CHRP DIGITAL HUMANITIES WORKSHOP SERIES 2

Beyond Tools and Critics:
Human-Machine Synergy in Literary AI

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Abstract:

When sentiment analysis labels a metaphor of loss as 'neutral' or a chatbot misattributes a myth, these errors reveal a fundamental divergence in how humans and machines interpret culture. This talk reframes AI not as a tool or adversary, but as a collaborator, exploring how humanistic reasoning and machine logic can productively collide. Through case studies—such as sentiment analysis of Irish conflict poetry and a retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) system that surfaces historical context for silenced verses—it demonstrates how gaps in interpretation spark innovation in both scholarship and industry.

Machines expose patterns invisible to close reading; humans infuse cultural nuance into algorithmic outputs. Together, they challenge assumptions about efficiency and objectivity. Beyond academia, this synergy transforms industries built on narrative, such as filmmakers employing understanding of literary narratives to enable scriptwriting with AI that preserves human sentiments, or game developers drawing on Irish mythology to craft transcultural storytelling.

The talk concludes by urging a reevaluation of the humanities' role in an AI-driven world. If machines excel at scale, humanists excel at questioning what patterns matter and for whom. By framing our disciplines as architects of human-machine collaboration, we can shape AI that amplifies—rather than flattens—cultural complexity and leverages the unique value of humanities.

Speaker bio:

Dr. Jenny Kwok is a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Arts, where she coordinates the Arts Tech Lab and teaches digital humanities. Her research bridges computational innovation and literary analysis, focusing on how Large Language Models (LLMs) can enhance—and be critically refined by—humanistic inquiry.

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