

Call for Papers: Rethinking Digital Labour

Call for submissions to a special collection in *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*

Abstract submission deadline: 15 August 2020

Full paper submission deadline: 30 November 2020

Guest Editor: Bingqing Xia (East China Normal University)

A number of important topics, themes and concepts frequently recur in studies of digital labour, such as exploitation, precariousness (Standing 2011), 'the gig economy' (Graham 2019), and unpaid labour, including those of digital 'users' (Terranova 2004) and audiences. Concepts of immaterial, affective and emotional labour have been widely prevalent (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005). This first generation of critical research has drawn, often valuably so, on a variety of Marxist, post-structuralist and Weberian sources to question prevailing neo-liberal and centrist models centred on values of efficiency and the supposed empowerment of workers and users. Some debates in East Asia follow this tendency to explore labour issues in the digital economy, such as platform workers (Chen and Kimura 2019, Chen 2018, Steinberg 2019, Shibata 2019) and workers in the technology assembly factories (Pun 2005, Qiu 2016, Sacchetto and Andrijasevic, 2015).

While these topics, themes and concepts have been beneficial in establishing a basis for critique, there is a danger that, at least in the form they have been applied, they may become rather familiar and in some cases potentially even a little stale. If so, this suggests a need to renew critique of digital labour, as the digital realm stabilizes around a set of key global players and platforms and as labour activists continue to face serious obstacles to success in an era of authoritarian populism. With its broad scale in the valorization of digital work, here, we concentrate our arguments on the professional workers in the information and communication technologies (ICT) related industries. Some digital labour debates in East Asia suggest certain issues that may contribute to renewal. For example, some authors have examined how creative labour in digital domains, such as creative labour in the 'platform capitalism' (Stevens 2019, Luthje 2019) and digital entrepreneurs (Leung and Cossu 2019), offers the bottom-up potential of innovation. It is important to address a renewed critique that beyond the rigid theoretical binaries that have long characterized digital labour debates on exploitation and labour agency.

We don't yet know the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, but it may well make worse the quality of working life of some platform worker, such as ride-hailing and food delivery workers, who often lack adequate access to employment-insurance benefits or sick leave. COVID-19 may change current digital labour debates in East Asia, including how to reform labour markets, welfare systems and government policies to ensure greater dignity of digital working lives. It is necessary to seek for certain agents supporting digital labourers' own rights that may lead to an alternative of capitalism.

We call for papers that seek to move beyond the theoretical and conceptual vocabulary that has dominated the first two decades of critical research on digital labour. We have particular interests in research exploring the agency beyond the paradigm on exploitation in East Asia, such as the socio-cultural dynamics of digital labour, reproduction of global inequality through digital work and possible responses, the agents originate from inequalities of gender, race and ethnicity. We also welcome papers addressing how COVID-19 may change the current digital labour debates in East Asia.

The print version of the resulting journal issue will be published in Volume 32(3) of *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, September 2021, although individual articles may be published earlier as accepted.

In line with *ELRR* policy of recognising the particular difficulties faced by women and First Nations/minority scholars during COVID-19 isolation, the journal will be looking for balanced representation in the published collection, and will continue to consider relevant high-quality submissions for publication in subsequent issues in cases where authors were prevented by COVID-19 related circumstances from meeting the relevant deadlines

Among the issues that might be explored are the following, many of which have certainly been present in earlier research, but often in an unconsolidated or under-developed way. This list is only indicative, and we would welcome fresh ideas from any area of critical research, and from any critical perspective.

- Changes in digital labour regulation and policy
- Immigrant digital labour markets and justice for migrant digital workers
- Agency initiated from inequalities of gender, race and ethnicity that may lead to an alternative to or form of capitalism
- Questions of *working dignity* in digital domains
- Maker culture and digital entrepreneurship
- Socio-cultural dynamics of digital labour
- Crises of digital work
- Alternative approaches to contesting digital work
- Theories of subjectivity and agency in relation to digital labour that build on or go beyond the Marxist paradigm
- Reproduction of social/global inequality through digital work and possible responses

Papers that draw on empirical research and theoretical overviews are equally welcome. We particularly welcome articles that engage with the topic of digital labour in East Asia. Submitting authors should review the scope statement of *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, which can be found at <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/elr>.

Process

Before submitting papers, authors should send an abstract of up to 500 words setting out their topic, and an outline of their argument and theoretical/methodological basis to the Guest Editor and Journal Editors-in-Chief listed below. We would encourage anyone thinking of submitting an abstract to contact the special issue Guest Editor via the following email address: bqxia@comm.ecnu.edu.cn

In consultation with the Editor-in-Chief and Executive Editors, the Guest Editor will select the articles that potentially best fit the special issue, based on peer review. Invitations will then be sent out to submit a full paper. An online workshop will be arranged in order to guide the development of the papers selected. Articles will be double-blind peer reviewed upon completion and subject to regular Editorial Board oversight .

Timeline:

15 August 2020: abstract submissions
 15 September 2020: invitations to submit a full paper sent
 Online workshop: a date to be determined in October 2020
 15 January 2021: first full paper submissions deadline
 15 March 2020: reviews and decisions returned to authors
 31 May 2021: deadline for final versions
 From 30 June 2021 onwards: articles published Online First
 1 September 2021: Publication of collection in Volume 32(3)

(Note: ELRR articles are published online ahead of print at any time of the year, following completion of the processes of review, revision, further review, acceptance, copy-editing and page proof finalisation).

Papers should be submitted through Sagemtrack <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/elrr>. The journal's formatting requirements can be found at <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-economic-and-labour-relations-review/journal202205#submission-guidelines>.

Editors

Bingqing Xia (East China Normal University, Shanghai) [bxqia@comm.ecnu.edu.cn](mailto:bqxia@comm.ecnu.edu.cn)

Anne Junor (University of New South Wales, Australia) a.junor@unsw.edu.au

Al Rainnie (University of South Australia) al.f.rainnie@gmail.com

References:

- Chen JY (2018). Thrown under the bus and outrunning it! The logic of Didi and taxi drivers' labour and activism in the on-demand economy. *New Media & Society* 20(8): 2691–2711.
- Chen L and Kimura F (2019) *Developing the Digital Economy in ASEAN*. London: Routledge.
- Graham M and Anwar MA (2019) The global gig economy: towards a planetary labour market? *First Monday* 24(4): <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9913/7748>.
- Hardt M and Negri A (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt M and Negri A (2005) *Multitude*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Leung W-F and Cossu A (2019) Digital entrepreneurship in Taiwan and Thailand: Embracing precarity as a personal response to political and economic change. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 22(2): 264–280.
- Luthje B (2019). Platform capitalism 'made in China'? Intelligent manufacturing, Taobao villages and the restructuring of work. *Science, Technology, and Society* 24(2): 199-217.
- Pun N (2005) *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham, GA: Duke University Press.
- Qiu J (2016.) *Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Sacchetto D and Andrijasevic R (2015) Beyond China: Foxconn's assembly plants in Europe. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114(1): 215–224.
- Shibata S (2019) Paradoxical autonomy in Japan's platform economy. *Science, Technology and Society* 24(2): 271-287.
- Standing G (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Steinberg M (2019) *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stevens, H. (2019) The quotidian labour of high tech: Innovation and ordinary work in Shenzhen. *Science, Technology and Society* 24(2): 218-236.
- Terranova T (2004). *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press.