

through the fog and to start creating real order, and thus real possibilities, in our digital world.

Notes and References

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Mobile Media in the Asia–Pacific: Gender and the Art of Being Mobile

Larissa Hjorth

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A pink mobile lies on a table, decorated with a dense collection of Hello Kitty charms. Commuters wait patiently for a train in Japan, all the while checking their *keitai*. A salesgirl dressed in a traditional kimono smiles and makes the peace sign, while dozens of the latest mobiles are arrayed on an advertising display behind her. These are all images captured by Larissa Hjorth, the author of *Mobile Media in the Asia–Pacific*, and they provide the visual accompaniment to her detailed account of mobile usage across the region. In this book, Hjorth begins by taking us deep into the library stacks of research into mobile phones, and then out on the town, in a tour of four divergent, urban locations: Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong and Melbourne. By the end of this substantial volume, readers will have a greater appreciation of the emerging and variegated role of mobile media in cultural production, friendship, gender and creativity in the region.

Her fieldwork, which forms the core of this book, began back in 2000 and progressed over several years. These ethnographic studies become the source of personal and direct accounts of how mobile phones have shaped and become embedded in urban cultures in the Asia–Pacific region in the early years of the century. Of course, the cultures of cities such as Tokyo and Hong Kong change very quickly, and mobiles change faster still. But rather than risking an excessive particularism in her research by focusing only on the vagaries of the present, Hjorth has delivered a rich and historically informed reading of how these different cultures have adopted and adapted the mobile phone to their own conditions.

This is Hjorth's first single-authored book, which she wrote based on the research that also become the substance of her PhD. But she is no newcomer to the mobile scholarship scene: she is already a prominent identity on the international conference circuit, and co-hosted a mobile media conference in Sydney in 2007. In addition to contributing to the developing literature about mobiles in the Asia–Pacific region, her book also reflects two important shifts that have occurred in

mobiles research. The first has been a move away from a singular focus on the social aspects of mobile communication (common in the many early studies by sociologists) towards an account of its cultural impact. This ‘cultural turn’ in mobile studies has been led by the likes of Bell,¹ Goggin,² and Miller and Horst³; it is a strong list to which Hjorth adds her name.

The second shift is the move away from mobile telephony being the central object of research and towards mobile media, which Hjorth describes as an evolution ‘from communication to creative media’ (p. 38). The contemporary mobile phone incorporates technologies that span across text, video, photography, sound and gaming. While a person on the train may still make calls and send text messages from a mobile, they are just as likely to be listening to a podcast, updating Twitter, watching a YouTube video or playing a round of XPlane. This has meant that mobile scholars are giving greater attention to the points of convergence in media technologies, the role of users as ‘co-creators’,⁴ and the fluctuating atmospheres of personalisation and intimacy. Hjorth’s book touches on all these issues, to which she adds a crucial point of focus: gender.

For a book already possessing a wide scope—covering the existing research of mobile media cultures, and then observing these cultures in various cities of the Asia–Pacific region—adding gender as another locus of analysis might seem courageous at best. However, Hjorth weaves her analysis of gender subtly throughout the book, emphasising the gendered practices of consumption and production. For example, she builds upon McVeigh’s work on Japanese gendered cultures—including the ‘technocute’ obsessions of *kawaii*⁵—to better understand the ‘feminised’ phone customisations of cute icons and phone charms. She also deploys the idea of hyperfemininity, which was first articulated by L. H. M. Ling, to consider the gendered forms of labour, care-work and inequality that are reinforced or challenged in mobile media use.

Hjorth truly comes into her own when she is sharing her findings from respondents. Through interviews with 20–40 people per city, she touches on a wide range of practices: from ring tone choices in Melbourne, to camera phone usage in Seoul, to mobile wallpaper selection in Hong Kong. These activities may seem minor or trivial to the casual observer, but Hjorth connects them to broader cultural and economic histories. She paints vivid pictures of cultures in flux, where mobiles can express social anxieties, hopes and desires. Many of her respondents were willing to share their camera phone images in the book, and we are given glimpses into images that are at once delightful and banal: home interiors, cute animals, and paparazzi-styled shots of friends.

While the author is careful to underscore the differences between each city she visits, this reader was struck by the remarkable familiarity of the camera phone photos across the cultures. They are striking precisely because they are not: these frozen images of cats, babies and cityscapes recall the millions of similar images that have already been taken around the world, and will be taken countless times again. Each respondent has a personal story to tell about the significance of a particular scene, but when taken together it invokes the story by novelist Don DeLillo of the most photographed barn in America:

We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies ... They are taking pictures of taking pictures.⁶

Yet there are many subtleties brought to bear on which images are kept, how they are shared and who makes such decisions. Hjorth invites us to a better understanding of these processes. For example, she finds that in Seoul ‘male partners surrender their phones to the female partners’ who then customise its appearance, while in Melbourne ‘the phone is very much an extension of one’s personal identity and is less likely to be shared’ (p. 175). Hong Kong, we learn, falls somewhere in the middle of these. These symbolic and material cultural differences are densely packed through the book, but they are leavened by Hjorth’s own observations of these cities that she has come to know well.

Weaknesses of the book, which are few, can most likely be tied to its close connection to the PhD process. This can sometimes result in chapters that cling a little close to the published literature, rather than allowing the author’s own valuable insights and characterisations to take the lead. Another suggestion might have been to broaden the attention on urban centres to include an account of regional areas, smaller towns and villages. One of the author’s goals is to more adequately capture the ways in which the region, and its varied mobile cultures, have ‘evolved unevenly’ (p. 32), yet there is little to represent the uneven development between the centres and the peripheries within countries. The four cities featured in the book have much in common, in fact, as examples of large international centres of capital as well as being part of the shifting conglomerate that is the Asia–Pacific. However, given the already impressive scope of the book, I think Hjorth justifies her sample selection given the book’s emphasis on globalised modernity and the cities themselves acting as potent symbols of different kinds of imagined hybrid communities.

Hjorth is also a hybrid of sorts, being both a scholar and an artist. While she does not draw attention to her multiple perspectives, it shines through in her fascinating accounts of various mobile-related art projects, and also in her wider claim in this that there is an ‘art of being mobile’ (p. 264). This idea marks the book’s concluding chapters, and it also points to a fascinating trajectory of research that Hjorth would be singularly well placed to pursue further. In her 2009 video piece, ‘C U: The presents of co-presence’, she employs similar ethnographic approaches to those used in her scholarly work, collating SMS messages and images and interspersing them with the emotional meanings for the recipients. Her video is an example of both the everydayness of mobile technologies, and their potential emotional resonance as sources of art. While this work does not accompany *Mobile Media in the Asia–Pacific* directly, it serves as a captivating companion piece on YouTube for those who seek it out.

Overall, Hjorth’s book is a terrific contribution to the rapidly growing field of mobile media research in Asia, and one that brings with it a much-needed analysis of gender. One would be hard pressed to find a better-informed or more engaging tour guide into this complex field.

Notes and References

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The Implementation Game: The TRIPS Agreement and the Global Politics of Intellectual Property Reform in Developing Countries

Carolyn Deere

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The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an integral part of the set of treaties which emerged out of the Uruguay Round of free trade negotiations and created the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is not now possible to belong to the international 'free' trade community without also signing up to TRIPS. TRIPS requires governments to provide legislatively backed monopolies for a range of intellectual assets. Most recent knowledge, or its expression in artefacts or various communication media, are thus governed by the provisions of this treaty. The TRIPS Treaty significantly impacts on decisions as to what part of knowledge and its use are available in the public domain, and what part is allocated as private proprietary 'rights'.

While the content of the TRIPS Treaty was widely contested—particularly when the wider public first learned of its provisions—less attention has been paid to contestation in its implementation. This book aims both to fill that gap, and to develop a broad political explanation of variations in how TRIPS has been implemented in lower income countries. This is a very ambitious goal. As Deere notes, the implementation of a set of rules about knowledge and its artefacts can vary significantly depending not simply on the laws promulgated, but also on complementary administrative and judicial arrangements. Indeed identifying means to summarise the variations in legal instruments alone would be a major undertaking. Deere largely restricts her analysis to variations in timing, use of TRIPS flexibilities (especially in regard to patents), and administrative arrangements. Even so, to go beyond case studies to attempt to develop an analytical framework for explaining implementation variations in some 106 countries is no mean undertaking.

She uses 'striking examples' to illustrate specific points, presenting 'mini' case studies, or brief illustrations. Given that the data cannot easily be presented in a broader systematic manner this approach is reasonable. However, with the exception of a detailed chapter on francophone Africa, the result is unsatisfying. The methodological approach does not allow clear substantiation of generalisations and insights. Nor does it provide substantial new data on implementation status. Perhaps this approach would work better if there were more, more substantial, country or regional case studies for the author to draw on. Alternatively if the author had selected countries to typify various outcomes and focused largely on these, the argument might have been more persuasive.

Asia Pacific is today arguably the most dynamic region in the world, a global engine of growth driven by productivity, investment, technology, and innovation. Women can help and are helping to power this engine, making vital contributions to sustaining and enhancing Asia's growth and lifting more people out of poverty. Gender inequality also remains high across the region in the sharing of unpaid care work. Governments, companies, the media, and individuals in every community can help to change attitudes toward women by using cutting-edge and innovative approaches. Collaborate on regional solutions as powerful catalysts for gender equality. 'Hjorth's book is a terrific contribution to the rapidly growing field of mobile media research in Asia, and one that brings with it a much-needed analysis of gender. One would be hard pressed to find a better-informed or more engaging tour guide into this complex field.' - Kate Crawford, University of New South Wales, 2009. About the Author. Larissa Hjorth is Lecturer in the Games and Digital Art programs at RMIT University, Australia. Product details. Through the lens of gendered mobile media, *Mobile Media in the Asia Pacific* provides insight into this phenomenon by focusing on case studies in Japan, South Korea, China and Australia. Despite the ubiquity and multi-layered nature of mobile media in the region, the patterns of female consumption have received little attention in the growing literature on mobile communication globally. Utilising ethnographic research conducted in the Asia-Pacific over a six-year period, this book investigates the relationship between gender, technology and various forms of mobility and immobility in the region. Asia Pacific Media invites you to a webinar **MOBILE MINISTRY: Making the Most of Every Opportunity in a Covid-19 World** Speaker: Rev. Bill Snider, Director of Asia Pacific Media. June 1 4:00PM Dubai 6:30PM Yangon 7:00PM Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh, Phnom Pehn 8:00PM Manila, Taipei 9:00PM Tokyo. WHERE: Asia Pacific Media Facebook Page - www.facebook.com/apmediaorg. Through the lens of gendered mobile media, *Mobile Media in the Asia Pacific* provides insight into this phenomenon by focusing on case studies in Japan, South Korea, China and Australia. Despite the ubiquity and multi-layered nature of mobile media in the region, the patterns of female consumption have received little attention in the growing literature on mobile communication globally. Utilising ethnographic research conducted in the Asia-Pacific over a six-year period, this book investigates the relationship between gender, technology and various forms of mobility and immobility in the region... Mobile Media in the Asia Pacific is a fascinating read for students and scholars interested in new media and gender in the Asia-Pacific region. See all Product description. Product details.