者在自己的研究領域有一點「把關人」的心態，而且很有競爭意識，對下一代並不那麼包容。另外，雖然我認為「向上」建立學術聯繫很重要，但你也需要和同輩「平行」地建立聯繫。我自己就可以很輕易地向1980年代末出生的人解釋我為甚麼研究特定類型的互聯網文化，他們也會理解。但現在對於2000年後出生的人來說就不一樣了。同輩之間的情誼是有價值的。當你成為一名高年級博士生時，可以說要「向下」建立聯繫。基於你的經驗，你能和學術輩分比你低的學者分享些甚麼呢？也許這個建議應該送給那些更有成就的中職業階段和高職業階段的學者，我們應該主動走到研究生身邊，讓自己隨時能為他們提供幫助，而不是等著那些我們知道自己不會去讀的郵件自我介紹，因為每天收到的這類郵件實在太多了。

NVD: 是的，這點很有道理。這也是我欣賞每年的互聯網研究學會 (Association of Internet Researchers, AoIR) 會議的原因之一。這些會議包括會前工作坊和導師指導計劃，促進了職涯初期的學者和資深學者之間的互動，非常有用。在這些場合，我從學生那裏經常得到的感受是，你讀得越多，就越覺得所有東西都已經被研究

過了。但總是有新的東西可以說！就像我們討論過的，形勢在不斷變化，平台在不斷變化，社會在不斷變化，研究也在不斷變化。所以不要認為所有的東西都已經被說透了！不要讓這種想法束縛了你。再說了，對於感覺某個特定話題和領域已經飽和，以及由此產生的沮喪情緒，也可能是積極的。也許另一個建議就是，從你對目前研究現狀的不滿和沮喪出發去寫作。我堅信負面因素、否定的力量，以及它促成積極變化的能力。抓住你所認為的這個領域的不足和盲點，並以此為起點開始研究。

CA：有時候，資深學者也是會錯的！

NVD：是的，這點很對。

CA：他們看不到你所看到的東西。有時候，我仍然覺得稱自己為「資深學者」很奇怪。我直到最近其實還算是一名新研究者。我九年前才畢業，而且期間為了照顧家庭和育嬰假中斷了相當長一段時間。但有時候我們的確跟不上時代的步伐。有時候，我們沒有處於其他環境中的人的視角。不必總是聽從「權威」或「資歷深的人」的意見。多閱讀、了解背景知識、在此基礎上進行研究，站在巨人的肩膀上，這是很好的。但你不必總是站在他們的陰影下。你可以去做自己的研究，並為之感到自豪。

NVD：而且不要忘記，一旦學者到了一定的資歷水平，他們就會承擔其他類型的職責，而不再從事最前沿研究。這不是批評，而只是學術界的生命週期中慣常會發生的事。這是陳詞濫調，但卻是事實。所以要珍惜那些年頭，尤其是在研究生階段，希望你能大量閱讀，因為以後就不太可能再有那麼多時間了。

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Academic Dialogue with **Crystal ABIDIN** and **Niels VAN DOORN**

Mapping the Platformization of Labor, Culture, and Society

CA: Crystal ABIDIN

NVD: Niels VAN DOORN

CL: Ngai Keung CHAN and Jian LIN

CL: What has inspired you to conduct ethnographic research related to digital platforms and internet culture? What are your major research concerns?

CA: I am an anthropologist of internet cultures. I was born when the internet was rolling out, so I remember buying a modem with my parents, learning to use it, dialing it with the phone, and then transmitting to a modem, then to a port, and then to Wi-Fi, now wireless. Because I grew up with technology, it is very natural for anthropologists to want to study what you are interested in. And I enjoy social media as a private citizen. So I have social media for work, social media about work, and then my own social media. I think that to be sustainable in academia, you would want to do work that you enjoy where you can because there is already a lot of work we are made to do that we do not enjoy, like administrative loads or research queries that are restricted by funders' agendas.

NVD: It is so important to do what you enjoy, and I enjoy talking to people as an entry point into larger social and structural questions. I think it is always important to start with people's personal stories and experiences. I am not trained as an anthropologist. I am not even trained as a sociologist. I am trained in communication science. But gradually, especially during my postdoctoral, I taught myself, with the help of colleagues in the anthropology department, to do ethnographic research. And I found out that I really liked it. It is about doing the kind of research that you enjoy doing, which I think is very important because eventually, I am less interested in platforms or platform

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labor than in the kinds of lives that people make for themselves and are sometimes unmade through various circumstances. I want to talk about people's lives in and by themselves, but also as entry points to talk about larger socioeconomic problems. For me, platforms can be an entry point, and people can be an entry point too.

CA: I am a younger millennial. For a lot of people in our generation, the internet is our third space or our third place. I traveled a lot and moved around a lot. So now I ask, every time you go to a new city, how do you work out the new transportation system and the new currencies? Do you stand on the right or the left on an escalator? Do you drive on the right or the left side of the road? Do you tip or not? It can be quite disorienting, even if you are a seasoned traveler. But wherever you go, the internet is the same. Your internet is there. Your communities are in your pocket. Some platforms may be firewalled, but you still understand that this is a relatively stable, calming, and protected space that does not change so much, even though your body is transported to different spaces. Society may have day and night times. But if you do not fit in with the mainstream, there are other nocturnal people like you who congregate on the internet during your "awake" times. So, I found spaces on the internet to be a solace and a very nice space for people who do not fit in nicely in certain spaces, or people who do not really have the opportunity to put down roots and make their physical space feel like home as easily.

NVD: I think there is a clear difference in the kinds of platforms we study. One of the differences, in relation to what Crystal is saying, is that wherever you go in the world, physically, your Instagram will remain somewhat the same. However, in the case of Uber or other gig economy platforms, they are not always the same. That is also something that interests me a lot, how the same platform company rolls out its service in different countries with different interface features and service options (that come with different Terms of Service agreements).

CA: Country differentiation.

NVD: Yes. And I wonder to what extent social media platforms really have a universal interface. For example, how do Instagram interfaces differ for users in Manila and New York?

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CA: Your feed might be different. Algorithms are definitely different. But the mechanics of knowing where to go, where your people live, the norms you have about reply times, when to go on in a conversation and when to stop, and whether it is socially acceptable to be on your laptop or text on your phone when you are in a long queue, that is sort of universal, and it is quite comforting.

CL: Related to what Crystal just said, you also mentioned homogenization and platforms in your presentation for CUHK's 60th Anniversary International Conference Sustainability and Sustainable Media this morning. Platforms seem to undergo the process of "TikTokization" or "Instagramization." Yet, platforms change all the time; TikTok of 2016 differs from the TikTok of now. There is a nuanced evolution of design, interfaces, and platform mechanisms such as monetization. How should we approach the very contingent and volatile nature of social media platforms? How can we address the evolutionary nature of a platform in different contexts? What kinds of methodologies or reflexive methodological imaginations can we take?

CA: I go back to Sociology 101. Platforms will always change, and we are always catching up. In a very basic sense, they are not the same as they were five or ten years ago because they have evolved. But when we situate them in society, the users are also not the same. I am not the same person as when I used to use Instagram in my 20s compared to now in my 30s. As a consumer who is more and more active, I have developed different types of agency and changed the way I resist or use the platform. At the societal level, the process of mainstreaming or sub-culturing happens. TikTok was known as "the young person's app" for a long time. It was an iteration of Musical.ly before. But then the pandemic happened. The World Health Organization tasked young people on the app to promote and mainstream safe handwashing practices. Companies, news organizations, politicians, and grandparents were on board.

So, when the platform culture shifts—whether it is becoming mainstream, venturing on the fringes, or being sidelined as marginal—it also changes how people view it and changes how the owners of the platforms respond to the push and pull. But I think structure is more important. Five years ago, we were focused on technologies like blockchain, the decentralized web, and the federated web. Now

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in the mid-2020s, we are focused on AI, the possibilities of this intelligence manipulating us or going rogue. With new knowledge being accessible, we have progressed so much from discussions about whether “algorithms are a black box or not,” and the pace of this knowledge update keeps increasing.

NVD: True.

CA: As academics, we train people to make these technologies and shape these discourses well. Our questions are more nuanced, and that means we research platforms differently as well.

NVD: But what remains the same is the opacity in a certain sense. There is still a lot we do not know about platforms, and that is really annoying because it is part of the reason why we keep trying to catch up. They always take the initiative, and we try to study it, and people try to work with it if they introduce a new feature or whatever. This speaks to the importance and problem of documentation. It is important to do longitudinal and, preferably, multi-sided research. I know it is a privilege to do that because you need a lot of funding and time. But that is the kind of research that I think we need more of, especially related to the gig economy and platform labor. There is too much snapshot-type, labor process-oriented research that focuses on issues of precarity, control, and exploitation. While these are important situated snapshots of platform labor from different parts of the world, they are still just snapshots. As you said, platforms change. They are different across spaces and change over time. In order to get a sense of these issues, you need well-funded, longer-term, and multi-sided research. Then, the problem of documentation comes. I have been trying to document as much as possible when I have access to the app. When I was working through the apps doing food delivery and domestic cleaning, I took a lot of screenshots. I downloaded as much marketing material and emails I received from them as possible. Document everything you can because the chances are high that it will not end up in the Wayback Machine. Meanwhile, we can use the Wayback Machine much more than we are currently doing. What I am saying is that there is a lot of room, hopefully, for more longitudinal research. We need to think hard about how we document what we see on the internet, in the interface, and the different types of features they introduce because they are constantly experimenting. The problem

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also, politically or policy-wise, is that I have been in conversation with policymakers and the platform companies, and when you confront them with something that workers you have spoken to say they are doing, they either deny it, claim it is a “black box,” or say, “We no longer do that; we have changed.” Again, you are playing catch-up, and it becomes politically and policy-wise very difficult to make progress with these constantly shifting “catch me if you can” types of platforms. I do not think there is a clear solution to this because that is the nature of research. We move very slowly and especially publish very slowly. So I think we will always be behind, but the importance lies in documenting and then reflecting on what we have been able to salvage and grasp and then creating a story of what happened. From there, we can try to extrapolate what will be or what might be in a particular institutional setting or national context.

CA: The depressing thing when platforms grow old and decay is the sense of resignation—this is just the way things are; we will be holding to these perceptions, no matter how they change. But the nice and promising thing is that users have agency and are creative with subversion or resistance. Then, you get this wonderful proliferation of off-label uses, where things are creatively used for purposes that they were not originally designed for. That gives you a lot of hope that despite the agenda of “big corporations” and “big platforms,” users will always find a way to push back. Thereafter, it is a matter of corporations and platforms catching up to see how they can censor, modify, and curtail their users. I am always looking at these users on the fringes. There is depression and aging when we grow old on platforms, but there is also hope when you can see all that pushback, which I appreciate very much.

NVD: Yeah, and indeed, you do see similar types of pushback against exploitation and attempts to rebalance the power in the gig economy, although I must say the power imbalance is quite significant. What you often see is that the small exploits, tools, and alternative apps that gig workers develop or use get co-opted. A lot of these insights get co-opted and then offered back to them by the platform they are trying to navigate. I am ending again on a kind of negative note. But this is how platforms change. To get back to the original question, the platform does not just change because it wants to change. The

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platform constantly changes in relation to what we do because they are constantly analyzing what is happening and trying to optimize for various purposes like advertising, transaction costs, or something else from their side, but not for the workers—i.e., the people who invest time and generate value but see little in return. The transaction costs are actually quite high for gig workers. There is also the problem of platforms trying to stymie the resistance that drives platform changes. We, as researchers, have to try to make sense of and document these forms of resistance and the changes they generate. I actually wonder how Crystal goes about documentation, except for interviews and taking screenshots incessantly.

CA: Millions. Millions of photographs, screenshots, notes, and licenses. Excessive documentation. It is because they have changed so much. Also, do it in clever ways that allow you to hide in plain sight. As I mentioned in my talk today, I had to let go of my professional camera because it looked like I was competing with the influencers I was studying. But it was okay if I was taking photos on my mobile phone all the time because that was just an accepted practice. So, other than documenting, sometimes, if I am not quick enough to write a thing, I “fake” a phone call. I turn on my voice notes, and I pretend I am talking to someone, but I am actually recording my audio field notes on my phone.

But I think that as an ethnographer, in my younger days, my memory was better. My ability to hold information was great. But even as I age, I am getting better at strategizing over what data to collect and how to do it, but that is just stage 1. Stage 2 is making sense of how all of these things connect in the temporal sense, paying attention to important context in situ, before you even go into details like coding or analysis. In general, ethnographers in the field rely a lot on “absorbing” the atmosphere. For example, if we were to meet again in ten years, I can probably remember this billboard (by the side of the table during this interview), the same three advertisements, and this ongoing buzzing sound (from a fridge) in the background. It is a lot of sensory overload in a short period, which is why ethnographers really rely on the body to absorb and to interface with the world.

CL: Platforms nowadays have become a fuzzy word in both the business world and academic research. How do you conceptualize

the term “platform”? How do we still find this term useful for our scholarly inquiry into actual labor experience or creator culture, for example, from your research experience?

CA: A sidenote that may help the conversation. My university, in its infinite wisdom, has what they call “platforms,” which are the values and ambitions of the university, like “enabling platform” and “future platform.” To them, a platform—like *pingtai* 平台 in Chinese—is basically a stage, an avenue where you decide to amplify something. However, they also borrow the metaphor of a platform with structure, governance, and our participation in it. So it is no longer just about values, missions, and beliefs but a structure that we are agreeing to participate in. There is a coherent organization, even if the only organization is a website with words that say, “This is where we are.” But that is the borrowing of corporate language to appear more organized and structured, to have the veneer of shininess or stability. It gives people the buy-in to say, “Yup, I am now here, and I am contributing as an individual at the grassroots level, building a startup, and participating in an already established system.” It allows them to go in with a bit of blind faith. I can see the value in that metaphor.

I direct the IER Lab at Curtin, and in 2023, we worked with a really wonderful multicultural, multilingual group. Guo Jia and I (Abidin & Guo, 2023) wrote a report entitled “Platformed Creator Discourse in Chinese Markets.” In short, we were very tired of people saying, “Oh, internet celebrities and influencers, it is just the same as *wanghong* 網紅.” Depending on the platform you are on, the term *wanghong* may or may not be appropriate. Depending on whether you are in Tier 1 to Tier 4 in Greater China, your product and your practice, *wanghong* has different currencies, or it might just be an empty signifier. We can study this in many ways, like press research and archival reviews. We can even study platforms and the way they change the discourse, which is what we did. We felt that while people had their own vernacular uses of these varieties of terms, platforms wanted to wrestle control and mainstream some terms over others. For instance, while in the past you were a “user,” calling you a “creator partner” made it feel like you are not being “exploited” to provide free labor and content, but instead “collaborating” with platforms. Technically, the practice is still the same. You are volunteering free,

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user-generated content, but the discourse helps you perceive this as being voluntary, as if you are an equal.

To your other question, I think we can map all of the ways platforms have historically been “sneaky” in changing design elements without notifying us, but that would require systematic research that can be undertaken by a lot of disciplines, such as web archaeologists, archivists, and historians. If I want to study this as an anthropologist, I want to know: What did people feel in the “glory days” of gig economy culture? What was the optimism? What were the “vibes,” as young people say these days? Why did people feel like this was the *gaochao* 高潮, the climax of the phenomenon? As the industry decayed, what were the sentiments again? How did the culture shift? How did people respond differently? I think these temporary experiences or reflections cannot be documented in a screenshot or via the Wayback Machine. You have to capture the present in time and then look back at it in retrospect. The value of doing this allows you to triangulate these experiences with what the platforms actually announced and what the reporters surmised to be sentiments from the ground, etc.

NVD: Yeah, and it is actually those tensions and contradictions that matter, and they are great to report on as a researcher. I do not see the problem with a platform being a fuzzy concept. For our journal *Platforms & Society*, this is a very good starting point that we actually want to cultivate.

CL: **The comment about the fuzziness of the platform concept comes from different disciplines. For example, Jian recently received a comment on his submitted book manuscript saying, “Platforms have been a buzzword. Everyone is talking about platforms. Why do not you just talk about the Chinese internet instead of Chinese platforms?” Of course, we know platforms are different from the older term software. It is important to talk about how the transition from software to platform happened and what new features emerged in this process. In your research and writings, do you also intentionally emphasize that you are studying platforms? Do you see platforms as technical entities or assemblages still matter in your research subjects?**

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NVD: I say that I study platforms and platformization very explicitly these days. But that is also strategic in terms of my professional life. I spent many years feeling deeply awkward when people asked, “What do you do? What do you know? How were you trained? Where do you study?” I sometimes hesitate, but I say that I study platforms and platformization to give me a foundation or a point of reference for others. I know that people will have some idea of what that means. At the same time, as you heard today, ultimately, I am less interested in platforms themselves—whatever they are—but more interested in how they serve as a stepping stone or as an entry point into thinking about particular life worlds, structural issues, inequalities, and so on. So I am interested in what Shapiro and I (2023) recently called the platform-adjacent approach—thinking about the flexible and porous boundaries of platforms and how they engage in boundary work. It is definitely not just a technical thing. Returning to Helmond’s (2015) platformization of the web—the process of making the web platform-ready—I am interested in questions of what it means to make other types of environments beyond the web platform-ready. If we think of it beyond the technical elements like API and data, what other social, policy, and environmental layers need to be adjusted to be platform-ready? What does that do in terms of the boundary work between platforms and whatever is on the outside? If you want a definition of platforms, my favorite piece is by Bratton’s (2016) ten pages from *The Stack*. Those ten pages are amazing for their conceptual abstraction, which really allows you to place his ideas about platforms into different spheres or life worlds. Platforms set the scene for things to happen, usually in a transactional way. I am paraphrasing Bratton’s work—they add value to those transactions and the people who are doing the transactions while always extracting more value for the platform. This is oftentimes done in a predatory way, though not necessarily, because there are various types of platforms with different business models. I am thinking now mainly of corporate gig economy platforms. It is always about market-making. Boundaries are always very porous, and there is a lot of spillover because platforms always try to absorb what is outside and bring it inside. They navigate the boundaries strategically because they do not need everything to be inside their domain, or “ecosystem.” I am speaking in an abstract way, but it is really about boundary navigation and what happens to the

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outside, which can be a city, a sector, a neighborhood, or wherever. Once it becomes platform-ready or interfaces with a platform, it can take many different shapes, forms, and trajectories. It depends on what sectors and platforms we are discussing. I would like to keep it at a general level because, for me, that is generative. And I would like to keep it fuzzy because otherwise, you cannot hold on to varieties and variegation. This is especially the case if we define platforms narrowly, insisting that they have to be programmable, include an API, and contain specific elements. It might make sense for certain questions and purposes, but I do not necessarily think it has to be the case because the platform is also an ideal and a model. It is part of not just a political economy but of moral economies. It definitely has that aura of opportunity, if nothing else. Usually, the challenges, problems, and risks are only incurred and experienced a bit later on. But usually, what people flock to is a space of opportunity. That is why I like to keep it a bit fuzzy.

CA: I have been introduced as a platform studies scholar, and I am honored because there is clearly a very esteemed group of people doing that work. But I have never self-identified as a platform studies scholar, even though I do study platforms. I will always say I am an anthropologist of internet cultures. I wouldn't even say I am an influencer scholar, even though a volume of my work focuses on that, because the internet also includes pre-social media, pre-influencers, and pre-platforms. It also stresses to whoever I am talking to my vantage point; I am focusing on the internet as a phenomenon or practice, or that I am focusing on culture. So, to put it more precisely, I think the visibility and importance of platforms and what we now call creator economies have become more prominent when these companies co-opt the practices of influencers, branch out into programs and partnerships, try to cut out the middleman from income and profits, and then try to regulate the control of revenue streams. In so doing, rather than thinking about the influencers and socio-cultural relations, you think of business models. It is in the age of this co-optation that platforms came to the foray because influencers are trained by platforms and made to think like creators.

However, a lot of creators do not really practice in the same way that influencers do. They are relying less on personal authority

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or parasocial relations and more on their content. People do not need to know so much about you volunteering your private life or having leadership over your community. Instead, they are just focused on entertainment. This is like the platformization of influencer culture, erasing some of that history and cutting out some middlemen to focus on creators. Ultimately, the subset of the internet I really focus on is still “internet celebrity.” You have got creators as one class of people, influencers as another, and then there are all these people in the periphery, the folks who are viral overnight (*baohong* 爆紅) or people who are there just to bring in volumes of traffic, *liuliang mingxing* 流量明星, right? They do not actually stand out or represent a cause. They are just there to usher in people’s eyeballs. Or there are even people who are merely memes, they are neither influencers nor creators, but their likeness is used on the internet. So I still go back to “internet celebrity” as an umbrella concept because, for me, that has longevity. It accommodates the evolution of all of these things. It also accommodates whatever is going to come ten years from now.

CL: This also brings up the question of interdisciplinary research. Platform studies, by nature, are interdisciplinary. Niels also mentioned in your opening piece for *Platforms & Society* that platform studies are being fragmented (Chen et al., 2024). What does it mean for you? It also relates to the questions of positionality and what kinds of academic audiences you want to address. How do you navigate this interdisciplinary and fragmented platform scholarship?

NVD: It is not always possible. Going back to that piece for *Platforms & Society* (Chen et al., 2024), you used to study the internet, and then you were studying social networking sites and subsequently social media platforms, right? But then we had this protracted and ongoing moment where platforms all of a sudden became part of basically every element of our lives, our professions, our sectors, and economies, etc. That is when scholars from all kinds of disciplines studying those areas also started taking notice and focusing on platforms. Their studies shaped the emerging field of platform research, but they were published in different journals tied to different disciplines, such as *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *Urban Studies*, *Organization Studies*, and *Review of International Political Economy*. So the field is

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emerging yet in a fragmented way. We, as aspiring editors, felt there was a need for a place to gather these different strands of platform scholarship. The field may remain fragmented to a certain extent, and that is fine, but we at least wanted to have a dedicated journal for the study of platforms and platformization.

CA: It is a “field” versus a “discipline” issue. I collaborate with a lot of people outside of disciplines when I am working in a field. Whether it is influencers, celebrity studies, creator studies, the gig economy, the platform economy, or whatever you want to call it, I think we have different responsibilities and a different agenda. When you identify as a field expert, you set the terms of reference and go in-depth. However, you also need to be equipped with at least one or two core disciplines to help elucidate concepts. But your responsibility is to make sure this concept has relevance to multiple disciplines so people can take your in-depth research as a term of reference. But when you are approaching this as a topic or a subject of study from different disciplines, like the topic of sustainability in the last two days, your job is to reconfigure how this phenomenon can be studied within the parameters of your discipline. You are not the topic expert. You are the discipline expert trying to illuminate how we can see this problem differently.

So I think the field experts, or people who identify as field-based scholars, you are at the forefront. You have to be, because you have to keep capturing what is new and then set the terms of reference and parameters. But discipline experts are also important because they are the ones who ensure that all of this is documented, systematic, and then embedded into the syllabi that we teach our students or that theories are mainstreamed into whatever we study.

Over the two days of the conference, we were offered dozens of definitions of sustainability, which is good. It would have been wonderful if we had an opening keynote or a comment about what the field of sustainability is today, with their terms of reference, and then perhaps after that, splinter into our disciplines. I do see value in that. I do not think the fuzziness is a problem. I think it is good because it means we are attacking from different vantage points. It also means that the research matter is sustainable because there is always someone covering something. The trap is a sense of competition, of maybe some

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disciplines wanting to own some fields a bit more, whether through method, definition, or approach, or some field experts wanting to push some disciplinary agendas over others and not being interdisciplinary in the dialogue. I think this negotiation requires a bit of generosity and a collaborative spirit, rather than just wanting to stamp your name on a thing or a definition and be like the “god” who created a subfield or something.

NVD: And we need interdisciplinary dialogue. Picking out the word embeddedness again, we tend to still think about or study platforms as a siloed phenomenon or a distinct object that you can study, like the “gig economy,” as I was saying today. But we need all those field experts and disciplinary experts to show us how particular platformization trajectories have happened and how they are very much embedded in existing institutional settings. Then, you can learn from them and keep expanding and problematizing our inevitable efforts to capture the meaning of the platform concept and to figure out what a platform is or does. So, keep the fuzziness alive. I think we agree on that.

CL: Platform studies always converge on some notes about governance. Sometimes we focus on the governance and regulation of platforms, especially in research on the gig economy. When it comes to creator culture, we also talk about how social media is governed and how social media should be governed. But at the same time, we also talk about the power of creators in the process of governance. For example, we discuss how they engage with their own community and how they exert greater influence in their own online culture and community. How do you approach the question of governance in your own research?

CA: There are a lot of great scholars studying governance quite literally by surveying what the governments and the platforms say and going through their policies. For me, it goes back to the question of the parameters. In 2022 to 2023, Xu, Hutchinson, and I (2023) published a special issue in *Policy & Internet*, looking at influencer regulations, governance, and socio-cultural issues in Asia. In this special issue, barely any of the papers really focused on “Big G” governance. There was governance at the grassroots level; for example, these gossip sites, these subreddit threads, and these troll blogs and comment

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sections were actually the ones conducting vernacular governance. Journalists would then take notice of the issues they raise and the scandals they spotlight and write a piece about it. When the public reacts, governments would then feel pressured to do something. That is governance. Usually, in the context of Asia, we expect governance to improve and evolve as a reactionary response rather than being preemptive, because there is already the overarching discourse of many Southeast Asian governments being too paternalistic or too punitive. But it feels “fair” if the government is being reactive to an issue raised by the citizens, who first enact these types of disciplinary mechanisms through online shaming, for instance.

The IER Lab also published a report in 2023 called “Benchmarking Influencer Regulations in the Asia Pacific” (Abidin & Hong-Phuc, 2023). We looked at what the government regulations said about influencers, digital cultures, and platforms that can be applied to influencers. We were trying to figure out where specific perceptions of influencers came from. Why is it so important for governments to define terms like “labor”? If it was children engaged in family labor, as in working in a family business, then most governments are less stringent about regulations because they are usually paternalistic in Southeast Asia and believe that families are the “basic unit of society.” But what are the blind spots and gaps if we leave parents to be guardians and employers over their children at once? In another example, it was important for some governments to consider “time” in defining “child labor”; work is permitted before ten at night, but thereafter, it is prohibited. Who will be policing these cut-offs, though, if your workplace is in the home? What if being on social media is part of your job? I think it was important to do the benchmarking across the Asia Pacific, to peel back the layers to see where the principles come from. The big question is, is there anything universal or regional about this part of the world that may offer us different insights when studying platform governance?

NVD: You are right. In the gig economy and platform labor scholarship, platform governance usually refers to government regulation. But I think we can take some cues from creator studies and other fields like social media studies. Gorwa’s (2019) work on the governance by and of platforms is very relevant. The so-called gig economy is just a very

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different set of institutional environments, embedded in a variety of mostly low-wage service sectors. Creators are very visible and very vocal. They have leverage. I am generalizing here, of course, but what I mean is that they can make their voices heard more easily than a lot of gig workers can. I am not even talking about taxi drivers and delivery workers, but domestic cleaners and care workers. It is much harder for them to be visible and participate in co-governance of any type around these platforms. Also, when the word “government” comes up, we usually think of ameliorative or redressive action by a government in the form of regulation. But we should think of government in the broader sense of the term, which includes governance by platforms. The gig economy research usually talks about this in terms of algorithmic governance and perhaps the terms of service agreements. But there are other participants in governance processes. There are other actors and conditions that are too often left out, again because we primarily look at the labor process narrowly conceived, and we do not pay sufficient attention to platform-adjacent actors. But to return to the question, I do believe there is a fundamental difference between the people trying to make money from gig economy platforms versus those in the creator economy and social media economy, as well as how they are socially situated. The nature of the labor is also different. In the creator economy, it involves being there, being vocal, and having people root for you. The stakes can be higher. It scales quicker. And you have a reach. Gig workers do not have that unless they go on the streets, but again, that is mostly masculinized and done only by taxi drivers and food delivery workers. That is why, again, we think of regulations when the word “governance” comes up. But there are really different environments. When we talk about platform work, I think we can have a conversation about the commonalities, like the ways platforms use data and algorithms, etc. Those are kind of the basics, but there are such different industries, such different actors, and such different stakes. The nature of work is different, and the compensations and where the money comes from are very different.

CL: Both of you have done rich research on creator cultures or platform labor. If you look at the larger picture, we actually have a growing interest in platform studies and creator culture, especially in our region. For example, a number of early-career scholars and

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students from China have published a lot about these issues in Chinese as well. What would be your recommendations to those who are newcomers to the field? What would be the lessons you want to share with them?

CA: I love this question. If I am speaking specifically to students in the Asia Pacific (APAC) or the Global South, i.e., not middle-class American students, I would tell them to have confidence in their work. While you may need to narrate your terms of reference for what a specific platform or phenomenon is, and people may pass your work off as just another “cultural case study,” do not belittle your scholarship. Despite the misperceptions, we all benefit from learning from culturally nuanced and comparative studies in this region. I think a lot of students start off with a very specific, unique, and niche interest because that is where their interest lies, which is great. But as their studies evolve, the students feel they need to become more and more “mainstream,” to speak the language that they think “mainstream academia” or white folks speak. So, confidence is important.

If I were speaking to the graduate students in general, I would say it is important to read. I think we are very eager to self-publicize, present, and package ourselves on social media; it can't be helped when the job market demands it these days. But we do not write nearly enough. And even if we do write, we do not read widely enough. So when we study new phenomena, we end up coming up with “fancy” vocabulary without going back to the questions of theory, frameworks, or concepts, or what research questions are important and valuable. It is great if you have coined a new term, but what're the conceptual underpinnings? What is the purpose? What are the implications? What have people written about before? I do not think we have enough time to read. The Key Performance Index (KPI) for graduate students feels like they are to go to conferences, publish, and write. You do not get acknowledged or public recognition for reading ten books, to list an example. But you can get through ten short, snappy articles written by a pop culture journalist easily; yet, the rigor, depth, and intention of these popular media pieces are different. So, read.

NVD: I wish I could read more. Also, if you are interested in a particular topic, you need to focus on that. Stick to that topic and see how platforms are involved in the broader context. The other thing is to

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reach out to more senior scholars. Reach out to us! I have noticed that especially students do not really do that. Just reach out and send your work. Of course, we will not always have time to read all this work, but it is really important to at least introduce yourself and to develop your ideas in dialogue with people who have been active in the field longer and whose work you really like.

CA: I think it is really important to reach out to senior scholars, take the initiative, and whatever you call. *Zunlaojingxian* 尊老敬賢, like paying your respects to your elders, so to speak. But at the same time, peer review the people that you want to approach because some scholars are a bit “gatekeepy” and competitive about their field and not as generous to the next generation. Also, while I think it is important to network “upwards,” you also need to network “sideways” with your cohort. For myself, I can easily explain why I study specific types of internet cultures to people born in the late 1980s, and they would understand. It would be different for people born in the 2000s now. There is value in generational camaraderie. When you become a senior Ph.D. student, network “downwards,” so to speak. What can you share with your junior scholars based on your experience? Maybe the advice should be given to the more established middle-career and senior-career scholars. We should go and sit at the graduate student table and make ourselves available, rather than wait for the email introductions that we know we will not read because there are too many streaming in each day.

NVD: Yes, that is a fair point. And that is also what I like about the annual Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) conferences. They include pre-conference workshops and mentoring programs that stage interactions between junior and senior scholars that are really useful. What I get a lot from students, also in these contexts, is that the more you read, the more you get the feeling that everything has already been researched. But there is always something new to say! As we discussed, the landscape is constantly changing. Platforms are constantly changing. Societies are constantly changing. Research is constantly changing. So do not think that everything has been said! Do not let that cripple you. Then again, that sense of the field’s saturation with respect to a certain topic and the frustration it conjures can also be positive. So maybe another piece of advice or suggestion would

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be to write from that place of dissatisfaction and frustration about the state of the art. I am a firm believer in the power of the negative, of negation, and its ability to forge productive change. So latch on to what you see as the field's shortcomings and blind spots and take it from there.

CA: Sometimes, the senior scholars are wrong!

NVD: Yeah, that is a good point.

CA: They do not see what you see. Sometimes, it still feels weird to call myself a “senior scholar.” I was literally recently an early-career researcher; I graduated nine years ago and took a lot of time off for caring responsibilities and parental leave. But sometimes we do not catch up with the times. Sometimes, we do not have the vantage points of people living in other milieus. There is no need to always defer to “authority” or “seniority.” It is good to read, understand the background, build on that, and stand on the shoulders of giants. But you do not always have to stand in the shadows. You can go and do your own work and be proud of it.

NVD: And do not forget that once scholars get to a certain seniority level, they take on other types of duties instead of doing cutting-edge research. That is not a criticism. That just will happen, which is the life cycle of academia. It is a cliché, but it is true. So savor those years, especially in graduate school, where you can just read a lot, hopefully, because later on, that is not going to happen so much anymore.

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