對話世界頂尖學者

網際網路與文化的融合效應——日本先驅學者從不同國家角度來談

The Blending Effect of the Internet and Culture:
A Pioneering Japanese Scholar's View on Internet Culture in Different Countries

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Abstract

The latest developments in communication technology have changed the way people connect and interact with each other. With the growing diversification of Internet use, more

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sophisticated survey methods are needed to understand Internet usage patterns. Since 1990, Dr. Ishii continues to focus on information society, media effects, nation branding, and consumer behavior researches. He believes that Japanese mobile Internet use is unique in that users are more dependent on mobile text messaging as compared to PC—based Internet and mobile voice phone. Dr. Ishii believes that mobile messages promote and support strong ties rather than weak ties in Japan. Japanese people are more individualistic at the psychological level. Mobile phones facilitate "selective interpersonal relationship" among young people. He said the mobile Internet will develop around the world in different ways, and this is dependent on the influence of local culture and customs. Cultural differences between different countries have been explained by the concept of relational mobility, which is the amount of opportunities people have in a given society or social context to select new relationship partners when necessary. For example, interdependent self-view is considered a common value among Japanese people, the associations between the relationship-oriented value (or interdependent self-view) and life satisfaction (happiness) mean that online communications with strong ties (or intimate friends) promote happiness feelings among Japanese users. It may be expected to have different interactions which are associated with happiness between Western and Eastern countries.

Introduction of Dr. Kenichi Ishii

Kenichi Ishii, Ph.D., is a Professor at Faculty of Information and Communications of Bunkyo University. His research interest focuses on social psychology of media use, consumer behavior, advertising, information society, transnational cultural influence, and Japan-China relationships. Recently, Dr. Ishii has been interested in the text analytics and psychological study on social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) from an international comparative perspective. His research has been published in scholarly journals, such as Journal of Communication, Telecommunications Policy, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, Social Indicators Research, and Social Science Research. He also has published several books in Japanese.

YLC：As we all know, Japan's pop culture industry, involving Japanese anime or manga, for example, has always exerted a powerful influence. Therefore, when you argue that "with the growing use of the Internet today, it will be harder for the media to maintain control, especially since the Internet allows cultural products to be exported to the global market," I strongly agree with you. However, what impact might the competition between different nationalist sentiments have on the internationalization of Japanese pop culture? Can the Internet help us to develop different ways to respond the media?

KI：In Japan, nationalists are more agreeable to favor of the policy for promoting internationalization of Japanese pop culture. However, Japan's government policy has been almost useless to promote Japanese pop culture overseas except a few exceptions. Historically, Japanese pop cultures were penetrated through unofficial people's network in pirated content, although presently pirated content has disappeared thanks to the diffusion of legal content which is provided by commercial companies. As you pointed out, the Internet helped to promote Japanese pop cultures.

For example, many Japanese animes can now be viewed online. However, I have a different view on this point. I expect that all cultures will be helped to flow globally through the Internet so that different cultural products meet demands from various consumers in the world.

YLC：Concerning Japanese people's use of technology, Professor Ishii, you mentioned in your research on mobile phone habits in Japan that "The mobile Internet will develop around the world in different ways, and this is dependent on the influence of local culture and customs." Comparing the cultural differences between Japan and the rest of the world, how do you think we should explore the participation behavior of different cultures and regions more systematically? Can the usage trends in different places be predicted or explained by contemporary researchers?

KI： I think basic online behavior patterns can be predicted by cultural patterns although policy, technologies, economic and marketing factors significantly affect online behaviors of a culture. However, to predict behaviors, we need more valid cultural index. Hofstede cultural dimension, which is commonly used in the academic community is useful, but it is not enough to explain differences in online behavior patterns. For example, high self-disclosure is generally considered more common in individualistic cultures, but the self-disclosure level of Taiwanese people seem much higher than their Japanese counterpart.

YLC：Further exploring the application of mobile technology, you have studied the impact of mobile phones and mobile mail on Japanese teenagers and pointed to the need to create more complex mobile phone software. What "more complex necessary elements" were you referring to at the time? Will the continuous advancement and growing complexity of technology conflict with the utopian world of your imagination? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the current reliance on mobile technology and mobile applications?

KI： In designing telecommunications services, cultural differences in telecommunication uses are important. For example, in Japan, privacy-oriented technologies are more popular than in other countries. For example, Prof. Tomita addressed that communication with "intimate strangers" who are anonymous online friends is common among the Japanese youth. However, localized applications are decreasing because the big IT technology companies have monopolized standardized global applications in the world. In this sense, I am pessimistic about the current reliance on mobile technology and mobile applications.

YLC： **Professor Ishii, you previously proposed "strong ties SNS" and "weak ties SNS." I think that this is a very interesting research argument and perspective. It is true that our attitude toward protecting personal data and the intensity of interaction in our interpersonal relations lead to differences in the choice and use of SNS. In the context of these psychological needs, how does the industry use different types of SNS to reduce the wariness of users and increase social media interaction successfully? In addition, do you think that these types of connections are still feasible when applied to cultures or countries outside Japan?**

KI： In Japan, LINE is widely used as an SNS (or communication tool) for strong ties whereas Twitter is used for weak ties. In an SNS, maybe both strong ties and weak ties can work using advanced functions which switch two different ties. For example, it may be possible to create an intimate friend group in Facebook so that users can make compatible the two different ties in an SNS.

YLC： **The development of communication technology has indeed changed the way that people interact with each other. Therefore, Professor Ishii, you specifically discussed "strong ties SNS" and how online communication in Japan enhances subjective well-being. Based on your long-term observations, can "life satisfaction" and "interdependent self-view" represent the special values of Japanese culture? In addition, what does "the associations between**

the relationship-oriented value interdependent self-view" mean in the context of online communication? In terms of online communication on mobile phones and social networks, can we expect different types of interaction?

KI： Life satisfaction is one of universal values. Interdependent self-view , which is a dominant culture in East Asia, is also considered a common value among Japanese people, although many Japanese people do not actually support interdependent self-view. Contrary to the common sense, some psychologists even address that Japanese people are not collective. However, it is important that those who do not believe interdependent self-view feel less happy in Japan. The associations between the relationship-oriented value (or interdependent self-view) and life satisfaction (happiness) mean that online communications with strong ties (or intimate friends) promote happiness feelings among Japanese users. I am not sure whether the association between life satisfaction and interdependent self-view represents Japanese unique cultures. I think this may be true in East Asian countries. In contrast, Prof. Kitayama, a famous cultural psychologist, addressed that happiness is more associated with independent feelings in the US. Prof. Kitayama's theory predicts that online communications with weak ties will promote happiness in the US, although I have not tested this hypothesis in Western (American) countries, but it may be expected to have different interactions which are associated with happiness between Western and Eastern countries.

YLC： **In addition, you also believe that mobile text messaging is more and more isolating, in contrast to "strong ties," because it strengthens core relationships and creates "weak ties" interactions. I am curious as to whether this is related to Japan's uniquely low individualistic or high collectivist consciousness? How do you view this type of weak and selective social media relationship and the media culture that closely accompanies it?**

KI： I think mobile messages promote and support strong ties rather than weak ties in Japan. In my view, Japan is not a high collectivist culture, although collectivist

culture is the "norm" in the Japanese society. Many previous psychological studies have shown that Japanese people are more individualistic at the psychological level. The cultural pattern associated with mobile text messaging is the risk avoidance rather than collectivism. High risk avoidance tendency prevents Japanese people from connecting with people outside their inner groups such as family and intimate friends.

YLC：**Moreover, cross-cultural comparison indicates that Japanese people tend to use mobile text messaging, while they are less willing to use mobile voice phones; mobile phones facilitate "selective interpersonal relationship" among young people. Professor Ishii, based on your long-term observation of the mobile phone and Internet, whether it is through big data analysis, artificial intelligence, or deep learning, what do you think are the inevitable impacts on users of the next stage of the mobile Internet, as people continue to live everyday around digital data? Can the rapid development of artificial intelligence and other technologies create greater satisfaction and happiness for mankind in the future? In your opinion, what's the prevalent view in Japan?**

KI：Ah. This is a difficult question. Japanese people seem to be less acceptable for AI technologies as compared to other people such as Americans. IoT will help us to use technologies more efficiently for sure, but it seems difficult to displace human communications by AI. However, Japanese people prefer virtual communications which are not associated with the real social relations; they loved virtual cultures such as bell-tomo and virtual singers (Hatune-Miku). Thus, it may be true that they will accept a virtual robot (or a virtual friend) by AI technologies earlier than in other countries. I do not know if this technology will create greater happiness for mankind.

YLC：**Finally, in your research, you found mobile devices play a role in promoting communication via SNS in all of the countries except China. What are the key insights from your findings for self-disclosure, particularly in the mainland, Taiwan and Japan? What made you start to pay attention to these countries,**

and what motivated you to pursue cross-national studies?

KI： Maybe this is not the case with current China, because almost everyone currently uses smartphones in China. I collected data when smartphones were not common in China. I think personal communication networks are more open in China and Taiwan than in Japan, I am especially interested in Chinese communication patterns such as Mianzi (face) and social relations theory proposed by the late sociologist Fei Xiao Tong because I think it is useful to understand Japanese communication patterns in comparison with Chinese ones, rather than with Western countries.

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