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Mediating Intimacies, Bridging Distances – The Use of ICTs in Intra-family Communication

Few families in Asia's urban cities remain untouched by information and communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs such as the mobile phone and the Internet have insinuated themselves into household routines and family conversations, serving as both the conduits and content of intra-family communication. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in China, Singapore and South Korea, this presentation considers how Asian families use ICTs to express care and mediate intimacies. ICT-enabled communication helps them to bridge emotional distances which may stem from socio-cultural conceptions of rule- and role-bound communication between husbands and wives, and parents and children. For families which have been 'broken up' by the exigencies of overseas employment or education, ICT-mediated communication is invaluable for bridging vast physical distances. Beyond their communicative functions, the social capital which ICTs vest or are perceived to vest, add to their allure. The presentation also considers how and in what circumstances these families may resist the use of ICTs.