

Mobile Media Photography and Intergenerational Families

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The visuality of apps such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp is becoming more apparent, especially as part of emotional work in contemporary relationships. In families, informal intergenerational literacy can be found throughout mobile media practices. Often, the emotional work around these practices remains tacit. In this article, we interrogate the ways in which mobile media photography has become imbricated in making-do practices of maintaining intimacy in intergenerational family contexts. Drawing from literature on mobile media visuality and transnational family relationships, this article considers Arlie Hochschild's emotional labor and "feeling rules" to consider how intergenerational familial genres in Australia and Japan are used to perform contemporary notions of familial intimacy and copresence. The article thus contributes a cross-cultural consideration of Hochschild's emotion work to examine how the circulation of images reveals the ideals of familyhood and aspirations of contemporary Asian families in a multicultural and monocultural context.

Keywords: mobile media, visuality, camera phones, families, intimacy

In this article, we consider how the circulation of images through mobile media apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp contributes to doing some of the "work" in maintaining a sense of the family. By

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“work” we are referring to the labor, often emotional, creative, and affective, around the construction of the family, including recording, storing, and curating family milestones and moments of bonding, micro-coordination of everyday tasks, and showing care and acknowledgment of family relationships. We are particularly interested in how cultural and intergenerational nuances and literacies play out through these mobile media genres and how images reveal ideals of familyhood and aspirations in an era of mobility. Our discussion draws on ethnographic fieldwork with families in Australia and Japan. In this fieldwork, we recruited families who demonstrate a diversity of migration experiences to also consider how this informs intergenerational literacies and genres.²

For transnational families, exchanging images has become a mode of maintaining familial bonds and facilitating a sense of copresence across long distances. Consider our first example of Nancy. Fifty-three-year-old Nancy lives in the outer suburbs of Melbourne with Jessica, her 19-year-old daughter, and her husband, Steven, a 58-year-old retiree. Nancy is Singaporean Chinese, and Stephen is Malaysian Chinese. In the 1980s, they migrated to Melbourne, where Jessica was born. Nancy is part of three group pages on Facebook: one for her side of the family, one for Stephen’s, and one for their church group. She is also part of five groups on WhatsApp. She rarely posts to her regular Facebook profile, but she often posts photos to the Facebook groups and sends others to the different WhatsApp groups. Nancy explains, “I take photos of my daughter. She is learning to cook, so I take photos just to have a record.” She sends several of these photos to her relatives overseas. As Nancy reflects,

My extended family, my cousins and aunties in Singapore . . . just share because they don’t have the opportunity to cook much over there. They do cook different things, they would like to bake more but they don’t have that kind of equipment like here and it’s hot over there as well so sometimes baking is not a conducive thing. And sometimes if we go for occasions we’ll share, so some things that the family do.

Nancy chats to her nieces and nephews in Singapore fairly often; on reflection, she explained to us, “I think they see a different side to me when we chat, it’s not like I’m the strict aunty when I visit.”

Nancy’s discussion of her transnational familial experiences through mobile media practice illustrates three key themes that resonated throughout our ethnographic fieldwork over two years (2015–2016). First, among mobile media practices, visibility is becoming more apparent in the emotional work invested in everyday life. In families, informal intergenerational literacies play out through mobile media practices, and often the emotional work around these practices remains tacit. Arlie Hochschild’s theories around emotional labor and “feeling rules” (1979, 2012) are particularly helpful in considering the genres and modes of performativity within the circulation of images, and we draw on these theories to contribute to the literature on the use of mobile media camera phones and its relationship to the family. Second, mobile media practices have a specific role to play in maintaining and negotiating transnational family relationships (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2006; Wilding, 2006). And third, mobile media has become inextricable

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from forms of mobility, and more interrogation should be given to consider cultural and gendered aspects of their relationship (Hjorth, 2008; Hjorth & Lim, 2012; Hjorth & Richardson, 2014).

In this article, we build on this literature to advance the discussion through an ethnographic focus. We draw on fieldwork with Malaysian Australian families in Melbourne and Japanese families in Tokyo that explores how they use mobile media for circulating images. Our cross-cultural perspective addresses Van House's observation that there is relatively little ethnographic investigation on daily practices of photography, as well as personal photography (Van House, 2011). This research draws on wider fieldwork based in Melbourne with 19 research participants, and in Tokyo with 12 participants; time was spent in different households, and in-depth interviews were conducted with family members. In some households, three generations were active in daily family activities, where grandparents spent some days of the week taking care of grandchildren before the parents returned home from work. For other households, weekly and sometimes daily communication through social media messages and postings, webcam, or phone calls was central to communicating with relatives overseas.

Tokyo and Melbourne were chosen as field sites for their representation of different moments in mobile media adaptation, different kinship structures, and different technocultural contexts. Tokyo, after over a decade of mainstream mobile phone usage, represents one of the earliest examples (Kato, Okabe, Ito, & Ryuhei, 2005). In Melbourne, the rollout of the NBN (National Broadband Network) is near completion, providing faster, more accessible WiFi to regions previously undersupplied, which has influenced the affordability and uptake of broadband WiFi within households. Further, Melbourne is one of Australia's most cosmopolitan and multicultural cities, where divergent cultural practices can be adopted within individual households; in contrast, Tokyo has historically embraced monoculturalism, providing background context for comparative inquiry.

This article thus contributes to the special issue by considering how mobile media practices and mobilities are imbricated in intergenerational family contexts, highlighting how the circulation of images as a reflection of emotional labor is part of the everyday "work" of the family. Our cross-cultural consideration of Hochschild's theories illustrates how emotions are performed, practiced, and displayed through digital media, which reveals navigations of familyhood across space and distance.

Feeling Mobiles: Feeling Rules and Emotional Labor

In relation to families, Clark situated uses of mobile media within the "emotional and moral economies of the household" (Clark, 2014, p. 321). By doing so, she drew attention to the family as an economic as well as social structure that contains invested labor both inside and outside the home. In addition to labor, managing and maintaining the household depends on exchanges of emotion between individuals and groups within the family. Clark drew on Arlie Hochschild's notion of emotion work to argue that "decisions about mobile media use take place in the context of emotionally-laden relational interactions" (p. 325). We wish to take this idea further by briefly revisiting Hochschild's "emotion work" and "feeling rules" before considering their implications for mobile media use between family members in cross-cultural contexts.

Hochschild defined emotion work as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). Emotion work can be directed at oneself by oneself. The mobile phone as both a mode of connection to one’s networks and a global repository of images and ideas, as well as a mode of storage, can provide a means for performing emotion work on oneself. For example, Mel is in her early 20s and works part time hosting children’s parties. At the time of fieldwork, she was becoming disheartened that her career in acting had not progressed as she had hoped, and she found herself constantly feeling anxious. When these sorts of negative thoughts approach, she explains, she looks through a folder on her phone she has labeled “Inspirational Quotes.” The folder contains images she has saved as they appeared on her Facebook news feed. Mel explains, “Sometimes I change my homepage, like lock screen if I’m having a tough week or want just something nice to think about when I open my phone up, I’ll go to that.” Mel is perhaps a typical example of how apps with image-sharing affordances are used for changing the present state of one’s emotions in a self-directed way.

Emotion work can also be directed toward others, and others can perform emotion work on oneself. As Hochschild elaborated, techniques of emotion work can be cognitive—that is, trying to change images, ideas, and thoughts to change the feelings associated with them—and physical or expressive, changing gestures to change the state of feelings (Hochschild, 1979). The gendered dimensions of emotion work have been discussed at length (Clark, 2013; Hjorth & Lim, 2012; Hochschild, 2012). The ways that women endeavor to produce comfort, provide emotional support, and undertake activities that enhance the emotional well-being of others have been given considerable attention (DeVault, 1999; Ericksen, 2005). However, as illustrated next, mobile media also plays a role in the frequency and kinds of emotion work invested in family relationships by men and women.

Whereas emotion work appears as the product of individuals, feeling rules are more socially embedded. As social scripts, they are unspoken but well-understood rules that appear through seemingly natural, mundane interactions. Feeling rules guide emotion work by “establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges” (Hochschild, 2012, p. 57). They prescribe the norms and expectations around the appropriate way to feel in different circumstances and for how long. Hochschild asserted that a feeling rule has aspects in common with other sorts of rules and norms of interaction, such as correct etiquette and bodily comportment, which draws attention to the experience and expression of emotions as being culturally embedded (Hochschild, 1979, p. 565).

A cultural approach to emotions suggests that people from different cultures experience, and therefore express, different emotions in different ways (Lutz & White, 1986). For example, reflecting on the impact of her volume *The Managed Heart* from 1983, Hochschild explained that the notion of emotional labor made little sense in the Japanese context (Hochschild, 2012). Because valuing being able to relate to the feelings and needs of others is important in Japanese culture, emotional labor is far more tacit and therefore harder to see (Hochschild, 2012). Hochschild also drew attention to the conflict, or “the pinch,” between a disapproved or inappropriate feeling that one is experiencing in a situation and the ideal feeling for the occasion that one should be experiencing. By doing so, she emphasized the performance of feeling and its social construction. Her ideas resonate with what anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has termed “cultural intimacy,” which explores the aspects of culture that reinforce a sense of collective solidarity within a group, but may be the source of embarrassment or exclusion by others (Herzfeld, 2014, p. 3). As a result,

performance of emotions becomes a mode for reinforcing a group sense of identity and in the context of families is often taken for granted as the normal expression of emotions. Through exploring cultural intimacy as "social poetics," Herzfeld (2014) drew attention to the cultural norms of what intimacy means in different sets of relationships.

Mobile media adds another layer to navigating emotions and family relationships. Wilding (2006) outlined that email, mobile phones, and digital cameras are intertwined with contemporary family relationships. Further, the availability of visually based social media platforms and the affordances of phones to circulate images implies that displays of family relationships directed at the family ought to be easier, but in turn they create obligation. In a similar way, webcam facilities such as Skype have alleviated much of the cost of, and added the feature of live video to, communicating across distance, but this in turn has intensified the expectations between those transnational family members (Miller & Sinanan, 2014).

Drawing on research on mobilities, mobile media, and emotions by Vincent and Fortunati (2009) and Lasén (2004), Hjorth has examined the negotiation between contested definitions of mobility, intimacy, and copresence. In these works, she observed how mobile media constantly transforms relationships between "home" and "away," which appears in nuanced ways in the context of transnational family relationships (Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth & Lim, 2012). Although mobile media might have facilitated new forms of copresence across distance, it also reinforces a sense of locality, as we illustrate in the case studies that follow (Fortunati, Pertierra, & Vincent, 2012; Hjorth, 2014; Ito, 2005).

In this section, we have established the gendered and cultural dimensions of emotional labor and feeling rules. We have also emphasized that mobile media reveals different modalities by facilitating copresence and traversing temporal and spatial distances. In the next section, we illustrate how these dynamics unfold within different categories of family relationships, and focus on intergenerational literacies. The section also explores how mobile media becomes imbricated in the conflicts of feeling rules and also of family relationships. The moment we feel compelled to change our emotion is due to the "pinch" that Hochschild identified as a "real but disapproved feeling on the one hand and an idealized one on the other, that enables us to become aware of emotional labor" (Hochschild, 2012, pp. x, xi). A conflict in family relationships is, as Miller (2008) argued, that any given kinship category also relates to the idealization of that category. There are assumptions as to what mothers are supposed to be like, there are assumptions as to what children are supposed to be like, then there is the actual person, his or her history, upbringing, memories, and circumstances, who inhabits the category of mother or child. There is also the discrepancy that exists between the idealized model of the category and the actual person, where digital media can constitute the lived relationship.

Mobile Media: Images as Communicative Objects and Family Relationships

Here, we consider family photographic practices in the context of mobile media. Mobile media facilitates different forms of intimacy and reconfigures experiences of privacy, publics, and place (Lasén, 2004; Özkul & Humphreys, 2015; Wilken & Goggin, 2013). Mobile phones are more intimate and personal because they are wearable, they are frequently attached to the user, and their materiality as personal

objects is often displayed through accessorizing and personalization of the phone and screens (Hjorth, 2008; Hjorth & Richardson, 2014; Reading, 2009).

The convergence of the camera with the mobile phone creates an inherently private and intimate object that counters the idea of the image as being “networked” (Bell, 2006; Gye, 2007; Ito & Okabe, 2005; Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008). Camera phones challenge what a “noteworthy” or “important” moment is as ordinary and everyday activities are subjects of images (Ito & Okabe, 2003). And, as Keep argued, the most frequent subjects of images—meals enjoyed, holidays, or things to show friends—provoke “news ways of thinking about the way we use photography in our lives, rather than viewing photography as a static medium to be framed and hung on a wall” (Keep, 2014, p. 18).

Often, images captured and stored, sent and exchanged are intended for those who are considered closest to an individual, rather than for display for wider or more distant networks, which differs from the display of images on websites or blogs (Okabe, 2004; Reading, 2009). Disseminating images to close and familiar groups also challenges a popular assumption that images displayed are simply for attracting audiences or to promote exhibitionism (Hjorth, 2008; Palmer, 2005). In the last decade, iPhone photography has exemplified a shift as the device that combines image making, processing, and distribution in real time and where images taken on phones are a more personal experience because they are stored and viewed on small, personal screens rather than large screens and monitors (Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Palmer, 2012). Pink and Hjorth (2012) have argued that everyday practices of camera phone photography are emplaced, which draws attention to their visualities and socialities as a result.

Through circulation, personal photography resembles other forms of gift giving, with the intention to acknowledge and maintain relationships (Taylor & Harper, 2002; Van House et al., 2005). Moving beyond the semiotics of the image, digital photographs also function as communicative objects; Villi likened digital photography to “visual chitchat,” “visual small-talk,” and “pictorial conversation” (Villi, 2012, p. 42). The effect of communicating the mundane and everyday gives a sense of what Ito and Okabe (2005) have termed “intimate visual copresence” and what Van House (2007) has called “distant closeness.” Today, affordances of high-quality built-in cameras, relatively low-cost mobile phone plans that include data, unlimited phone calls, and text messaging, and broadband WiFi within the home reduce some of the barriers for exchanging images.

We build on what Chalfen (1987) has described as “Kodak culture” and what Rubenstein and Sluis (2008) have called “Nokia culture” to argue that practices of circulating images serve to do the emotion work of the family. Uses of smartphones, laptops, and other mobile devices by transnational family members to “feel connected” and remain “in touch” are well documented (Horst, 2006; Licoppe, 2004; Wilding, 2006). Yet, the role that the circulation of images might play in comparative cultural contexts is currently underinvestigated (Miller et al., 2016). A notable study by Robertson, Wilding, and Gifford (2016) examined how Karen refugees in Melbourne used images posted to social media to create what they termed a “family imaginary”—that is, how individuals sustain a sense of family despite separation, absence, and distance. These sorts of exchanges using digital and mobile media are defined by norms of generalized reciprocity, or, as Baldassar explained, “just being there” involves a gift of one’s presence or oneself through these expressions of care, concern, and acknowledgment (Baldassar, 2015, p. 83). As we illustrate next, the circulation of images

in family contexts reveals implicit cultural understandings of kinship and also the navigation of extended kinship, including distant ties and connections.

As communicative objects, exchanging images contributes to recording milestones and bonding that were family rituals pre-mobile media as well as the micro-coordination of daily activities that occur within the household. Within families, the most popular genres of images circulated are intrinsically linked to ritual and routine aspects of family life: of holidays, the home, and time spent together through meals. These reinforce intimate and private domestic realms, which brings into question gendered dimensions of divisions of labor within the household. And instead of public display on websites and blogs that were more prevalent with circulating images before mobile media, these images are circulated in carefully controlled environments of closed and dyadic groups over social media.

Sharing images as emotional communication also occurs in relationships where expressing emotion is defined by cultural rules. King-O'Riain (2015) emphasized that uses of Skype in Irish transnational families are concerned with normalizing emotional exchanges, where emotions are displayed through conversations over short spaces of time. In her research on Italian migrants, Baldassar (2015) focused on caregiving practices across distance, where routine exchanges result in expected return visits by relatives. Our examples that follow provide cross-cultural perspectives from families with Malaysian Chinese and Singaporean Chinese heritages in Melbourne and Japanese families in Tokyo, and we illustrate how family members navigate transnational mobility (Melbourne) and how they overcome space distance and time in maintaining familial routines (Japan). In both our cases, mobile media becomes inextricable from facilitating copresence and reinforcing cultural ideals of familyhood.

The Circulation of Images as Emotion Work

In the examples from Melbourne and Tokyo that follow, the cultural inflections of emotion work and uses of mobile media are brought to the fore. As communicative objects, family photographs are not only representation and content but also products of agency, intention, and everyday practice (Crang, 1997; Gómez Cruz & Meyer, 2012; Pink, 2011). Circulating images also resonates with approaches in family sociology that shift the emphasis on family as a static unit bounded within a household to a "set of practices": everyday routines enacted by family members, which extends beyond the home (Madianou, 2016; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

Melbourne: Milestones and Micro-coordination

Melbourne provides a significant case study as a multicultural city where, according to the City of Melbourne (2013), 42% of residents were born overseas, and the most commonly spoken language after English is Mandarin (10%). Half of the participants from the fieldwork in Melbourne were born overseas, the majority being from Malaysia and retaining transnational kinship ties to Malaysia and Singapore. The same participants belonged to family groups on WhatsApp, and four participants belonged to family groups on Facebook.

Let us return to Nancy and her husband Stephen and daughter Jessica. Stephen is the administrator of two Facebook pages, one for his ex-navy friends and one for his extended family. Stephen posts photos to both groups, and he usually has his smartphone when his family goes to dinner with his sister's family. Although not a special occasion per se, Stephen will usually take a photo, particularly when the families are trying a new cuisine, and shares them on his profile page. Stephen posts both family outings and photos from within the home (Figure 1). He explains,

Family events, yeah I do take photos, not many, just enough to remember the occasion. . . . Sometimes I post it on Facebook, but sometimes I just keep it in there (the phone). Sometimes I go outside and have a look at my plants, I take a photo and post it. I want my family to have a look. I'm proud of my garden!

Stephen rarely speaks to his siblings and their children who live overseas unless they are coordinating holidays. Yet, all his nieces and nephews are on Facebook and "like" or comment on photos. Similarly, he sees their photos, and when he sees or speaks with his siblings, they will discuss each other's news through what they have seen on their children's profiles. Through the acts of posting and liking, the photos circulated by family members who have migrated are also reassuring "evidence" that they are safe, emotionally well, and meeting the aspirations of upward mobility (Hall, 1991; Lustig, 2004).



Figure 1. Images of eggs and baby birds taken in Stephen's backyard and posted to Facebook.

Another example is Chua, who is 72 years old. He and his wife migrated from Malaysia to Australia in 1990, where they had their son and daughter. Chua and his wife look after their daughter Lily's sons, Matty, aged 2, and Jamie, aged 4, two days a week. When he babysits them, the boys mainly ask Chua if they can play games on the iPad or look at photos. Although Matty doesn't touch the screen as much as Jamie when they have a game open, he will scroll across the screen, watching one image follow another.

Most of the photos on Lily's iPad are of the two boys and their cousins. Due to haptic screens and mobile devices, viewing images as galleries and slideshows and being able to zoom in and out of the image on a portable device, meanings and memories of family are also emplaced as they travel from one place to another (Hjorth & Pink, 2014; Pink & Hjorth, 2012). Chua's daughter Lily has taken and stored most of the photos on the iPad. Her keeping them for accessible and portable viewing reflects our preceding discussion, where curating photos is part of the emotion work of motherhood.

Lily and her husband Christopher are engineers who sometimes work long hours in the city. When Chua and her mother are not looking after Matty and Jamie, Lily tries to come home from work early, and after she puts the boys to sleep, she will go grocery shopping. Often, she is delayed by other tasks that need attention in the home, and Christopher goes instead. Sometimes Lily leaves a list for him, but when she doesn't get the chance, Christopher sends her a photo over WhatsApp to make sure he has all the right items and to check that they don't need anything else. Although Lily might do the grocery shopping the majority of the time, her communicating with Christopher while he is grocery shopping is part of the gendered division of labor at home, and sending photos assists and reassures in coordinating very mundane everyday activities.

These examples from Melbourne illustrate some of the ways that visual cultures are imbricated in maintaining relationships at a distance. One of the most common genres of family photos is the holiday photo, which compels what Haldrup and Larsen (2003) have termed "the family gaze." Taking a cue from Urry, the family gaze explores how families see the world and themselves. Haldrup and Larson emphasized that holiday photos do more than keep records or document real experiences; they also "reveal more about the culture of imaginative families and idealized holidays than the people and places represented" (Haldrup & Larson, 2003, p. 28). Images of holidays also demonstrate ideals of upward mobility, where aspirations also include travel to cosmopolitan experiences before returning "home" (Gomes, 2017).

Images taken on phones also have a role in coordinating routine activities within the home. Factors contributing to these practices that may be culturally or geographically comparative are working rhythms and meanings and expectations of different family roles. Retired men such as Stephen and Chua might now contribute to the "kin-work" of the family through mobile media that might have been enacted by women through letter-writing, phone calls, and sending gifts before the arrival of contemporary digital technologies (Baldassar, 2015; Di Leonardo, 1987). For households with more traditional gendered divisions of labor such as Lily and Christopher's, images circulated on mobile media might alleviate some of the work typically performed by women. We explore these nuances further in our case studies from Japan.

Tokyo: Emotional Labor as Care at a Distance

In the contemporary Japanese context, the ideal of familyhood is based on choice and lifestyle, that is, a small nuclear family with a couple and children, and a wider circle where individuals have to invest considerable effort in building and maintaining relationships (Nonoyama, 2009). The mobile phone has a distinctive recent history in the Japanese context, emerging as an individuated and personal technology (Hjorth & Richardson, 2014; Ito & Okabe, 2005). The mobile phone has also become instrumental in nurturing extended relationships and networks. Reading (2008) observed that mobile phones are far more

important in the home than other devices and cited Dobashi's research on mobile phones for micro-coordination given that married women predominantly still do not work (Dobashi, 2005; Reading, 2008). LINE is the most popular social media platform in Japan and was used frequently by the majority of research participants for communicating with their families.

Take, for example, 32-year-old Rika, who works as a flight attendant. She works long hours, leaving home early in the morning and returning late at night. She is also away from home for days at a time. Her 72-year-old mother lives alone nearby. Rika is quite typical for her generation and grew up owning a mobile phone. Her mother bought Rika her first phone when she was in junior high school as a mode of personal security, exemplifying what Matsuda (2009) has called the "mom in the pocket." In the last 15 years, Rika and her mother have acquired habits of communicating phatic, logistic, and emotionally laden messages through and by their mobile phones, and now through Rika's smartphone and her mother's digital devices.

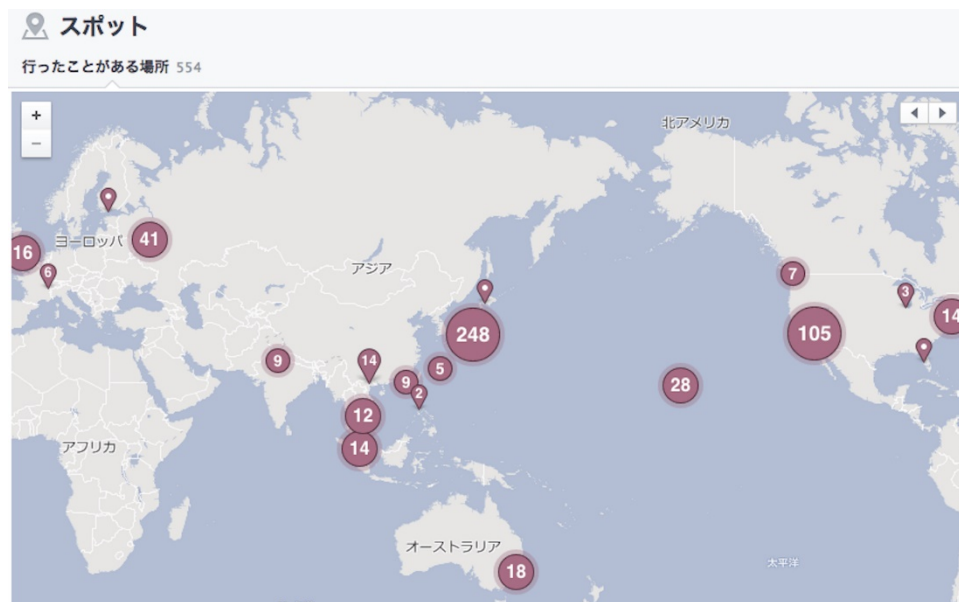


Figure 2. Places Rika has checked into, viewed by her mother.

After she left university and started working as a flight attendant, Rika continued to check on her mother through the constant copresence of LINE and Facebook because her mother tends to worry when she is caught up in delays caused by overseas flights. Because of time differences and costs that can accompany a voice call, the most frequent form of reassurance Rika leaves is when she "checks in" on Facebook when she is abroad so her mother can keep track of her location (Figure 2). Even though Rika's mother doesn't have her own Facebook account, Rika keeps her own profile open on her tablet and leaves it with her mother, so she can browse as she likes. Rika's efforts in alleviating her mother's concerns are enacted through social media as a way of shifting her mother's feeling of worry to reassurance.

Although the mobile phone allows for what Huang, Thang, and Toyota (2012) have called the "portability of care," Rika's use of the phone to check in with her mother also reveals the emotional

ambivalences that can accompany being in constant contact. On the one hand, Rika's narrative emphasizes the practices of care-at-a-distance to alleviate her mother's anxieties regarding her whereabouts, yet on the other hand, being contactable also heightens Rika's feelings of guilt about being unable to care for her mother face-to-face. Rika's story reiterates that the norms of caregiving are assumed to be most effective when a relative is physically present (Baldassar, 2015). Yet, with an increasing amount of transnational families, the ideal of face-to-face caregiving might also become elusive. It also emphasizes the role of digital media for alleviating both feelings of guilt and separation, and it deserves further long-term inquiry in practices of care-at-a-distance.

Circulating images as a form of showing care-at-a-distance also occurs between family members who remain within Tokyo. Tetsuo is a 38-year-old freelancer who often works from home, and he lives with his wife and three children. Tetsuo is the main active caregiver in the family; he is mostly responsible for household chores and daily tasks. Because his wife works late hours, Tetsuo often includes her in the evening dinners through sending her photos from his phone. Tetsuo shares images, from grocery shopping to meal preparation to the finished product, with him and their children eating together (Figure 3). These gestures have become routine to Tetsuo and his wife to give her a sense of copresence when she is absent from family meals. Food photos and images of meals are among the most dominant genres within camera phone practices. As an extension, sharing images of meals contributes to maintaining co-present intimacy through the symbolic art of sharing a meal, which has deep meanings in several cultures (Counihan, 1999; Tierney & Ohnuki-Tierney, 2012).



Figure 3. An image of a meal Tetsuo has prepared and sent to his wife.

Given the differing contexts of mobile media in Australia and Japan, it is perhaps not surprising that the portability and visual affordances of smartphones have resulted in a more integrated form of copresence in the Japanese context. We found few instances of “always-on” webcam uses from Melbourne, except in the case of rituals and important events. Nancy recalled watching the funeral of former prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew over Skype with her cousins; the tablet was set up in her cousin’s living room for hours so Nancy could see the screen but also see and hear cousins’ conversations and join in, while continuing her own activities across the day. This instance was among the few examples of the always-on webcam, which also invites further investigation to the impact of the always-on webcam in different categories of transnational relationships.

In the last example of Tetsuo, routine exchanges of images across an evening seemed to have a natural fit within the household that is perhaps more reflective of a cultural fit of exchanging images of routine activities, especially meals, between separated family members. These case studies from Japan also illustrate that absence and separation are increasingly characteristic of the contemporary mobile family. For these families, the integration of the mobile phone into household life, including the circulation of images, also extends emotional exchanges for times when family members are not able to be a part of routine family life.

Landscapes and “Socialscapes” of Feeling

The exchange of visual cultures and the use of digital images as part of family photography now increasingly play a part in doing some of the work of the “family.” Some of these practices are both ordinary, in terms of micro-coordination and phatic communication, and more extraordinary, that is, sharing transnational domestic life through more dyadic communication over WhatsApp. Further to sharing family histories and the stories families tell themselves—such as through displaying images on Facebook—which are common themes in family photography and digital media, the circulation of visual cultures through mobile media draws attention to constructions and experiences of place as well as experiences and expressions of emotions.

This article has provided an ethnographic exploration of some of the more abstract points of family relationships, senses of place, and emotions, and has attempted to draw attention to some of the inherent gender and power factors that reside in “work” in the household. First, we have examined the ways that visibility has become part of the emotion work invested into maintaining relationships, where mobile media reaffirms ideals of familyhood and contributes to expressing care and acknowledgment. Images can substitute for discourses of care, and their circulation can contribute to practices of care and intimacy in their own right (King-O’Riain, 2015). Second, mobile media practices play a key role in maintaining transnational family relationships through displays of ideal familyhood; in addition, for families who may live in the same city or region and for whom absence and separation might be characteristic of family life, the circulation of images contributes a sense of copresence. Given that the number of mobile families is likely to increase in urban centers such as Tokyo because of longer commutes and an increase in the number of working mothers, uses of mobile media will also become more intertwined with contemporary kinship in Asia. Finally, this article has considered the circulation of images through mobile media in relation to gendered aspects of relationships in different life stages. By examining these themes, this article has

contributed to furthering understanding of mobilities in Asia through presenting a comparative study of cultural inflections of contemporary family relationships within national and transnational technocultural contexts.

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