

Der Erfolg des ersten Workshops in Seoul hat die Veranstalter motiviert, dieses Format fortzuführen und weiterzuentwickeln. Der nächste Workshop ist bereits für den Sommer 2015 in Planung und wird voraussichtlich an der Nankai-Universität in Tianjin, VR China, stattfinden. Dieser Workshop soll dann ein etwas größeres Format aufweisen und inhaltlich auch die japanische Netzwerk-Forschung mit berücksichtigen. Ein Call for Paper wird im Frühjahr 2015 verbreitet werden.

Sven Horak und Markus Taube

### **Situated Practices on China's Changing Internets: From the Users of Mobile ICTs and Apps to Weibo Posters and Social Networkers**

12th Chinese Internet Research Conference, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 18.–21. June 2014

At its twelfth edition, six years after its last Hong Kong chapter, the Chinese Internet Research Conference (CIRC) is back in “Asia’s World City” for a four-day multidisciplinary gathering of scholars and practitioners interested in China and ICTs. And the Hong Kong S.A.R. in June 2014 surely is an interesting *milieu* to discuss the Chinese Internet: sitting right outside the infrastructural and informational border of the Great Firewall, wired by the fastest broadband connections in the world, the city is poised for a grassroots referendum on universal suffrage that gained momentum through social media, while Beijing reaffirms its authority on the region with a White Paper widely discussed online and tightens the grip on Internet platforms in the Mainland after the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Among these tensions and issues, David K. Herold, Chair Organizer of this edition of CIRC, asks: what are Chinese Internet users actually doing, and how are we academics accounting for it?

CIRC 2014 begins right in the midst of things, with the first two days dedicated to the refreshing perspectives of graduate students from all over the world, enriched by two master-classes dealing with the methods and the ethics of Chinese Internet research. Florian Schneider (Leiden University) tackles the overwhelming methodological possibilities offered by digital tools, presenting a spot-on overview of network analysis and data visualizations, arguing for a contextual choice of methods and a critical eye towards the conclusions drawn from data analytics alone. On the second day, Jesper Schlæger (Sichuan University) proposes a similar approach to research ethics, deployed as a constant negotiation of protocols rather than fixed rules; drawing on his research experience on e-government in China, Schlæger discusses the subtleties of tailoring social science research ethics – informed consent, participants’ signatures and IRB forms – to the context of Chinese society, the expectations of informants, and the local Internet platforms.

Issues of methodology and ethics will continue to reverberate and generate discussions throughout the conference. One strand of contention is the conflicted methodological relationship with big data: is network analysis in itself enough to make statements about online practices, or does it actually hide the flows that happen between the nodes, with big data being better understood just as “trace data” (Schneider)? Clément Renaud (Télécom ParisTech), presenting his innovative ways of identifying and tracking memes on Weibo, claims to treat big data as texts to be interrogated through content analysis in order to supplement the flatness of network-centered research. Similarly, Hong Tao (University of Paris) suggests not a simple mixing of methods, but a constant zooming in and out between qualitative and quantitative data, to tie together individuals and society along the vectors of digital traceability.

During her spotlight session closing the four-day conference, Zhang Weiyu (NUS Singapore) summarizes the debate with a timely quote of Pierre Bourdieu, asserting the need for reciprocal integration of network and content analysis when dealing with traces of affective expression online – in her case, retweets of celebrity microblog posts along networks of fandom.

In terms of research topics, apparatuses of censorship and regulation still draw the interest of several academics (Zhou Yining, Liu Ran, Du Juan, Li Ningyi), along with theorizations of digital media as conducive to the development of civil society (Jun Fu) or mass mobilization (Chen Keru). And indeed there is no scarcity of original accounts of different Chinese Internet cultures: Katrien Jacobs (Chinese University of Hong Kong) presents her in-depth research on Chinese online communities producing and sharing homo-erotic fiction; Feng Miao (University of Illinois) and Florian Schneider flesh out nationalist debates online in the wake of the Diaoyu Islands territorial issues; Leung Wing-Fai (University College Cork) follows the racist attacks on Lou Jing, a mixed-heritage Shanghai girl debuting on a talent show; Cara Wallis gives voice to migrant domestic workers and their use of the QQ messaging software; and finally Tom McDonald (University College London), in an enthusiastic spotlight presentation, makes an engaging case for an ethnographic approach to the circulation of newborn babies photos across the QZone pages of young mothers in a Chinese village. Several thematic panels gather tangential topics of interest: videogaming and Chinese gaming culture (Liboriussen, Zhang, and Rao); personal mobility and mobile communication (Chu, Ip and Leung, Sun, Wang); and Weibo, with two sessions entirely dedicated to finding answers for the question raised during one discussion: “why is Weibo so important for academics?” The comparative approach proposed by Bolsover (Oxford University) is practiced by a number of cross-national inquiries: the adoption of local digital media platforms by expats living in China (Fan Mai), the changing habits of Mainland Chinese students living in Hong Kong (Cao Bolin), the civic engagement of Chinese college students in America (Wang Lei and Jiang Shaohai).

In the true spirit of CIRC, most presentations self-reflexively ask the perennial question: “what is this Chinese Internet we are talking about?” Many of the great answers to this question called for the importance of abandoning methodological nationalism, for the complication of linguistic determinism, and for the “need to unpack the black box of actors besides the usual dualism of government and users” (Séverine Arsène). Infrastructures and platforms matter, as they mediate and create leeway and leverages (Rauchfleisch, Mayoraz and Liao); the political economy of international Internet governance matters (Hong Shen), and the actual industry practices like *shanzhai* and maker culture matter as well (Silvia Lindtner). In the future of the research field, any analysis of the Internet in China must take into account the situated practices of platform cultures, the materiality of nationalizing Internets, and the political economy of governance.

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