Mobilized by Mobile Communication - How the Chinese Use Mobile Media to Change Politics and Democracy in China (PhD project)

The ADI supported fieldworks for “Mobilized by Mobile Communication - How the Chinese Use Mobile Media to Change Politics and Democracy in China” took place in China from August to December, 2010.

During three months of fieldwork in China until now, Liu Jun had travelled to Beijing, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Shanxi and Shenzhen, to investigate how the understanding of mobile phone interactions and mobile social networks can be extended under the particular guanxi structures of Chinese society. To be specific, Liu conducted the study of “mobile phone rumors” using in-depth interviews with mobile phone users in Beijing, Shenzhen, Fuzhou and Shanxi Province to explore the relationship between earthquake- and acid rain-related mobile rumors and guanxi network.

Why do people believe mobile rumors instead of clarifications from governments? How do people consider mobile rumors and their social network under emergency situation? By focusing on people’s attitudes toward the messages from mobile communication channel, the cases show an emerging guanxi-embedded network in the context of mobile technological innovation.

**Conclusion**

This study observes that mobile social networks are a way that Chinese people cultivate, maintain and strengthen their guanxi networks. Embedding the reliability of guanxi, the message spreading via mobile communication always enjoys high credibility, while mutual obligation contributes to the explosive growth of the message within mobile social networks under special circumstances, such as during festivals and holidays, popular protests and social disturbances. This circulation in turn increases both the dissemination and credibility of messages, and rumors. The characteristics and strength of mobile social network in China therefore emanate not only from Information and Communication Technologies, but also from the socio-cultural source - guanxi - deeply rooted in Chinese society.

Part of the result has been accepted and published as Liu Jun, “Mobile Social Network in a Cultural Context”, in E. Canessa and M. Zennaro (ed.), M-SCIENCE: Sensing, Computing and Dissemination, ICTP—The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, November 2010, pp.195-224.