

# Sina Weibo of China: From a Copycat to a Local Uptake of a Global Technology Assemblage

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## ABSTRACT

*In this essay the author presents an expanded genre view to examine global diffusion of interactive technologies in this increasingly globalized world. Through an analysis of its generic features, the author explores how Sina Weibo, a technology considered as a copycat of a Western technology, arises as a local uptake in a discourse of global technology diffusion. In studying its struggle and resistance, the author shows how a local uptake is shaped by the implicit value and ideology of the technology it imitates from. Meanwhile, this diffusion process is also a process of enacting the emergent structure of local technology use. The dynamic and dialogical structuring process behind genre formation worldwide manifests the complex interactions of technology and culture in our contemporary conditions.*

*Keywords:* Assemblage, Culture, Genre, Sina Weibo, Technology, Twitter, Uptake

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## INTRODUCTION

At the night of July 23, 2011, two high-speed passenger trains had a rear-end collision in eastern Zhejiang province of China. Four cars from the front train called *Harmony* derailed and fell off from an elevated bridge, killing 38 people and injuring more than 200. It so happened that I was visiting my parents who lived two hours away from the site of the accident. After I heard the news from TV, my first reaction was to use VPN (Virtual Private Network) to scale “the Great Firewall of China”—a system of Internet censorship ran by the Chinese government that blocks access to the websites with

sensitive political information—to assess what was happening from the overseas media. My past experiences told me that the state media of China tend to cover this type of accidents. I also opened a browser window to follow posts on Sina Weibo, a popular social media service that was perceived as a Chinese copycat of Twitter by many Western observers.

What was happening on Sina Weibo was remarkable. I saw pictures of passengers trapped inside trains at dark night, derailed car dangling off the bridge, mighty tractors crushing mangled cars on the ground to bury the wreckage on site and therefore cover up the tragedy, and so on. I witnessed personal reports from miserable

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passengers and their concerned relatives. I read poignant and often witty commentaries about the Railway Ministry and the government, circulated among Weibo users—thanks for the unique feature of rich media invented by Sina, Weibo users were able to post much longer posts than 140 characters in a picture format. For the first time, I did not want to scale the Great Firewall to get truthful information as the depth and authenticity of news coverage from overseas media was hard to compete with the immediacy of the first-hand information and pictures posted by common Chinese users. Indeed a Sina Weibo user in one of those two trains broke the news first on the site.

I was not alone: Many Chinese citizens devoured the information about the accident on Sina Weibo as earnestly as I did. As time passed, the informed public got more and more upset about the ways the Railway Ministry handled the accident and eschewed their responsibilities. People were agitated and furious when the spokesman used bureaucratic rhetoric to diminish the consequences of the accident at the first press conference 26 hours after the collision. Almost 10 million pieces of online criticisms were posted during the following five days (Anti, 2012), ultimately resulting in a reversed official stance and a more thorough investigation.

The above episode sounds like another Twitter-like success story after *Arab Spring*. However, at the time when Egyptian activists are still fighting for democracy and freedom on the Tahrir Square two years after the so-called Twitter revolution, a new policy issued by the highest court of China this fall rules that a message of online rumor and slander “forwarded more than 500 times or read more than 5,000 times could earn convicted offenders up to three years in prison” (Buckley, 2013). As a result, hundreds of “outspoken” Chinese microblogs users were detained (ibid). In both cases, the phenomenon of the social media revolution and its aftermath clearly shows the complicity of technology diffusion and use characterized by local cultural, political, and sociotechnical

conditions. A simplistic view that celebrates the instrumentality of a social media technology would be too hasty and naïve here.

With the fast development of digital networks in the age of globalization, emerging technology use practices in one locale have been diffusing rapidly across the globe. During the last two decades, we have seen the global expansion of new technology use practices such as instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, social network services, and microblogging. The emergence and arising of Sina Weibo takes place in this wide context. This essay examines the genre formation process of Sina Weibo as an answer to the call raised by Coakes (2012) to understand “the essence of technology and its impact on us.” It follows the discussion of the special issue of “What do we mean by technology?” (2012).

“Weibo” is the Chinese word for “microblog(ging)”. Sina Weibo was launched in August 2009 to fill the void after Twitter was blocked by the Chinese government since the Ürümqi riots that July. With more than 500 million registered users and 54 million daily active users in fall 2013, it is ranked as the No. 2 active social network in China (Buckley, 2013; Kemp, 2013; Ong, 2013). Sina Weibo has a very fast development trajectory: While it took Twitter five years to have around 100 million tweets per day by January 2011, it only took Sina Weibo half of the time length to reach the same benchmark by March 2012 (DeWoskin, 2012). For outsiders, the scale of Weibo is astonishing. “On Twitter something might get retweeted 50 times. On Weibo it’s 1,000 times” (ibid). Recently the British Prime Minister David Cameron opened a Weibo account before his diplomatic visit to China in December 2013, and he attracted 194,000 followers within three days. In contrast, he has 500,000 followers for his Twitter account opened for one year (McCormick, 2013). Cameron was not the first Western celebrity who joined Sina Weibo; the American movie star Tom Cruise started his account in 2011.

From the beginning Sina Weibo was regarded as a Chinese copycat of Twitter. Later it was ridiculed as the illegitimate child of Facebook and Twitter as it imitated features from both sites that are banned in China. In fact one could find the traces of almost every successful American social network sites and apps in Sina Weibo, including Foursquare, Pinterest, and many others. On the other hand, it has developed many distinctive features originating from Chinese Internet culture, including rich media, threaded comment, private chat, microgroup, microevent, and so on. And some of these features found their way back into the later versions of Twitter. Indeed it would be highly doubtful whether Twitter would have succeeded similarly in China if not banned.

Opposing a naïve view in favor of the instrumentality of a social media technology, I present in this essay an expanded genre view to examine global diffusion of interactive technologies in this increasingly globalized world to understand the complicity of technology use. I first describe the framework of a technology as a genre (Sun, 2012), and I argue this framework will bring valuable insights to approach cross-cultural technology design issues. Then I look at the two aspects of the genre formation process surrounding Sina Weibo. The first aspect is the development of its generic features. With a close analysis, I show how Sina Weibo, a technology considered as a copycat of a Western technology, arises as a local uptake in a discourse of global technology diffusion. The second aspect is various forms of struggle and resistance surfacing from the process of structuring, through which I illustrate how a local uptake is influenced by the implicit value and ideology of the technology it imitates from. Meanwhile, this diffusion process is also a process of enacting the emergent structure of local technology use. In the end I maintain that the dynamic and dialogical structuring process behind genre formation worldwide manifests the complex interactions of technology and culture in our “technological culture” (Slack & Wise, 2005).

## UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY AS A GENRE

Regarding technological artifacts as a genre sounds like an adventurous idea, but it is not new at all in the field of technology design. Two decades ago Brown and Duguid advocated that “designed, communicative artifacts” (1994, p.10) to be broadly interpreted as genres. They characterize genres as “socially constructed interpretive conventions,” which is not confined to textual artifacts. They envision designers working as writers, who “try to invoke a particular genre, to establish the conventions they are putting into play,” and users responding to the designed artifact as readers who “try to recognize what has been invoked, what conventions are in play so that they might respond appropriately.” For example, people behave differently in a music hall as they do in a dining hall based on their understandings of expected conducts in these two different settings.

“The socially constructed interpreted conventions” have been closely examined by the school of rhetorical genre theory for the past thirty years. Rhetorical genre theory studies typified human activities through the distinctive textual features of genres, and many of the studies in this line illustrate that those generic features represent accepted social practices in particular cultural contexts. Bazerman describes genres this way: “Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. . . . They are locations within which meaning is constructed” (1997, p.19).

In my research on cross-cultural user experience design I found a genre view of technological artifact illuminating for exploring local technological use practices deeply rooted in peculiar cultural contexts (Sun, 2012). One of the major problems in cross-cultural design is the disconnect of *action* and *meaning*: A technology introduced to a new local context is usable, but it is often not meaningful for local users. Why would this happen? While action and meaning is connected in the original design

(i.e., top-level interface features represent the lower-level actions that make sense in a local culture where the design originates from), only the interface features of the technology are localized, more accurately, translated, influenced by a transmission model of communication, when the design is transported from one place to another. As a result, the translated interface is often confusing or incomprehensible for users in another culture who are not familiar with the actions the interface captures. An extreme example is that a Maori user would feel lost in an online digital library that is built on Western library classification system (Duncker, 2002).

To connect action and meaning in cross-cultural technology design, we need to have a robust theoretical construct that could address both action and meaning in design practices. Meanwhile, this construct should be able to traverse between the macro level and the micro level (Kampf, 2012; Shneiderman, 2011). For the former, it needs to have an explanatory power to approach sociocultural influences in order to “[shape] technology to produce positive outcomes” (Shneiderman, 2011, p. 11). For the latter, it needs to be able to delve into concrete actions to “design and build innovative interfaces and deliver validated guidelines” (ibid, p.10). The genre concept meets all these criteria. Therefore I maintained that designed, communicative technological artifacts should be regarded as a technological genre, and I argued for an expanded view of genre to examine interactive technologies (Sun, 2012).

An expanded view of genre is beneficial particularly in a cross-cultural communication and design context. It studies how the connection of design and use is dynamically settled in different interface features by inquiring about rules and habits related to genres (e.g., Brown & Duguid, 1994, 1996; Spinuzzi, 2003; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). It should be noted that here we focus on technological artifacts rather than general artifacts. Technological artifacts, as technologies themselves, are defined by the core components of technology, instrumentality and social circulation (Sun, p.17-20, 2012). In this sense, the socially recognized interpretive

conventions are a part of a technological artifact, while a general artifact (e.g., an object of local ingenuity) does not necessarily have that. In addition, the expanded genre view will help us to conceptualize the difference of local development of interactive technologies during global diffusion, which will benefit the field of ICTD (Information and Communication Technology for Development).

The notion of technology as a genre has two sides: genre as a behavioral construct and that as a structural construct. Next I will elaborate on each side of the coin, discuss how each side is connected to the key problem of cross-cultural design, and how the insight from each side will integrate action and meaning in cross-cultural design and therefore help to solve the problem.

The side of a genre as a behavioral construct matches with the action angle in cross-cultural design. According to Carolyn Miller (1984), genres are social actions in response to recurrent situations with social motives. In that sense, genres solidify social practices through their meaning-laden generic features. Indeed, social practices represented by generic features are what attract many researchers to study genres. For them, a genre is “a collection of practices that finds its nexus in the recurrent, dynamic activities in which users engage” (Spinuzzi, 1999, p. 37). Informed by activity theory (e.g., Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Nardi, 1996), genre theorists such as Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Pare (1999) claim that genres are “specific human activities” (p. 24) and “enactments of recognized social motives” (p. 25). Here the research pursuit in human activities, i.e., the functionality and purpose of a particular genre (e.g., sending a resume to solicit for a job interview), is investigated through the form of the genre. Therefore, both action and meaning in local uses is blended together, and generic features of a technology have developed as a result of the interplay of regular uses and sociocultural influences. One could see traces of human actions occasioned by the sociocultural contexts from the generic features of a genre. For example, a Korean refrigerator’s multi-functionality reflects local sociocultural factors.

It not only refrigerates and freezes food, but also ferments kimchee, a pickled cabbage staple on Korea's dining tables.

The side of a genre as a structural construct comes from the angle of meaning. Influenced by Giddens' structuration theory (1984), Miller (1994) suggests genres are capable of reproducing social structures with their recurrent nature in situated communication. Research in organizational communication shows that genres are produced, reproduced, and modified by individuals through a process of structuring (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). As technology use is socially and culturally shaped, generic features of a technology carry specific meanings and maintain local social structures. For example, Ilkone i800, a phone designed for the Islamic world released in 2004, has a compass that points to Mecca, a loaded text of the Quran in Arabic and English, and the lunar calendar used by Muslims to define the calendar holidays. Packed with an attractive Arabic design, this contemporary phone mediates traditional Muslim practices.

The fusion of action and meaning is instantiated through a structuration process. Through recursive social practices with a technology, an emergent structure of technology use is enacted, which Orlikowski (2000) names the process of *technology enactment*. She characterizes the enactment as "a situated and recursive process of constitution" (p. 409). Clearly, the process of genre enactment as constituting structures connects "behavioral and structural," i.e., action and meaning, and thus agency and structure are connected across the macro level and the micro level. This process both strengthens the current social structure and introduces new changes to the current system initiated by the technology. Clearly a genre view connects various levels of contexts in theoretical probe (Spinuzzi, 2003)

The structuration process is dialogical, which indicates that a technology-in-use is a response to local conditions, and that the practice of technology use is a dialogue between the user and the technology, the technology and local

conditions, and the present and the past. Going back to the example of the phone model Ilkone i800, today all those important phone features for the Muslim community could be packed in small mobile apps on any phone, not have to be on a particular model any more.

At this stage of the globalization process, when a global telecommunication network links almost everything into a pervasive (and unfortunately coercive) system, local technology use practices need to be examined in a global context. I argue that emerging processes of technology enactment are not just responses to recurrent situations within local institutions, but local uptakes of a global discourse as part of the glocalization, informed by Bakhtin's dialogism (1981, 1986) and Freedman's "uptake" (2002) from rhetorical genre theory. According to Freedman, "uptake" refers to a dialogic process of 1) responding to and 2) taking up and extending the use of texts/acts/practices responded to. Originating from speech acts theory, the concept of uptake is recast by Freedman to explore the "bidirectional relation" (i.e., dialogicality) between texts in rhetorical genre theory (p. 40). While the examples of uptakes usually are interrelated genres in a genre system, such as a proposal as an uptake to a CFP (call for proposal), the concept of uptake also applies to the dialogic relation between various instances of a same genre, as shown in the case study of this essay.

## SINA WEIBO AS A LOCAL UPTAKE

In this essay, the concept of uptake is used to study the local variations of a technology across the globe, and I maintain all those uptakes form a global technology assemblage. In this increasingly globalized world, a successful technology use practice such as Twitter is often diffusing through, copied to, and imitated by other locales and contexts and takes on new generic patterns. Next I will examine such a case.

## Generic Comparison

For people who are not familiar with microblogging, Twitter is “an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read ‘tweets’, which are text messages limited to 140 characters” (“Twitter,” 2013). The brevity of 140 characters per message influences the ways that Twitter is used as a medium. For example, it breaks news and serves as an efficient and effective communication means during the times of disasters and social movements, as we could see from the train collision case. Other distinctive features include hashtags and @username. The former are words or phrases prefixed with a “#” sign that function as searchable links in the streams of tweets. Popular hashtags often become trending topics on the Twitter homepage, and therefore hashtags and trends connect individual tweets to larger themes of the global Tweet conversation. The latter is a user’s Twitter identity, which could be used by other people to message him/her or refer to this person in conversation. The ability of breaking news and messaging each other makes Twitter a combination of social media and social network service.

Sina Weibo was regarded as another Chinese copycat of Twitter behind the Great Firewall of China where Twitter is blocked ~~by the Western world~~. It adopted all the core features from Twitter at the time of launch, including maintaining the 140-character limit, talking to other people using “@UserName” format, adding hashtags with a slightly different format of “#Hashtag#,” following other people to make his/her posts appear in users’ own timeline, and retweeting. Nowadays it integrates well-proved design features from other American social network service websites as well, such as Facebook’s homepage banner and FourSquare’s check-in.

Many American technology entrepreneurs are concerned about this kind of clone practices; however, East Asian collectivist cultures have a different view of intellectual property from the Western individualist culture. As a matter of fact, cloning successful technologies is a

common practice in countries such as Vietnam and Korea. For example, there were 97 Groupon clones in Vietnam as of 2011 (Tran, 2012). William Alford, Professor of Harvard Law School, points out in his book of “To Steal a Book is an Elegant Offense” (1995) that the Confucian culture sees intellectual and artistic creation as “transformative engagement with the past” (p. 26). This practice entails “selection and adaptation if it was to be meaningful to oneself, one’s contemporaries, and one’s successors” (p.25). As a result, “the replication of particular concrete manifestations of such an endeavor by persons other than those who first give form never carried...the ‘dark connotations...it does in the West.’” (p. 28). Tracing the development of the intellectual property law from Imperial China to the contemporary Chinese societies, Alford explains why the current efforts to set up intellectual property law in Mainland China remained unsuccessful. That failure primarily comes from the incompatibilities of “legal values, institutions and forms generated in the West with the legacy of China’s past and the constraints imposed by its present circumstances” (p. 2). Given the diversity of the global world where we live, it seems narrow-minded to advocate and impose one set of intellectual property law to all kinds of countries.

Indeed what really distinguishes Sina Weibo from many other Chinese copycats and then makes it a big success should be contributed to that “transformative engagement with the past.” In that sense, they selected core features of a popular Western technology from the immediate past and adapted them by adding unique features originating from Chinese Internet culture, such as rich media, threaded comment, private chat, microgroup, and microevent. It should be noted that some of these features found their way back to the later versions of Twitter, for instance, embedding rich-media content in the timeline and threading and grouping conversations. In the case of rich-media content, Sina users were able to embed the content such as pictures, videos, and audios almost from the beginning of application launch, and the rich-media content is displayed in the timeline in both the

Web version and mobile one, but Twitter did not have this feature in the web version until October 2013 (Sippey, 2013)<sup>1</sup>.

A quick peek into the generic features between Sina Weibo and Twitter illustrates that local technologies are both a behavioral and structural construct. Next I will compare the interfaces of the two applications to see how the authorship of a message is established in situations of replying and retweeting. For replying, unlike Twitter that displays all the responses to the original tweet on a flat level, the response to a Weibo message is set up as a threaded comment, under a lower level from the original Weibo message. This imitates the design feature of a discussion forum, when people reply to the first post on the same topic. Discussion forums are very popular among Chinese Internet users, and it is natural for Sina to build on that genre convention. For retweeting, Twitter displays the original author of a retweeted message in the timeline with a fine print noted as “retweeted by” someone one follows. In comparison, what is displayed on the timeline of Sina Weibo is still the people one follows, and the retweeted message is introduced as a sublevel message.

In both circumstances, there is a clear hierarchy of messages in the timeline of Sina Weibo and therefore a hierarchical discursive relationship. However, there is not such implied power relationship in the Twitter’s interface, and all the messages are treated as an equal contribution of a conversation. Here different discursive relationships on Sina Weibo and Twitter manifest different structuring processes behind each technology. As discussed earlier, the original author of a creation is not necessarily important in a Confucian culture when everyone participates in the “transformative engagement with the past” collectively.

### **Value-Laden Technology: Struggle and Resistance**

The close reading of Sina Weibo’s technological features indicates that Sina Weibo is deeply rooted in Chinese Internet culture as a technological genre. Through genre enactment,

i.e., recursive interaction with a technology by millions of local users, a new structure of technology use is created and introduced into a local culture. The most notable fact is that Weibo makes it technically possible to get an individual voice heard and therefore grants the subordinated groups discursive power. This has brought fresh and powerful transforming forces to a country where there is no open journalism and freedom of speech. However, this is not what the Chinese government expected when they evicted Twitter outside of China and supported local versions of Twitter.

In China, technology is advocated as “the No.1 productive force” that will lead to the prosperity and wealth of the state by Deng Xiaoping, the reformist leader who introduced the Socialist Market Economy to China after the Cultural Revolution. Technology is widely regarded as a neutral and value-free vehicle for accomplishing the goals of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” Yet technology has politics and is never value free (Friedman 1996, 1997; Winner, 1980), particularly when this technology diffused from another culture that has a different power system and ideology. As a result, we see various forms of struggle and resistance emerging from the use of this technology given the value-laden nature of this technological genre in postmodern China.

The struggle and resistance occurs on two levels. On the first level, the platform owner, Sina Corp., trudges between employing additional resources to comply with government requirements on content and making business revenues.

Internal censorship is a common practice among the UGC (User-Generated Content) companies in China. Since the Chinese government watches online Internet activities very closely and will take actions to block certain content or even shut down the involved websites, it is better to delete a potential trouble-making user post by the company itself rather than to get the whole website or some features of the website turned off. This happened before: In March 2012, the commenting feature of Sina Weibo and other microblogging services was

shut down for three days by the government to stop the spreading of the “rumors” about a coup attempt in Beijing (Chao, 2012).

Sina Corp. conducts internal censorship and has been watching their user accounts very closely. According to the research done by a group of computer scientists (Zhu, Phipps, Pridgen, Crandall, & Wallach, 2013), Sina’s internal censorship is efficient and rigorous, and its content department responded to sensitive Weibo posts in a timely manner and removed them very fast. 35% of deletions occurred within 5-10 minutes of posting, and another 60% did within a day. Particularly those users who had a history of more deleted posts tended to get their posts deleted more quickly than other users who had no previous records.

This internal censorship is exercised through a combined system of machine and human beings at Sina Corp. It hires hundreds of content inspectors to review just-published Weibo messages (Yan, 2013). Computers first screen the posts with highly sensitive words that are not allowed for being published and block them from posting right away. For the posts that include possibly sensitive words in original posts or in commentaries, the computers would give a green light for publishing temporarily and then forward those published posts to the content inspectors who will make the final decision for deletion or not. This procedure of human involvement is important, as machines cannot detect sensitive words buried in a long Weibo message in a picture format<sup>2</sup>. Two shifts of content inspectors, more than 70 people per group, examine the content of Sina Weibo 24 by 7. Each inspector needs to review about 60,000 messages every day in a 12-hour shift.

It is not a small cost for a high-tech company such as Sina Corp. to maintain a big group of content inspectors. People joked it functioning as a labor-intensive business rather than as a technology-intensive one as its Western comparable. In fact, the high expense for self-censoring UGC content has deterred some Chinese IT companies from arising to be the transforming power for democracy. Instead they chose to diminish their capabilities of being a media outlet

and channel as they brand their new products. For example, WeChat, an uprising mobile chat application that had 235 million monthly active users worldwide by July 2013 (Hong, 2013a), downscaled its content publishing channel in its recent update.

As to Sina Weibo, it has placed a lot of efforts for moving to the direction of a platform of social media marketing. After selling 18% share to the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba in May 2013, Sina Weibo changed its timeline display to be a “Weibo-Taobao” platform in August which facilitates shopping on the e-commerce site of Taobao owned by Alibaba (Hong, 2013b): A new form of Taobao product listing is included in the timeline which consists of price, product popularity, and a “Buy” button. While this move is apparently driven by the pressure from its stockholders and its own craze for business revenue, it is also a tactics to eschew the “stigma” coming from Twitter, a tool for promoting democracy in the Chinese political context. However, technology has its implicit values and inherent features. While Sina Weibo works hard to brand itself as a social marketing platform, it has grown into an increasingly influential political forum, even though it did not intend to.

The second level of struggle and resistance occurs between Sina Weibo users and the microblogging platform. Under the coordinated censorship between Sina Weibo and the government, Weibo users have been trained to be sophisticated rhetoricians in using puns, alternative wording, and even memes to achieve communication goals. For example, an image of river crab has been a popular Internet pun and meme in China, which represents “censorship.” The phrase of river crab has the similar pronunciation in Chinese as Harmony, the advocated societal goal to solve the class conflict and societal unbalance due to huge social injustice and inequality in China. Therefore, the image of river crab has been adopted as Internet slang in reference to Internet censorship. When posts on a forum have been deleted due to censorship, people would say the posts have been “harmonized” or “river crabbed.”

## IMPLICATIONS

To conclude, I argue that Sina Weibo, which started as a copycat, arises as a local uptake of a global technology assemblage.

In my earlier work (Sun, 2012), I describe a technological genre as “a stabilized assemblage of articulations, for the time being, in an ongoing process of structuration” (p.69). Here the notion of assemblage is influenced by Latour’s actor-network theory (2005) and Deleuze and Guattari’s work (1987). “An assemblage constitutes ‘singularities and traits’ deducted from the articulations, but does not reduce complex connections and relationships of a network (or a structure) to an essence or a critical factor” (Sun, 2012, p.63). To put this way, an assemblage does not necessarily have a hierarchical structure or center as a system, which precisely depicts the complex interactions between entities and their constant movement and flows in the contemporary condition. By the same token, I see the local variation (e.g., Sina Weibo) of a globally diffusing technology (e.g., Twitter) is an uptake of a global technology assemblage. Furthermore, as there is no center in this assemblage, the globally diffusing technology itself such as Twitter could be regarded as both the core technology and an uptake situated in a certain cultural context.

Together these local variations—uptakes—form an open, globally networked assemblage with dialogic relations flowing between the elements: Local uptakes share similar technological affordances (Sun & Hart-Davidson, 2014) and generic features; the technological affordances evolve all the time to account for the ongoing structuration; and a successful use for a particular task in one locale—the successful response to one situation—is expected to be reproduced in another locale (e.g., embedding rich-media content in the timeline of a micro-blogging service).

Understanding a local technology as a local uptake of a global assemblage brings valuable insights to technology studies. The notion of uptake provides a framework to ad-

dress “emergent structure of technology use” in different culture. It sees the emergent structure of technology use as a stabilized assemblage of articulations through structuration. When technology use is only interpreted from one local cultural context, our attention tends to go to the behavioral aspect of the genre formation. Therefore we are more interested in exploring how its design features address the previously unmet needs in certain use contexts, e.g., the brevity of 140 characters of Twitter makes it super convenient and fast for communication during times of disasters. Yet the introduction of the local-global dyad makes it much clearer to see the discursive dimension of a genre by analyzing how a technology responds to local structuring forces, as shown in the case of the unique timeline of Sina Weibo.

Analyzing the dialogic relationship of local uptakes demonstrates that local uptakes represent the pulling forces that re-assert local agency against the pushing force of globalizing trends towards homogeneity and synchronization at this stage of globalization. The dynamic and dialogical structuring process behind genre formation worldwide manifests the complex interactions of technology and culture in our “technological culture” (Slack & Wise, 2005).

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This feature is not available in the mobile version at the time of writing yet.
- <sup>2</sup> One practice for Sina Weibo to detect this type of sensitive, picture-based long messages is to screen the sensitive words that pop from the comments posted during retweeting.