# The Local Sociality and Emotion of *Jeong* in Koreans' Media Practices

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Yoon, K. (2016 a). The Local Sociality and Emotion of *Jeong* in Koreans' Media Practices. In Lim, S. S. and Soriano, C. (Eds.). *Emerging Phenomena, Enduring Concepts: Understanding Digital Cultures Through Asian Frameworks* (Routledge Advances in Internationalising Media Studies series). London: Routledge. (In press: scheduled for Feb 2016).

The final version is available: http://www.taylorandfrancis.com/books/details/9781138842328/

## Abstract

*Jeong*, which can be defined as a particular state of mind that arises from family-like relationships, is a cultural norm that governs social interaction in Korea. In the midst of the flourishing discourse regarding the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), *jeong*-based relationships appear to remain a badge of collective identity amongst South Koreans. This chapter explores how the affective local sociality of *jeong* is signified and practised in Koreans' use of ICTs. In particular, two aspects of *jeong*–sociality and emotion–are examined. In so doing, the chapter discusses how the concept can contribute to illuminating Asians' media practices. The chapter suggests that the local norm of *jeong* may not necessarily fade away with the emergence of mediated communication, and thus it is important to address how the local norm is integrated with emerging media environments.

**Keywords:** *jeong*, emotion, *maeum* (mind), sociality, *uri* (we), *yeonjul* (affective linkage)

## Introduction

The rapid innovation and diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in South Korea (hereafter, Korea) since the late 1990s has been remarkable and attracted global attention. To recover from the country's financial crisis in the late 1990s, the government proactively invested in ICT industries (Kang, 2014). As a result, the ICT industry's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which was just 4.5% in 1990, increased to 50.5% in 2000 (Hanna, 2010). Thus, Korea, which used to be known as "the land of morning calm", has recently been represented as a global ICT powerhouse (Jin, 2010).

With the extensive adoption of ICTs throughout the country, the increasing presence of technologically mediated communication in Koreans' lives over the past two decades raises questions of how local cultural norms are negotiated and redefined in emerging media environments. The conjunction of local culture with new media in the Korean context may be particularly intriguing because the country is known for the lingering influence of traditional cultural norms despite the extreme rate of modernization and urbanization (Alford, 1999; Yoon, 2003, 2006). In particular, Koreans' cultural characteristic of *jeong* (정)[1], which draws on face-to-face and family-like bonding as the prototype of human relationships (S-W. Lee, 1994), does not seem at first glance to be compatible with virtual communications enabled by new mobile personal technologies.

The emergence of web 2.0 and social media provokes contemplation about how mediation is locally negotiated in Koreans' media practices, especially in relation to the local cultural code of *jeong*. In the midst of the flourishing discourse of globalization and increasing media technologies, *jeong*-based relationships appear to remain a badge of collective identity amongst Koreans (Alford, 1999; S-W. Lee, 1994; Tudor, 2012). Thus, *jeong* is an important indigenous concept to be examined in the studies of emerging media technologies in the Korean context. However, media studies research, by both Korean and international scholars, has paid little attention to *jeong* and other related local cultural codes.

In this respect, this chapter explores how the locally specific cultural norm of *jeong* is articulated within emerging media environments, and how the concept can help to illuminate Asians' media practices. The scholarly investigation of *jeong* in the realm of media studies can

[1] *Jeong* can also be romanized as *cheog*, *chŏng*, or *jung*. The romanization of Korean terms in this chapter follows the Revised Romanization of Korean system.

show how the Korean notion can be compared to other Asian concepts relevant to understanding mediated communication, on the one hand, and with those favored in Western media theories, on the other. This chapter suggests that *jeong* may not necessarily fade away with the emergence of mediated communication and thus it is important to address how this local norm is imbricated with the evolution of communication technologies. In so doing, while suggesting an alternative, non-Western understanding of selfhood in media environments, this chapter also critiques and cautions against essentializing the practice of *jeong*. In addition, by applying an insider perspective on Koreans' media practices, we can avoid the decontextualized formulation of media analysis, and thus re-imagine emerging communication technologies and human communication (Dissanayake, 2009, p. 458).

## Defining *jeong* in the era of globalization

*Jeong* has been considered one of the key characteristics that govern Koreans' human relations (S-W. Lee, 1994). However, despite its frequent use in Koreans' everyday life and in the journalistic discourse on 'Koreanness' (*hanguginnon: 한국인론*), the concept has rarely been defined in academic terms (S.C. Choi & Choi, 2001). Although several attempts to define and analyze *jeong* have been made mostly by Korea-based scholars since the 1990s (e.g., Baek, 2002; S.C. Choi & Choi, 2001; S.C. Choi, Kim & Kim, 2000; Ko, 2014; C. Lee, 1994; Yoon, 2003), the concept still lacks theoretical and empirical investigation. This paucity of research may be due to the intangible and subjective nature of the concept, which does not allow for an unequivocal analysis and comparison with any social scientific concepts developed in the West (H. Yang & Yu, 2010).

The Korean concept of *jeong* draws on the Chinese character *情 (qing)*, which originally refers to emotion or feeling. However, the Korean notion of *jeong* has been so uniquely localized that its meaning is more complex than the original Chinese meaning (Chung & Cho, 1997). An authoritative Korean language institution defines *jeong* as "the mind arising from a feeling" or "the mind of feeling love or affection" (National Institute of the Korean Language, 2015). This definition captures an aspect of *jeong* in its ordinary use, where *jeong* is elucidated as a particular state of mind (*maeum*) and/or feeling (*neukkim*). However, the definition still remains too ambiguous to be used for cultural analysis. In this respect, S-W. Lee's (1994) attempt to see *jeong* as a perspective or framework that defines Koreans' human relations and social lives offers

leverage whereby we can analyze the process of *jeong* and compare it with its Western, or Asian analogues. In particular, S-W. Lee (1994) analogizes *jeong* as a symbolic space that represents Koreans' human relations, drawing on family-like bonding. From this perspective, Koreans' sociality in the *jeong* space can be contrasted with Western societies' human relations predicated on social exchange between individuals who seek to advance their own self-interests. The *jeong* space comprises *uri* (*우리*: we), in which "I" and "You" exist as an inseparable unit (S-W. Lee, 1994). In a similar vein, S.C. Choi and Choi (2001, p.80) state that "*jeong* embodies the emotional links among individuals that are bonded both socially and relationally". In this perspective, *jeong* refers to a mechanism of Koreans' social and interpersonal relationships between in-group members (Baek, 2002; S.C. Choi & Choi, 2001; S.C. Choi & Kim, 2006).

Given the aforementioned literature, *jeong* can be analyzed as a communication process that involves two dimensions – emotion and sociality, both of which are deeply intertwined with each other. That is, *jeong* refers to locally bound affection or a particular state of emotion (Shim, Kim & Martin, 2008), which is maintained within the family or family-like, small groups. Thus, it is necessary to consider *jeong* in relation to Koreans' mentality of *uriseong* (*우리성*: we-ness). As S.C. Choi, Kim & Kim (2000) effectively analogized, *uriseong* is to *jeong* as structure is to substance. We-ness and *jeong* are deeply interwoven and interdependent (S.C. Choi et al., 2000). In the sociable and emotional space of *jeong* (S-W. Lee, 1994), which originally draws on face-to-face based, small circles of people (Alford, 1999), in-group members share a strong sense of togetherness and attachment to each other (S.C. Choi & Choi, 2001). The *jeong*-based relationship is also likely to emerge throughout a long period of time (S.C. Choi & Choi, 2001). Regardless of one's individual interests therefore, he or she cannot be easily exempted from the space of *jeong* and cannot do so volitionally.

In response to the rapid modernization of Korea, literature on the discourse of Koreanness (*hanguginnon*) tends to lament the decline of *jeong*, which is often discussed in parallel with increased individualism and Westernization (e.g., Tudor, 2012). In particular, the growing discourse of globalization since the mid-1990s has aroused in Koreans a mixture of concerns, fears, and hopes (Alford, 1999). In particular, the explosive diffusion of personal mobile technologies has ignited debates about their impact on traditional and local cultural norms. On the one hand, as shown in serial governmental policies such as Cyber Korea 21 (1999) and Korea

Vision 2006 (2002), ICTs have been considered in the dominant discourse as a key to Korea's transition to a globalized society, thus strengthening the we-ness of Koreans. At the same time however, public discourse about ICTs has also involved concerns about the decrease of *jeong* due to the extensive use of communication technologies (Yoon, 2010). Particularly in Korea of the late 1990s and the early 2000s, young people were represented in popular discourse as a user group that was particularly exposed and vulnerable to excessive media use (Yoon, 2006). Regardless of their different evaluations of the role of emerging technologies, the two aforementioned dominant discourses seem to share an essentialized notion of Korean we-nesss. That is, emerging media technologies were signified as contributing or detrimental to the imagined essence of we-ness.

While Koreans have long acknowledged *jeong* as a foundational norm of sociality and emotion, it has been criticized for its restrictive roles in personal and public sectors (Alford, 1999; S.C. Choi et al., 2000; Ko, 2014; S-W. Lee, 1994). In particular, it is argued that family-like attachment of *jeong* among in-group members may intervene in private life. As *jeong* is created via a form of long-term, close attachment, it can be considered an inescapable relationship. It can be expressed as not only as "sweet" (*goun*) but also as "bitter" (*miun*) *jeong* (S.C. Choi et al., 2000). For example, Yoon's (2003) studies of young mobile phone users in Seoul showed how family attachment drawing on *jeong* could sometimes be perceived as "a nuisance" for individual members of the family. Furthermore, the blurred boundary between the private and the public in the *jeong* space may entail the management of public affairs through private connections, as shown in the management style of *jaebeol* conglomerates (Alford, 1999).[2] Such side effects of local sociality have been similarly observed in other East Asian countries, where affective and personal connections often command significant power in the public sector (Chang & Chu, 2006). As *jeong* tends to increase within certain temporal and spatial boundaries and to rely on cultural proximity, its formation and maintenance may inevitably exclude individuals who are not considered culturally proximate. Hence, the *jeong* space may not necessarily be an egalitarian and/or hospitable arena, since it clearly demarcates insiders from outsiders, even discriminating against the latter (Han & Choi, 2011; H. Yang & Yu, 2012). Overall, it appears that among Koreans, while *jeong* is an emotional resource to maintain and protect in response to globalizing

[2] *Jaebeol,* also written as *chaebŏl*, refers to family-owned, Korean corporations. The term *jaebeol* literally means a wealth ("jae")-clan ("beol"). *Jaebeol*s own dozens of affiliated companies across various industrial sectors. Samsung, Hyundai, SK, LG, and Hanhwa are the biggest five *jaebeol* in Korea as of 2015 (Marlow, 2015).

forces on the one hand, it is also considered an outdated cultural code that may adversely affect modern ways of life.

## *Jeong* in the cross-cultural context

The concept of *jeong* seems to share a common ground with other East Asian based cultural norms such as *amae* in Japan and *guanxi* in China (M.H. Kim, 2012; Mao, Peng, & Wong, 2012; I. Yang, 2006). It has been argued that East Asians share "relationship cultures" or "collectivistic cultures", which are distinguished from cultures that draw on the individualistic conception of human beings and relations that are primarily prevalent in the West (Han & Choi, 2011; Sasaki & Marsh, 2011). In relationship cultures that "share a common emphasis on relational concerns across all domains from the dinner table to the office" (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003, p. 364), *jeong*, *amae*, and *guanxi* tend to be identified as comparable concepts (Han & Choi, 2011). These concepts are often referenced in light of the individualism-collectivism comparison, or the cross-cultural examination of social trust (Han & Choi, 2011; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003).

*Amae*, which can be translated as "permissive love" or "dependence" in English, has been compared to the notion of *jeong*, as both emphasize attached and obligatory relationships (Kim, 2012). *Amae* involves a feeling of dependency between children and parents, and thus allows one to act "childish and dependent with a lover and feel comforted, forgiven and taken care of, or even be spoiled" (Han & Choi, 2011, p. 399). *Amae*'s collectivist dependency is very similar to the emphasis on interdependency between members of an *uri* (we) in the *jeong* space. However, *amae* allows for a participant's privilege over other(s), which seems different from the way *jeong* functions, as the latter tends to be based more on reciprocal relationships between *uri* members (I. Yang, 2006, p. 291).

*Jeong* is also comparable to the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which refers to "relationships of close ties" and now more widely refers to "connections" or "social ties" (M. M. Yang, 1994). "Practicing *guanxi* means engaging in a trust relationship through reciprocal interactions and seeking *guanxi* is to establish a trust relationship by searching familial ties" (Han & Choi, 2011, p. 397). The emphasis on familial ties in *guanxi* largely overlaps with the close bonding in the *jeong* space. While *guanxi* emphasizes "personal benefits rather than benefits to the collective",

*jeong* relationships emerge from individuals' commitment to the collective of *uri* (I. Yang, 2006, p. 291).

*Jeong*, *amae*, and *guanxi* are "all intricately related to human connectedness and interpersonal relationships" (S.S Kim, 2007, p. 727). Given its similarity with *guanxi* and *amae*, *jeong* can be situated in the East Asian tradition of human relations and communications, which tends to emphasize collective harmony, a highly context-oriented communication style, and clear in-group/out-group divisions (de Mooij, 2014). In this regard, East Asians' shared legacy of Confucianism and its particular role in Koreans' communication is noteworthy. Confucianism, based upon the lessons and canons of Confucius (551–479 BC), has significantly influenced Korea and other East Asian countries. Confucianism is a "value system that seeks to bring harmony to the lives of people in communities – the family, the village, and the state" (Shim et al., 2008, p. 27). Confucianism, introduced to and developed in Korea since the 15th century, defines the family relationship as the "prototype of all human relations" (S-W. Lee, 1994, p. 86), and thus social relations or public lives are considered an extension of family relationships (S-W. Lee, 1994). The imagination of the family as the origin (or inseparable part) of the self in the *jeong* space appears to reflect Confucian norms, and *jeong*'s collectivism and emphasis on in-group harmony are also regarded as Confucian influences. It is often agreed that "Confucian codes of conduct" operate extensively in Koreans' everyday life (Shim et al., 2008, p. 46; See also Alford, 1999; Janelli, 1993).

*Jeong* can also be compared to a few Western concepts addressing networks and/or affective ties. The affective sociality of *jeong* seems to have particular significance in the era of social media, as the concept may offer an important reference point for the Western concept of "social network". The notion of social networks, which emerged as "a middle ground between individuals and communities" in sociology (Baym, 2011, p. 385), is defined as "structures of relationships linking social actors" (Marsden, 2001, p. 2727). The Western concept of social networks can be compared to *yeonjul* in Korea, which is an actualized form of *jeong*-based close social ties. *Yeonjul* may be a good example of how the indigenous concept of *jeong* can be reified as a relatively concrete and tangible form of sociality. *Yeonjul*, which can be translated as "affective linkage", is a Korean mode of strong social ties that largely rely on the members' birthplace (blood and regional ties) or educational background (alumni status) (Lew & Chang, 1998). Whereas the Western concept of networks draws on rational individuals' pursuit of

interest and/or collaboration, *jeong* and *yeonjul* are not necessarily grounded in a concept of solid selfhood but bear a more pronounced social stance. Notably, recent empirical studies show how *jeong* and *yeonjul* are enabled via emerging communication technologies and how young Koreans execute these different modes of sociality to negotiate the networked individualism of (Western-developed) social media and the collectivist space of *jeong*.

*Jeong*'s affective dimension of social relations can also be compared to Western concepts of "caring" or "gift-giving". *Jeong* focuses on unconditional, unintentional, and ceaseless attachment, and is thus differentiated from the Western concept of caring that tends to take into account the carer's intention (Ko, 2014). Gift-giving practices examined in Western-based studies address the "exchange of the tangible between both physically distributed and co-proximate groups" and imply strategic engagement with social exchange for enhancing intimacy (Taylor & Harper, 2002, p.440). Such gift-giving appears to be significantly different from the way *jeong* operates; "simple exchanges of gifts or performing rituals are not enough for brewing *jeong* sentiment" (Han & Choi, 2011, p. 401) because *jeong* practices are more than intended social exchanges between individuals, and need to develop over a long period of time, emphasising unintended, selfless commitment to the group.

## ***Jeong* 2.0 in the era of social media**

The integration of emerging media technologies with existing cultural norms has been actively examined throughout the development of media studies (e.g., Horst & Miller, 2006; Miller & Slater, 2000; Williams, 1974). In this regard, the ongoing cultural negotiation of new technologies is not entirely unique to the Korean context. However, the role of *jeong* in the web 2.0 era offers a particularly intriguing case for media studies as it reveals how social interactions in two apparently different spaces–*jeong*-based space and technologically mediated space–are articulated with each other.

To explore how *jeong* operates, or is redefined in response to new ICT environments, two major perspectives on technologically mediated communication are significant (Tomlinson, 1999): first, as a *facilitating* process of already existing cultural norms; and second, as an *intervening* process that causes qualitative changes in the cultural norms. This framework identifying two aspects of mediation, albeit simplistic, may effectively address how the role of ICTs in society has been theorized. It also seems to resonate with the ongoing technological and

cultural determinism debates (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly, 2009). In this respect, while a new communication technology can be viewed as a means to efficiently maintain or intensify existing cultural norms, it can also be claimed that the introduction and diffusion of a new technology may entail new cultural norms that are qualitatively different from existing ones.

With regard to the sociality of *jeong*, it is important to explore how the *jeong* space as a small group-oriented, collectivist cultural norm interacts with the technologically mediated virtual space. Internet-mediated communication has been considered to decrease, transform, and/or supplement the traditional mode of community (Wellman et al., 2003). It is argued that the virtual space of the internet, and more recently online social networking sites (SNSs), involve particular affordances which incline users towards particular forms of media usage. In particular, Wellman et al. (2003) identified constant global connectivity, wireless portability, and individualization as critical technological affordances of the early internet. boyd's (2014, p.11) study of the more recent trends in online social networking has also illustrated four major features of social media design: 1) the durability of online content; 2) the existence of the potential audience; 3) the spreadability of content; and 4) searchability.

Western-based scholars have argued that the affordances of web 2.0 facilitate the emergence of "networked publics" (boyd, 2014) or "networked individuals" (Wellman et al., 2003). This view appears to draw on a Western perspective of the "the individual as the source of rational thought" (Bowers et al., 2000, p. 190). However, the internet itself has evolved differently depending on the user's cultural context. For example, the Cyworld phenomenon in Korea illustrates how the internet is localized, mediated, and signified among Korean users. Korea-developed Cyworld, an early form of social media (1999~), reflects local cultural norms that valorize the family as a foundational unit for communication. In particular, users on Cyworld create his/her own home and his/her friends are interpellated into a family member (J. H. J. Choi, 2006; Shim et al., 2008). For example, the classification levels for Cyworld friends are referred to as *chon*, which means the unit of kinship, close contacts are called *ilchon* that originally refers to parent-children relationships, and second level contacts are named "*ichon*" that originally means grandparent-children relationships. Jin (2012, p.5) claims that the kinship metaphor "plays a significant role in promoting online social networking in Korea mainly because users' relationships are stronger than those seen in other SNSs due to the metaphor of family relationship, which cannot be easily broken."

This familial imagination among Korean internet users appears to be distinctively different from the networked individualism that seems to be reified in interfaces of Western-designed SNSs such as Facebook (Rainier & Wellman, 2012). In addition, Cyworld's indirect representations of user identity, often via avatars rather than photographs of oneself, can be contrasted with the public display of self that is observed on Facebook (boyd, 2014) or Instagram. Shim et al. (2008, p.130) suggest that the avatar-mediated self-representation on Cyworld is a way to "express 'self' or to create an image of 'self' indirectly". Even so, the self exists in the *jeong* space, remaining largely inseparable from its family or familial communities. In this respect, Yoon (2015) has found that recent Korean Facebook users are not necessarily satisfied with the ways in which Facebook displays the self and facilitates networks. In the study, some Korean users tried not to directly present themselves on Facebook profile and timelines. For them, updating about their individual lifestyles and interests was not necessarily a cool thing to do, as they regarded Facebook as a virtual space for "showing off", something they were averse to doing. Conversely, they saw Cyworld as a more intimate virtual space where they were prepared to post personal stories and share feelings with their significant others.

In addition to its sociality dimension, *jeong* involves an emotion dimension in the context of web 2.0. The affective space of *jeong*, which originally draws on face-to-face intimacy, may be more complicated with highly mediated communication enabled by personal ICTs. In particular, Koreans still find it important to maintain such face-to-face intimacy even with the intensifying use of technologically mediated communication. For example, young Koreans, who are often depicted as a techno-savvy demographic, do not necessarily prefer technologically mediated communication. As explored in a case study (Yoon, 2003, p. 332), although young Koreans appropriated the mobile phone "as useful technology when it is based on a face-to-face relationship", they described it as "restrictive or boring when it is dissociated from such direct interaction". Similarly, in a recent study of smartphone use by transnational Korean families (Yoon, 2016), some young people questioned the value of mediated, virtual togetherness in favor of face-to-face communication.

The enduring importance of *jeong* as a form of close and intimate emotion implies that in the Korean context, communication technologies are not necessarily perceived as communicative, but are signified as technological and perhaps even incompatible with the humanizing space of *jeong*. In this respect, the practice of "cute customization" among young Koreans (Hjorth, 2009a,

2009b) shows how new technology is appropriated in a way that can be better integrated with the local emotion of *jeong*. According to Hjorth (2009a and 2009b), young Korean media users appropriated cute stickers, accessories, and avatars in an intimate way, so that affective sociality is enhanced and new technology is re-signified as objects with humanity and feelings. Koreans' preference for intimate interface design, stickers, and avatars has also been observed in the recent phenomenon of the Korean-developed messenger application (app) KakaoTalk (2010~), which has been nicknamed a "national messenger" due to its extensive popularity. Yoon's (2015) study of Korean KakaoTalk users suggests that the app's focus on inter-personal, and small group talk on a smartphone, and its affinity with voice calls have been identified as the key appeals to Korean users (see also Jin & Yoon, 2014). In the study, "doing KaTalk" (acronym for KakaoTalk) implied intimate feelings between participants who greatly value the closeness and closed-ness of communication. Their intimate feelings are not only verbally shared, but often rely on non-verbal cues. Certain user interfaces in cyberspace, such as avatars and gifts (on Cyworld), and stickers (on KakaoTalk), can contribute to non-verbal, indirect, and high context-oriented sharing of *jeong* (D.H. Lee, 2013b). In particular, the extensive use of stickers in mediated communication is considered a characteristic of mobile media cultures in Korea and other East Asian countries (Hjorth, 2009a; Lim, 2015; Russell, 2013). Lim (2015) attributes the popularity of stickers in the Asian context to the ability to explicitly visualize feelings, whereby the ambiguity that often occurs in Asians' high-context communication can be avoided; however, she also suggests that emotive stickers may paradoxically help to facilitate emotional social bonding that relies on high context communication.

As was earlier discussed, the affective space of *jeong* draws on collectivist sociality predicated on the collective of *uri* (we) rather than the individual self. This affective and collective norm may be in conflict with the default settings of emerging communication technology, such as SNSs, which primarily draw on an individualist perspective and encourages individuals to showcase themselves to their networked publics (boyd, 2014). In Korea, however, technology is appropriated through the local sociality and emotion of *jeong*, and has thus engaged with a local mediascape, in which technological mediation is redefined by designers and users as a more affective, collective, and humanized process. It should also be noted that the *jeong* space of affection involves a strong sense of attachment, imbuing individual participants with a sense of obligation to respond all the time. Indeed, Koreans have difficulty turning down

others' requests to meet or communicate online, or offline. In Haddon and Kim's (2007, p. 11) study, an interviewee commented on how she would respond to such requests: "I can't say 'no'. It's so hard to say no. It's part of the culture in Korea. To say 'no' is not good." In this regard, *jeong* relationships can substantially limit one's freedom, compelling users to respond and pay attention to others' requests for communication online. A recent study has also reported that young Koreans struggle with un-friending on social media and increasingly experience digital fatigue caused by dealing with the extensive range of Facebook friends (Yoon, 2015).

In contrast to the aforementioned observations on the lingering influence of *jeong* in social media use, D.H. Lee's (2013a) study of young Koreans' use of Twitter explored how *jeong*-based *yeonjul* sociality can actually be modified by social media. The study found that Twitter's affordances, which allow for relatively egalitarian or open communication beyond the hierarchies involved within strong local ties, interplay with and transform the traditional norms of sociality. Notably, strong ties and instrumentally organized weak ties are blurred in Koreans' use of Twitter. Thus, D.H. Lee (2013a) claims that young Koreans seek ontological security not only through local norms of sociality, but also through a mixture of affective ties and technologically mediated virtual ties.

The observed transformation of *jeong* relationships may also be considered in light of the recent notion of "reflexive intimacy". In his study of Australia-based Facebook users, Lamberts (2013, p.177) finds that social media users' emotional engagement with technology and other users are not simply dictated by social media's affordances. Rather, he argues, users may increasingly appropriate social networking media as a tool to enhance emotional competency, or what he calls "reflexive intimacy". Reflexive intimacy, which seems to be inspired by the individualization thesis, focuses on the agentic force of individuals in negotiating relationships with an explosive range of others via technological mediation, such as via social media in particular. However, this concept does not accommodate the affective ties and ambiguous boundary of selfhood in the *jeong* space, which do not necessarily derive from agentic force but more from relational bonds. In the *jeong* space, we-ness constitutes a central unit of intimacy and indeed, tends to be accompanied by the suppression of the self to some extent (Shim et al., 2008).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the unique cultural characteristic of *jeong* to develop an understanding of Koreans' media practices. Korea's rapid modernization over the past few decades, which has been accompanied by the phenomenal increase of ICT production and consumption, has seemed to be in conflict with indigenous ways of life to some extent. The remaining value of *jeong* in Koreans' sociality and emotion can be seen as a local response to globalization (Yoon, 2003). While some critics consider *jeong* to be no more than a myth that may not have any substance (e.g., Alford, 1999), this chapter has argued that the notion of *jeong* can illuminate how the local mediascape is constructed, signified, and maintained in the Korean context. Thus, the dimensions of local sociality and emotion that are salient in *jeong* can be further elaborated upon and utilized for internationalizing media studies.

The notion of *jeong* may offer an alternative framework for understanding selfhood in the social media era. Despite the increasing use of personal communication technologies, feelings of the collective of *uri* (we) are so fundamental in the affective and attached space of *jeong* that an "I-centered" perspective seems absent and silenced (Choi & Choi, 1990). The Western-dominated discourse of emerging communication technologies and internet-mediated communication tend to be predicated on a particular understanding of selfhood. That is, whether from a technologically or culturally deterministic perspective, the user is defined as a (be it active or passive) rational subject in emerging digital environments who can decide whether or not to be involved in diverse social networks. However, a conceptualization of selfhood that focuses on relations between rational individuals does not fully explain inter-dependence between I, you, and we in the *jeong* space, or the seamlessness of such relationships. This implies that a particular Western model of the "ideal" ICT user and its subject position may not be easily applicable to other contexts such as Asia-based users (Goggin & McLelland, 2009). Thus, for a better understanding of Koreans' media practices, it may be necessary to explore the ongoing role and meaning of local cultural norms.

With the explosive diffusion of social media and their associated apps, dominant social media's technological affordances have been considered to have significant influence on our daily communications and media use. For example, Facebook's interface, originally built upon the concept of "public-by-default and private-by-effort" (boyd, 2014, p. 12), may contribute to easily expanding the user's human networks, thus constructing a virtual public sphere which has

been referred to as the arena of "networked publics" (boyd, 2014) or "networked individuals" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). However, this conceptualization of networks may not fully explain how local affective ties, which are based upon local norms of sociality, such as *jeong* and *yeonjul*, engage with virtual, mediated communications.

The prevailing model of networked individuals also appears to adopt a technologically deterministic perspective, as it suggests that social media enhances a particular form of individualism. However, as evidenced in the significant Facebook fatigue amongst Korean users (Yoon, 2015), social media can be appropriated and signified as even an "unsociable" media form in the *jeong* space. The "sociability" of social media is based upon a specific form of individual and society, and does not universally lead to intensifying and expanding social ties. Of course, individualist online user behaviors, or a mixture of individualist and collectivist orientations, have increasingly been observed in Korea-based cyberspace (D.H. Lee, 2013a; Shim et al., 2008). However, some Korean online forums that have encouraged overtly individualist user behaviors and discouraging *jeong*-based affective ties have ended up as extremist trolling sites. In this regard, K.H. Lee (2014) argues that the recent Korean trolling site *ilbe* and its hate speech phenomenon are partly due to its attempt to circumvent any possible *yeonjul*. Hence, Koreans' close and closed communication style, based on the norm of *jeong*, may not easily co-exist with the networked individualism afforded by the dominant forms of social media and the internet. We therefore need to engage in further discussion about how *jeong* space can evolve in the era of social media. Mediated space, which may often lack such characteristics as familial connections, embodied intimacy, a clear sense of local belonging, and/or the context and cue of communication, may be in conflict with the *jeong* space and thus remain uncomfortable for those who are more familiar with *jeong* relationships.

The incompatibility of social media-driven communication with the *jeong* space may be part of a bigger question about the cultural bias of the internet and social media. There have been discussions and suggestions about alternative online cultures in recent media studies (e.g., Fuchs, 2014). However, while most of the discussions seem to address aspects such as gender, race, and social class, they remain largely Western-centric perspectives. With few exceptions (e.g., Wong, 2013), there has been little discussion of how Asian cultural frameworks can be appropriated to challenge the Western-dominant design of communication technologies and their virtual spaces. In this respect, the concept of *jeong* can be a significant reference point for theorization about

new media in Asia. In particular, an emic perspective from inside can contribute to exploring how Koreans carry, use, and negotiate *jeong* in their media practices. However, the emic perspective does not necessarily imply a celebratory introduction and revival of local norms in media studies. As has been addressed earlier in this chapter, *jeong* may (adversely) involve the voluntary suppression of the self and the exclusion of others (Ko, 2014; Yee, 2000). In this process, various subject positions – marginalized groups in particular— can be interpellated into the homogeneous national subject (Cho Han, 2000).

Thus, the use of *jeong* and other related concepts discussed in this chapter suggests that the theorization of *jeong* for internationalizing media studies may require bilateral efforts – exploring and re-signifying the indigenous concept in the language of media discourse, on the one hand, and critiquing the essentialized use of the local concept, on the other.

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