

TOWARDS THE SOCIAL AND MOBILE

The Development of the Mobile Internet in China and Japan

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Introduction

In this chapter we explore two divergent histories for the rise of social and mobile media—China and Japan. In these two different histories we see how various technological, cultural, social, and linguistic factors have informed the uptake and adoption of social and mobile media. Both countries share some common techno-cultural characteristics, especially the trend towards social mobile media. In particular, convergent social mobile media platforms—WeChat in China and LINE in Japan—are increasingly playing a key role in everyday media spaces.

As we argue in this chapter, social mobile media has become integral in many people’s everyday life and interpersonal relationships, especially in and around family communication. It is this intergenerational communication that envelops the mundane intimacies with hybrid forms of new media literacy. Our preliminary findings, drawn from a three-year Australian Research Council discovery project, highlight the significance of mobile media use within both the mundane intimacies (such as conversation with family members) and also broader social and political actions. In order to explore these intergenerational intimate mundane ties we begin with a contextualization of the rise of social mobile media in China, followed by Japan.

Internet and Social Media Development in China: An Historical Overview

In September 1987, 19 years after the birth of the American Advanced Research Project Agency Net (ARPANET), the Internet came to China. The China Academic Network (CANET) officially established the first international Internet email node in Beijing, and sent out the first email from China to Germany on 14 September 1987. The email included the text, “Across the Great Wall we can reach every corner in the world”, marking the debut of the Internet in China.

In April 1994, China established its TCP/IP protocol. Later, the first webpage “Tour in China”, was launched to introduce Chinese economic, cultural, and trade developments to foreign visitors. At the same time, in order to keep pace with the Information Highway Project being proposed by the American government, Beijing launched its so-called “Golden Projects”, or the “Golden Bridge”, “Golden Shield”, and “Golden Card”, which symbolized the official initiation of commercialization and civil use of the Internet in China. From May 1995, Internet business was officially open to the public (CNNIC 2009).

From 1997 to 1998, commercial portal websites such as NetEase.com (www.163.com), Sina.com (www.sina.com.cn) and Sohu.com (www.sohu.com) were established, marking the arrival of the Web 1.0 era in China. As they covered a wide range of information, from politics to economics, from entertainment to sports, these portal websites attracted huge traffic, thus functioning as important news distribution channels for Chinese audiences. The new online news distribution model greatly challenged the traditional information and communication model in content creation, business operation, and capital structure. At the same time, most leading traditional media organizations such as *People’s Daily* and *CCTV* also established their online versions.

With blogging arising from 2003, social media gradually grew in visibility. Around 2005, China fully embraced the user-oriented Web 2.0 era in the form of blogging—epitomized in 2006 when “You” was chosen as the *Time Magazine* person of the year. Internet users, young and old, rushed to register their own blog accounts and to keep online diaries. Over the past decade, with the introduction and rise of the mobile Internet, millions of Chinese have embraced the online as part of everyday life.

According to the latest statistical report released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC 2015), by June 2015 the Chinese online population reached 668 million (ranked number one globally), and nationwide Internet coverage reached 48.8 percent of the population. Among this percentage, mobile phone netizens figured predominantly—88.9 percent (594 million). However, despite the rise of Internet accessibility afforded by mobile media, it should be noted that there are still imbalances according to region, gender, and socio-economic status. For example, the Internet penetration rate in urban China has reached 64.2 percent in 2015, whereas the Internet penetration in regional areas is 30.1 percent (CNNIC 2015).

Today, the Chinese Internet industry consists of roughly three domestic Internet giants referred to as BAT—namely Baidu (www.baidu.com), established in 2000; Alibaba (www.alibaba.com), established in 1999; and Tencent (www.qq.com), established in 1998. These three giants control an enormous amount of user data. In particular, BAT has a wide range of investments, covering various fields of SNS, e-commerce, online gaming, online payment, entertainment, lifestyle, and medical care, and have produced several Internet products with national popularity such as Taobao (an online-shopping website/APP launched by Alibaba in 2003) and WeChat (an Instant Messaging APP launched by Tencent in 2011).

Along with the rapid growth of the Internet in China, control of Internet content has gradually been strengthened. The Chinese government has officially regulated online content and services since 2000. The current Chinese Internet content control system consists of two parts—content censorship over domestic websites, and access blockage targeting websites outside the state’s jurisdiction. The famous Great Firewall (GFW) system makes a large number of international websites such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube inaccessible to Chinese netizens. The blockage of foreign websites led by the state acts like a trade barrier that has enabled growth of the domestic industry—for example, Renren.com (the Chinese version

of Facebook), Baidu.com (the Chinese version of Google), and Youku.com (the Chinese version of YouTube) (Taneja and Wu, 2014).

In contemporary China, the Internet has become an integral part of official and unofficial forms of everyday life. In March 2015—on behalf of the government—Chinese Premier Li Keqiang introduced the “Internet Plus” policy and elevated Internet development to the level of a national strategy. According to Li:

We will develop the “Internet Plus” action plan to integrate mobile Internet, cloud computing, big data, and the Internet of Things with modern manufacturing, to encourage the healthy development of e-commerce, industrial networks, and Internet banking, and to get Internet-based companies to increase their presence in the international market.

(2015: 20)

Development of Social Media in China

Although “social media” refers specifically to online applications allowing the creation and communication of user-generated content (UGC) based on the technology and ideology of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), the earliest appearance of social media in China can be traced back to BBS (bulletin board systems) of the Web 1.0 era. In May 1994, the first BBS in China, “the Dawn BBS”, was established, providing breakthroughs for a brand new way of communication and discussion among ordinary users. Popular BBSs such as Qiangguo Luntan (www.qglt.com), Tianya (www.tianya.com), and college BBSs, which are still active among some college students, allowed new modes of self-expression and group connection, and also influenced public opinion in transitional China. For example, on Qiangguo Luntan people could discuss and even debate about national policies, such as the one-child policy and the strategies of anti-corruption (Zhou 2008).

In February 1999, Tencent launched its instant messaging tool QQ, which marked the birth of the first nationally popular social media product in China. QQ has been widely favored by its users due to its user-friendly design, rich applications, powerful functions, and stable operating system. By 2015, the number of monthly active QQ user accounts was 832 million with the peak number of concurrent user accounts totaling over 228 million (Tencent 2015). By 2004, the year Facebook was born, “Blog Fever” had fully hit China. Leading companies in the Web 1.0 era such as Sina.com started to provide online blogging services. Tencent also launched the online personal space known as “Qzone” for its QQ users. In Qzone, a user can present his/her online persona by writing blogs, posting photos, sharing thoughts, and linking to outside sites. Qzone has become a popular platform for personal expression and mutual communication between QQ users.

As Qzone has become more popular among its users, more and more social media sites have appeared. In March 2005, Douban (www.douban.com), an UGC social network service based on people’s interest and location, was launched. Douban targets well-educated young urban netizens with specialized tastes and provides them a public platform to share, review, and discuss such things as books, movies, and music. It also allows young people to organize cultural activities, make friends, as well as build communities. In December 2005, a Facebook-like real-name social media site for students known as Xiaonei (www.xiaonei.com) was launched, and its name was later changed to Renren (www.renren.com) in 2009 to attract more users beyond college students (as the Chinese “Xiaonei” means “on campus”, while “Renren” means “everybody”). By providing online functions such as blogging, photo albums

and resource sharing, Renren successfully captured the interest of the first generation of digital natives in China who were born after the 1990s, and enjoyed high popularity for several years.

However, Renren was gradually abandoned by users with the emergence of microblog media-rich sites such as Weibo and WeChat. The launch of Jiebang (www.jiebang.com)—also known as Chinese Foursquare—in 2010 marked the introduction of locative social media in China. Jiebang encouraged users to “check in” online when they visit offline places to win prizes, which also allows them to notify their friends about their movements and experiences, thus creating a new type of place-making among Chinese youth (Hjorth and Gu 2012). However, as other more influential social networking platforms such as Weibo deployed the “check-in” mechanism, Jiebang use declined. Jiebang tried to rebrand itself as an online journal for cataloguing the everyday, but Weibo has continued to dominate.

Weibo and WeChat are undoubtedly the largest and most dominant social media in China today. One of the earliest microblog services (similar to Twitter) in China was Fanfou (www.fanfou.com) established in 2007. However, the launch of Sina Weibo (or simply Weibo) in 2010 attracted many celebrities and cultivated a large number of grassroots opinion leaders due to its strength of town square-like publicity and fast information circulation. Weibo has undermined many traditional media outlets and become the well-deserved new media platform, contributing to democratic influences on the news flow and public discourse in contemporary Chinese society.

Unlike the wide publicity of Weibo (visibility to everyone)—the mobile instant messaging app launched by Tencent in 2011—WeChat deployed various internal applications to



Figure 24.1 A Weibo screenshot



Figure 24.2 A family WeChat group: WeChat has become an important platform for family internal communication.

differentiate functions for connecting. These apps included multimedia instant messaging (text, voice, video, and group chat), creative ways of finding friends (“shake”), and an updated social function known as “Moments”. WeChat has now become one of the most influential social media in China (Skuse 2014). In 2015 WeChat’s monthly active user number reached 549 million, with a coverage of 90 percent of smartphone holders (Tencent 2015). As a nationally favored mobile Internet app, WeChat has also successfully attracted those “information have-less” or even “information have-nots” (Qiu 2009) to start using the Internet—such as old people and rural residents.

The Impacts of Social Media in China

In the 1990s, the debut of the Internet and BBS opened up a brand new world to Chinese people. At that time, most people were used to highly regulated traditional media sources to gain information. The emergence of BBS challenged the traditional one-way information flow pattern, expanding resources for news information and enlarging the communication and social network of netizens. For the first time, Chinese netizens felt the magic of talking to strangers online and had the chance to express their own opinions freely on public affairs.

The blog bears a revolutionary significance in Internet history, especially in China (MacKinnon 2008). For the first time, blogs made it possible for the writings of the grassroots class in China to be read by others on a large scale. This phenomenon, in turn, indirectly resulted in the growth of online literature mainly focused upon palace drama, time-travel stories, campus love stories, and supernatural stories. Examples include the two leading online literature websites—Qidian.com (www.qidian.com) and Hongxiu.com (www.hongxiu.com). Notably in recent years, a growing number of popular Chinese TV series and movies are adapted from online literature, including *The Legend of Zhenhuan* and *The Secret of Grave Rubbers*.

The popularity of social media such as Renren and Douban can be attributed to the Chinese belief in Confucianism, which emphasizes collectivism and social norms over individual interests (Hofstede 2001). While their American counterparts may focus on developing new relationships and extending their networks in order to bring in social capital, Chinese college students primarily engage in the maintenance of existing, close relationships for bonding social capital (Chu and Choi 2010). Social media, especially Renren, have provided effective ways for accumulating social capital by China’s younger generation, most of whom are the only child in their family and thus have a heightened sense of familial ties and obligations.

Due to the advertising and accessibility of its platform, Weibo has become a significant media platform for Chinese netizens to consume and circulate news, to express opinions, and to engage in public and political affairs (Svensson 2014; Zhou 2015). It also serves as an important source of public events, even if the popularity of WeChat does result in the loss of Weibo users. As Kantar Media’s (2015) *State of Chinese Social Media in 2015* concludes, Weibo is the “pulse” of China—it both reflects and influences the pulse of China; it amplifies and solidifies the social trends.

On one hand, WeChat has created a unique social networking culture based on mobile multimedia instant messaging. On the other hand, it has built up a low-cost media platform (official account) for individuals and social institutions to express and share. In addition, WeChat integrates many other functions that reflect the rhythms of everyday life. WeChat has become the dominant vehicle for accessing various different online services—from news to entertainment, from e-commerce to payment, from taxi-booking to Lucky Money—seemingly connecting everything and everybody into the network.

In everyday life, the impact of WeChat can be felt as it subtly shapes, and is shaped by, changes in traditional Chinese family communication and intergenerational relationships. With increasingly more Chinese family members accessing WeChat, the popularity of family WeChat groups to share information has emerged, allowing different ways in which families can care for each other and express once unspeakable emotions, especially with the rise in intergenerational geographic mobility (Hjorth and Arnold 2013; Zhou and Xiao 2015).

According to our fieldwork conducted in Shanghai, through the locative and social dimensions of mobile media, parents have more opportunities to give care to their children, especially for translocal families in China. For example, let us consider the mother and daughter participants, Biyu and Ai, who are typical of the respondent found in fieldwork. Biyu's mother, Ai, recounts how mobile media has allowed her to feel emotionally closer to her daughter when she is physically apart through WeChat:

I want to know about her living, her mood and where she goes and with whom.
I worry about her safety. WeChat is a convenient way [. . .] Now I can know what she is doing at the moment. I see where she is. I see her photos. I feel we're closer.
It's just like I'm with her.

At the same time, the locative and social dimensions of mobile media also give rise to potential conflicts and problems, especially “over-care” from parents and “worry about worries” of children. Biyu is a typical case in point. She describes her mother as overzealous when it comes to her safety. Ai keeps a “friendly eye” via tracking Biyu’s “footprint” on WeChat. “My mom wants to know my every movement”, Biyu complains. “Over-care” from parents makes their children recognize the worries of their parents, which, in turn, worries the children.



Figure 24.3 A WeChat “Moment” screenshot: family members living apart use Moment to learn the whereabouts of each other.

Thus young people are also learning how to manage their locative sharing (and non-sharing) on social media as a mode of performance for their parents in order to maintain a harmonious intergenerational relationship.

Over the past 20 years, the Internet in China has played an important part in its economic reform and opening up processes. From PC-oriented Web 1.0 to mobile Internet Web 2.0, the Internet is a crucial technology within contemporary Chinese modernity. It is not only encouraging individual expression, group communication, and civic participation, but also reconstructing the traditional news ecology and power relationships.

In the next section we turn to the rise of the Internet and social media in Japan. Unlike the early beginnings of the Internet in China that relied on PCs, Japan's embrace of the Internet was largely synonymous with the uptake of mobile Internet devices. However, while these technological histories differ, connections can be made around the use of social mobile media to strengthen familial ties through mundane intimacies.

The Internet and the Mobile Phone (*Keitai*) in Japan

The commercial use of the Internet in Japan started in 1993 (see Chapter 11 in this volume). Initially, Internet access was PC-based, consisting of a dial-up connection (with the use of phone line and modem). This system was then replaced in 2001 by high-speed constantly connected line connections known as Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) by several telecommunication operators (Digital Arts 2015). Along with the development of a faster Internet connection environment for personal computers, Internet connection services via cellphones known as *keitai* appeared. *Keitai* (from *keitai denwa* or handheld phone) is an everyday term for mobile phones and personal handyphones (PHS) that have become ubiquitous in Japanese life from the launch of the first Internet-enabled handsets in 1999 (see Ito *et al.* 2006).

Until the advent of the *keitai*, Internet connections via PC required various kinds of equipment and infrastructure—such as a computer, a phone line, connection equipment (such as a modem), a contract with an Internet service provider—and the configuration of all kinds of settings. A PC-based connection was also expensive as phone-line rental companies billed calls by the minute. Conversely, the dominant mobile Internet service known as “*i-mode*”—an Internet service started in 1999 by NTT docomo—required nothing but a *keitai* to connect to the Internet and charged only for downloads, not for time spent browsing. The simplicity of this system meant that Internet use via *keitai* dramatically increased after 2000.

i-mode advanced its functions with the development of hardware and acquired 40 million subscriptions by 2004—five years after its appearance (NTT docomo 2009). According to NTT docomo (2009), practical services such as “news”, “mobile banking”, and “ticketing services” were the main services in the beginning, but gradually entertainment-oriented services such as “game”, “*chaku-uta*” (downloadable ringtones made up of the melodies of songs), and “*decomail*” (decoration mail) became widely used. *Decomail* updated the image of previous text-only emails since it allowed mail to be enhanced using different templates, images, color, and fonts—attaining wide popularity, especially among young female users (Figure 24.4).

The evolution of these diverse *keitai* services represented by *i-mode* has come to be seen as synonymous with the diffusion of the Internet in Japan. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), while penetration rates of the Internet in the 1990s were only 21 percent, by 2005 rates had exceeded 70 percent (MIC 2014a). A survey on Internet usage by device conducted by MIC found that the computer was the main Internet

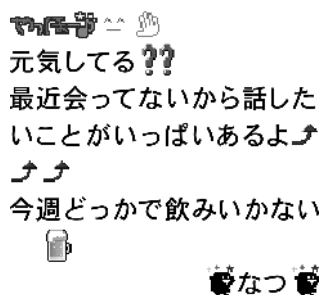


Figure 24.4 Decomail (NTT docomo)

access portal until 2003 (at 40 percent), then becoming a concurrent use of both computer and mobile device in 2005 (57 percent), to the situation today whereby access by computer only has decreased to just 18.6 percent (MIC 2014b). Now it is impossible to untangle the connection between the Internet and the *keitai* in Japan.

Sumaho and Social Media

With the recent spread of smartphones, the Internet has become an embedded part of everyday life for Japanese people, old and young. In Japan, the popularization of smartphones began in the late 2000s when the first iPhone arrived. According to a survey conducted by the Institute for Information and Communications Policy (IICP) in 2013, the utilization rate of smartphones was 52.8 percent, which was 20 points up from the previous poll (IICP 2014). The age group that uses smartphones most frequently is people in their twenties (87.9 percent), followed by those in their thirties (78.7 percent), teens (63.3 percent), forties (58.8 percent), fifties (32.4 percent), and sixties (8.7 percent).

The smartphone is called “*sumaho*” in Japanese and is distinguished from *keitai*. While *keitai* referred to conventional Japanese mobile phones, these devices were more what other countries would define as “smart”. *Keitai* devices afforded a convergence of various capabilities including mobile Internet—a capability that many associate with smartphones. A prominent feature of *sumaho* is its flexibility in installing various apps and customizing the set of functions and appearances by an individual’s own preferences. Moreover, a touch screen also became an indicator of a *sumaho*. The spread of *sumaho* has resulted in an increase not only in Internet use, but also in more intense social media use among the younger generation. *Sumaho* users use social media more and for longer than conventional *keitai* users (Sekine 2013). That is to say, they no longer talk over *sumaho*, instead they communicate via various social media applications, exchanging short phrases and images. The success of the *sumaho* has also led to the success of LINE. It seems that *sumaho* is creating more opportunities for synchronous communication.

Post-2004 Japan has seen the rise of social media represented by emerging companies such as mixi, GREE, and Mobage. Despite maintaining an invitation-based user registration system until 2010, mixi enrollments had exceeded 10 million by 2007 (Yoshino 2014). mixi allowed users to interact with other mutually accepted members (called “*my miku*”) by sharing diaries and photo albums or by interacting in “community” pages with those who share the same interests.

A feature of mixi was how it represented a sharp contrast to large-scale, anonymous Web 1.0 bulletin board systems (BBS) such as 2ch (“*ni-chan*”) that had been popular at the beginning of the 2000s. In 2ch users mostly interacted with an unspecified number of other users on an anonymous basis, and, given the anonymity, 2ch became well known for its anarchic and sometimes racist and sexist content. In contrast, mixi offered a sense of security to its users as communication in mixi was based upon a mutually accepted member (*my-miku*) and community members (Yoshino 2014). This type of network promoted trust and respect rather than the trolling characterized by 2ch.

GREE and Mobage harnessed Japan’s love of games by focusing upon game services. GREE is known for its world-first mobile social game *Tsuri Suta* (Fishing Star) (GREE 2015). GREE released successive games targeting youth and also sold in-game items (Fujishiro 2010). By 2009, membership surpassed 10 million. Mobage focused on combining social media with games. Its popular games include *Kaitou Royale* (A Royal Phantom Thief), in which the user hunts treasures with other users in the game, and *Hoshikku*, in which users develop the civilization of their star (Fujishiro 2010). Mobage acquired 10 million users in 2008 (DeNA 2015).

During this time, foreign social media such as Twitter and Facebook started to spread in the 2010s, heightened during and after the events of March 2011 (Yoshino 2014). As of 2015, the current social media rates in Japan are 57.1 percent—with 91 percent in the twenties age group, 80.8 percent in the twenties age group, 80.8 percent in the thirties, 76.3 percent in the teens, 60.5 percent in the forties, 36.7 percent in the fifties, and 14.3 percent in the sixties (IICP 2014). The following statistics identify the usage of the three most frequently used social media services among each age group (IICP 2014).

More recently, LINE has begun to dominate the social media landscape in Japan. In particular, its deployment across the generations, and as a metaphor for familial genealogies, can be noted. LINE is a service providing text-messaging among individuals or groups, as

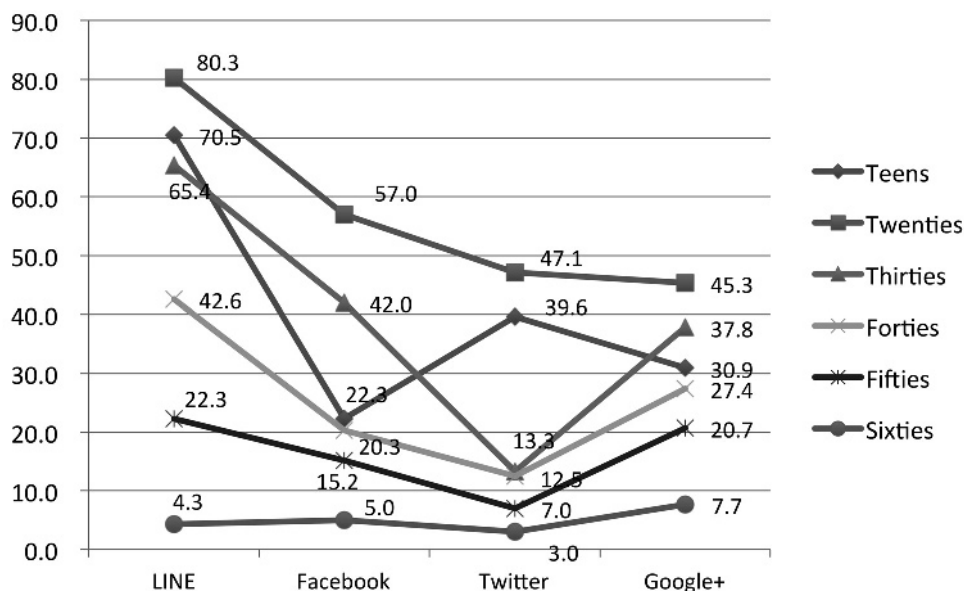


Figure 24.5 Use of popular social media (by age groups)



Figure 24.6 Chat with rabbit stamps on LINE

well as making phone and video calls for no charge. A stamp function—which is an advanced form of *emoji* (pictogram or emoticons) and *decomail*—allows communication without the need for text messaging and this *kawaii* (cute) culture has been key to its success (Figure 24.6). Many of these functions are available in the Chinese WeChat, highlighting the overlaps between the applications and their significance in intergenerational ties in and around social mobile media use in Japan and China.

LINE was developed soon after the earthquake in March 2011. The ex-president of LINE, Mr Morikawa, explained in an interview that they decided to develop LINE because they saw that many people used Twitter as a communication tool for intimates at the time of the earthquake (ITmedia business online 2013). Since 2011 when LINE started its service, it has gained users in many countries, especially Japan. As of 2015, the number of domestic registrants was 58 million, which is over 45 percent of the whole population (LINE 2015). The popularity of LINE has overtaken the role of the aforementioned social media like mixi, GREE, and Mobage. Mr Morikawa cited three characteristics as significant to its success (ITmedia business online 2013):

- Users can communicate with familiar people privately.
- Services are designed especially for *sumaho*.
- Adopting elements such as *emoji* (pictogram), *decomail*, games, and fortune-telling, which were the culture of *i-mode*.

LINE argued that people were exhausted from the multiple communication avenues. By deploying cute characters—which have played an important role in Japanese culture and expressing emotions (Hjorth 2003)—LINE provided the growing amount of *sumaho* users with easy, fun, familiar, and mundane ways to communicate with co-present intimates. Here the *kawaii* functions to personalize and bring an emotional softening to digital encounters.

The Use of Social Media in Family Contexts in Japan

In our fieldwork in Tokyo, seven out of eight participants use LINE most in communicating with their families. Over the three years of working with households, the significance of LINE in intergenerational relationships has grown. In addition, four out of these seven participants have a “family” group on LINE and send messages back and forth with their families. Here, LINE operates as a digital genealogy for offline intimacies. As one participant, 22-year-old Haruko, noted:

My family writes about how they are doing in the family group on LINE. My younger brother tells us when he is coming home from his year abroad and my parents send us photos when they go traveling. It's handy to share photos and videos with everyone in the family. When my younger brother graduated from university, he sent a graduation photo and a message to us to thank our parents. I was deeply moved because at that time we all lived separately. I also sent my future plans to them when I was studying abroad. I felt I was saved at that moment. Before using LINE we didn't share photos when we were traveling. I think we started to use LINE in this way because we started to live separately. Until now we could have sent emails simultaneously to everyone, but we didn't. I like LINE because we can communicate like having a chat.

As discussed elsewhere (Ohashi and Kato 2016), most of the participants in our fieldwork were using more than one social media service. Through a tapestry of social media use afforded by the *sumaho*, they were able to compartmentalize different mundane intimacies and intimate publics. However, currently LINE is the most favored social media service for maintaining relationships with their families. Like the Chinese counterpart, WeChat, LINE plays a key role in the daily rituals that are both intimate as well as mundane. Combined with the use of “stamps”, the use of LINE may complement their face-to-face interactions.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have contrasted two very different histories of the rise of the Internet and how it has transformed into its current smartphone context. The development of the Internet in China took place in a rather staged way—from Web 1.0 (that is, the prosperity of portal websites and the popularity of PC) to Web 2.0 (that is, the mobile Internet and the popularity of smartphones). When it comes to Japan, access to the Internet from both PC and mobile phones converged early thanks to the existence of *keitai*. We find that the development of the Internet in China was strongly associated with the effort of the government; while considering the Japanese case, it was not as government-driven as the case in China.

As both Japan and China are culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse, the rise of the Internet, followed by mobile Internet and then social mobile media, has allowed for alternative ways in which to articulate the personal and intergenerational, as well as the political and social. For example, immediately after the earthquake in March 2011, it is said that in the central Tokyo area (including prefectures adjacent to Tokyo), more than five million people could not reach their home on that day because of the damage to public transportation. According to the survey conducted by Weather News (2011), it took about seven times longer to reach home when compared to a person's ordinary commute. While many stayed in their office building, some people tried to walk home. It was reported that during the walk home, many tried to use Twitter to collect information about ongoing changes in transportation recovery. One could, in fact, spontaneously change the route toward one's home based on communication through tweets. Social media enabled coordination at a micro level. Also, as Tamura suggests (in this volume), the experiences of the earthquake motivated people to utilize social media applications to gather and share information about changes in the social and political climate. In addition, mobile media also operated symbolically as a vessel for containing the intimate during times of grief—some people held onto their phones as security when they couldn't make contact with loved ones (Hjorth and Kim 2011).

The political and social influences of the new media have also been observed in China. The emergence of the Internet and social media in China does not merely mean an increase in the quantity of information, but also suggests the possibility of having qualitatively different information and communication to provide diversity and alternatives. It is fair to say that the Internet in China is much more abundant, liberal, and diverse than the state-controlled mass media, and has raised information flows and the expression of opinion to an unprecedented level. A recent nationwide random survey study has found that, after controlling for other variables, Internet use is still significantly related to both civic participation and opinion expression of Chinese people, such that Internet users tend to engage in politics and public affairs more actively compared to Internet non-users (Zhou 2015). Like Japan, the Internet in China is a space in which multiple political and social agendas are conversing.

The mobile Internet in both China and Japan plays a crucial part in everyday life. In particular, the rise of social mobile media like LINE in Japan and WeChat in China highlights the significance of the media in maintaining and fostering intergenerational ties. These are *personal* as they are *political*, *intimate* as they are *public*. Here we see that social mobile media is shaping, as well as being shaped by, familial rituals. However, more work is needed into the growing significance of social mobile media in shaping, and being shaped by, digital kinship.

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PLATFORMS,
PRACTICES, AND
POLITICS

A Snapshot of Networked Fan
Communities in China

Ling Yang

Introduction: Contextualizing Chinese Fandom

Fandom has a long history in China. Traditional Chinese operas, of which Peking opera is the most famous, used to attract fans across the social hierarchy. The late 18th and 19th centuries witnessed the popularization of two images of opera fans: the sophisticated connoisseur who diligently evaluated and recorded the beauty and talents of opera actors, and the lascivious “sugar daddy” who squandered time and money to pursue intimacy with the cross-dressing boy actors (Goldman 2012: 17–22). In the 1920s and 1930s, movie going became “part and parcel of the modern way of life” in metropolises like Shanghai (Lee 1999: 118), which, in turn, produced a large number of movie fans, mostly composed of fashionable youth and petty urbanities. Between 1925 and 1937, over 120 film magazines were launched in China to help movie fans obtain information about domestic and Hollywood film stars (Yue 2009: 47). After having being subdued during the homogeneous and monotonous Mao era (1949–1976), fandom has made a powerful comeback since the late 1970s in tandem with the revival of commercialized mass culture. In the early 1980s, an ardent soccer fan seized national attention by giving up his factory job and family to become the first full-time soccer supporter in China (Tencent Sports 2009). At a time when few Chinese had ever thought about quitting their job or filing for divorce, the daring decision of this soccer fan made him a bizarre yet fascinating icon of personal autonomy during the reform era.

Fandom has gradually evolved from a privilege of the literati and wealthy patrons in traditional society to a common practice among urban consumers in Republican and post-socialist China. However, it was not until the phenomenal rise of Super Girl fandoms in 2005 that the general public began to realize that fandom is more than a usually benign, yet occasionally excessive, pursuit of a personal hobby, but also a remarkable economic force, a booming subculture, and a form of social activism. When individual citizens are connected through the Internet and united by common interests, they can not only determine the outcome of a televised singing contest, but unleash an unprecedented amount of grassroots