

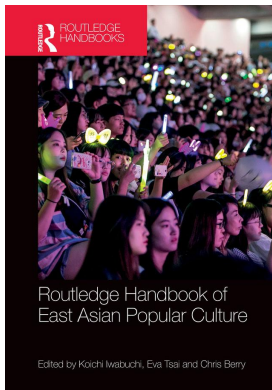
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SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

The rapid development of mobile and social media has greatly broadened people's social networks, allowing for the possibility of more diverse interactions. Social media in particular have facilitated the expression and exchange of political views, including calls for action against states and other authorities as seen in the Arab Spring, the 318 Sunflower Movement in Taiwan, and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The significance of social media goes beyond its potential as an alternative channel for information not otherwise available via traditional media. The terrain and architectures of social media are themselves political and their uses and meanings still are being negotiated. This section presents a comparative landscape of social media in three East Asian nations—South Korea, Japan, and the People's Republic of China. Each of the chapters describes active struggles to determine the uses and define the scope of social media and each recounts the creation or maintenance of “national borders” in social media spaces at specific cultural–historical junctures.

In Dong Hyun Song's analysis (9a), there was a period when South Korean cyberspace was operating quite unencumbered by state scrutiny or intervention. Netizens' mobilization against the Lee Myung-bak administration's beef trade deal with the United States was a turning point that set off a series of state interventions and the subsequent migration of Internet users to global rather than local providers of web services. Such “cyber asylum seeking” attempts were direct responses to state restrictions on freedom of expression, such as the suppression of critical Twitter users and the seizure of personal data from popular mobile applications like Kaokao Talk. In the cyber asylum-seeking movement, individual actions to “annex the global” amounted to the reconfiguration of cyberspace as a counter-space to the state.

Since the March 2011 earthquake and the ensuing tsunami and nuclear power plant disasters, social media in Japan have acquired political potential in addition to their original intended function as social networking tools. Analyzing this transformation in their chapter (9b), Love Kindstrand, Keiko Nishimura, and David H. Slater particularly note the constitutive, symbolic, and communicative relationship between the social media and various post-311 political activities, such as the anti-nuclear protests. They observe that the same technologies that allowed for the mobilization of numerous global social movements were also used for reactionary politics, such as harassment directed at Korean minority communities in Japan.

To some extent, post-311 politics yielded a powerful sense of national collectiveness in Japan. In the People's Republic of China, the collective sentiment present in the social media spheres evolved for different reasons. Jens Damm's chapter provides an overview of social media development in China, describing how its homegrown architecture and linkages are always contingent on the Great Firewall, and noting popular practices used to evade state censors. Damm observes that social media in China improve on traditional media and offer opportunities for civic engagement. Yet at the same time, there is a tendency towards pleasurable entertainment in social media that distracts rather than promotes public engagement.