



**The Impact of Life Changes on Social Media Practices:  
An Ethnographic Study of Young Chinese Adults  
Living in Australia**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Xinru Chen

Bachelor of Arts (Communication University of China)

School of Media and Communication  
College of Design and Social Context  
RMIT University

November 2019

## **Declaration**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Xinru Chen

November 2019

## **Acknowledgements**

I am tremendously thankful to my supervisors Dr Marsha Berry and Dr John Postill, for their devotion to my dissertation and for their patient guidance, continual encouragement, support and care throughout my doctoral study. I have been extremely lucky to have supervisors who enlighten me with their ideas and who keep motivating me. I could not have completed my research journey without their support and dedication.

I would like to thank all the faculty members at School of Media and Communication, RMIT University, in particular, my milestone committee: Professor Sarah Pink, Professor Heather Horst, Professor Lyndal Jones, Professor Lisa French, Associate Professor Craig Batty and Dr Chengju Huang, for their valuable feedback and helpful advice. I would also extend my appreciation to the Digital Ethnography Research Centre for monthly reading sessions and discussions, and for wonderful seminars.

Furthermore, I thank everyone who participated in my research and who helped me throughout my studies for my PhD. I am especially thankful to Professor Frank Rogers, whose academic life inspired my own and Professor Vance Martin, who has been a true friend and mentor to me. I also thank Dr Jenny Weight for providing editorial assistance. My thanks also go to my homestay family, Mr Henry Dunn and Mrs Claire Dunn, for taking good care of me during my stay in Australia.

Most significantly I would like to thank my parents. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my father, Mr Chen Ping and to my mother, Mrs Wu Hongyan. They have supported

every academic move I have made: from Japanese language and literature, to TV program directing and now to my study of social media and life changes.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the China Scholarship Council for awarding me the State Scholarship Fund to support my doctoral study at RMIT University financially and I am especially thankful to the Education Office, Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Melbourne.

## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
The mobility of young adults .....	2
Staying connected while mobile .....	4
Main strands of social media research .....	6
Social media and interpersonal relationships .....	12
Life changes .....	15
A working definition of 'life changes' .....	17
Research questions .....	19
Thesis outline .....	23
<b>Chapter 2: Research process</b>	<b>27</b>
Introduction .....	27
Social media ethnography .....	27
Stage one: planning the fieldwork .....	30
Stage two: conducting the fieldwork .....	33
Characteristics of participants .....	37
Ethnographic approach .....	41

Stage three: writing up the research .....	52
Perception of life changes .....	56
Conclusion .....	59
<b>Chapter 3: Sharing your life with friends</b>	<b>60</b>
Introduction .....	60
Mirroring life changes .....	64
Different platforms, different presentations .....	89
Conclusion .....	93
<b>Chapter 4: Reaching out for romance</b>	<b>97</b>
Introduction .....	97
A smaller pool of candidates .....	107
Away from the old social circle .....	107
Gender imbalance .....	110
Language limitations .....	112
Cultural barriers .....	115
Employment woes .....	119
Mobility of friends .....	120
Trace back and play back .....	123
A show of affection on social media .....	135
Seeking advice and justice .....	137
Conclusion .....	139
<b>Chapter 5: Friending your parents</b>	<b>141</b>
Introduction .....	141
Friending and training your parents .....	145

Mutual caring .....	155
Family decision-making .....	167
Conclusion .....	172
<b>Chapter 6: Working it out</b> .....	<b>175</b>
Introduction .....	175
<i>Daigou</i> .....	179
From a shopaholic to a <i>Daigou</i> agent .....	181
From gift shopping to business shopping .....	187
Social media and <i>Daigou</i> .....	189
Planning your career .....	191
Working it out on social media .....	194
Conclusion .....	198
<b>Chapter 7: Thoughts on social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes .....</b>	<b>200</b>
Introduction .....	200
Locating the ethnographic findings in line with five principles .....	201
Reducing channels as a way of communicating .....	206
From co-presence to co-decision making .....	219
The pyramid model of self and significant others .....	223
A triangle model of self, interpersonal relationships and life changes .....	228
Conclusion .....	231
<b>Chapter 8: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>233</b>
Introduction .....	233
Key findings .....	235
Major contributions .....	238

Future research .....	240
Concluding remarks .....	243

**References 245**

**Appendices 268**

Appendix 1 Key interview questions (English) .....	268
Appendix 2 Key interview questions (Chinese) .....	271
Appendix 3 Questionnaire sample (English) .....	273
Appendix 4 Questionnaire sample (Chinese) .....	277

**List of Tables**

1.1 Table of comparisons among Facebook, WeChat and Weibo .....	8
---	---

**List of Figures**

1.1 The pyramid model of self and significant others (parents, friends, employers and lovers).....	19
1.2 Mutual relationships between life changes, social media practices and interpersonal relationships (author) .....	23
2.1 Distribution of research participants .....	35
2.2 Age of participants .....	38
2.3 Number of years participants spent in Australia .....	39
2.4 Education level of participants .....	39
2.5 Enrolment status of participants .....	40
2.6 Work status of participants .....	40
2.7 A map of the main field sites .....	44
2.8 Examples of my mind maps .....	54



2.9 Examples of my categorizations for different themes and topics .....	54
2.10 Examples of raw material selections for different topics and chapters .....	55
3.1 'Fried dumplings for my dinner, they taste so nice' .....	66
3.2 'On my way home today there was a guy standing next to me talking quite loudly on his phone, I turned to look at him, "eh... I have an antidote, do you want some?"' .....	68
3.3 'Rear-end, really!' .....	68
3.4 'Missing the sunshine in my hometown...' .....	71
3.5 Posts of beautiful things that Xiaofang loves in Melbourne .....	73
3.6 'Forgot umbrella again... I don't understand Melbourne'.....	73
3.7 '80 days left before I go back to my motherland...'.....	74
3.8 'The female singer's qi of middle-jiao is quite strong'.....	76
3.9 'Ankle sprain Day 1~ going out having fun is not an option any more, can only stay home and reflect on myself~' .....	80
3.10 'Please monitor me!'.....	82
3.11 'Sign-in MintReading'.....	83
3.12 Reposts of the No Pants Subway Ride .....	84
3.13 'This is what we call harmonious co-existence between man and nature' .....	85
3.14 'I registered for Facebook out of curiosity; I find that the page layout of Facebook is quite simple, Sina Weibo possesses all the features Facebook has and it has even more functions.'.....	90
4.1 'This ad is very popular recently. Who will accompany me on my journey?'.....	100
4.2 'It would be wonderful if we could live in the same city, at least, we may have the opportunity to come across somewhere in the city.' .....	101
4.3 'I really want to have a romantic relationship...' .....	102
6.1 Priority of location or profession .....	194
6.2 Sharing the experience of how to get an offer from Morgan Stanley (HK) .....	198

7.1 Example of <i>Jiugongge</i> (九宫格) .....	212
7.2 Numbers of participants accessing social media more than ten times a day on each of the three devices.....	218
7.3 A triangle model of self, interpersonal relationships and life changes .....	230
7.4 A triangular model of self-regulatory relationships (Shah 2006, p. 388) .....	231

## **Abstract**

There are mainstream research focuses on how social media affect people's lives, the present study explores how people use social media when confronted with life changing events or circumstances, especially when living overseas. Being exposed to a new living environment in Australia, many young adults from other countries are faced with a range of challenges. These may include cultural barriers, language limitations, employment difficulties, and academic pressures. The interpersonal relationships of young adults and their technological mediations shift as they experience life changes.

Drawing from long-term ethnographic research among young adults who moved from mainland China to Australia for further education or employment, I argue that social media are crucial in assisting young adults to navigate their life transitions. However, this plays out differently depending on the type of relationship and social context (friendship, love, family and work). I propose that with the affordances and the integrated communicative environment that polymedia (Madianou & Miller's 2013) provides, young adults living overseas present themselves and their life changes to diverse groups of people in different ways in order to mediate different types of ongoing relationships. This thesis contributes to the scholarship of interpersonal relationships and social media studies by exploring the digitally mediated communication of young adults going through life changes.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### The mobility of young adults

*Huiyun arrived in Melbourne with four suitcases to start a new life<sup>1</sup>. On the flight, she jotted down a to-do-list in Australia. She was confident that she would do really well in her Master's course and she was looking forward to running into Mr Right in this beautiful city.*

Huiyun is one of countless Chinese young adults who went overseas for further education.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, with globalization and the social changes that are happening in China, more and more of Generation Y (八零后, *Balinghou*), born 1980-1989, are inspired to travel abroad to pursue further education or to obtain foreign work experiences (Xiang & Shen 2009; Zweig, Changgui & Rosen 2004). In 2014, approximately 694,400 mainland Chinese students were studying abroad with the top three destination countries being the United States, Japan and Australia (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014).<sup>3</sup>

International students from China are of critical importance to the Australian higher education sector. According to the statistics of the Department of Education and Training,<sup>4</sup> in 2015 there were 136,097 Chinese students studying in Australia on a student visa. Australia has the highest percentage of international students (27 percent) in the world. According to the 2016 statistics of the Ministry of Education, a

---

<sup>1</sup> The 'new life' here refers to 'study and live in a new country'.

<sup>2</sup> In order to preserve anonymity, all of the participants' names in the thesis are pseudonyms. All of the participants' interview transcripts and social media posts shown in the thesis are translated by myself.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/news/australia-attracts-international-students>, accessed on 19 January 2017

total of 554,179 students paid in full: the Chinese students accounted for nearly 1/3 of these.

Indeed, China is currently the largest exporter of international students. There are a number of push and pull factors explaining this large number of mainland Chinese pursuing their studies overseas (Solimano 2008). From the push perspective, increases in Chinese household incomes enable the children of a greater number of families to experience overseas education. In fact, international education is now a dominant trend in Chinese society. Many Chinese parents view overseas education as advantageous, for the exposure of their children to foreign languages and cultures, as well as for the access it provides to the higher education of those countries. Chinese parents feel that these possibilities also offer their children advantages in their future competition for employment (Yang 2007).

Moreover, changes in government policies have resulted in more positive attitudes towards international education. In the case of the pull factors, information on the tuition fees of host countries, living expenses and living environment (i.e., whether the host country has had a natural disaster or not; or whether safety is an issue in the host country), and the state of international relations between the host country and the Chinese government, have a significant influence on the decisions of parents concerning the education choices of their children. In making these choices, parents also take into consideration which places their friends and relatives recommend for studying overseas. In some cases, even the social links of parents to a foreign country are a key factor. 'Most of my friends and my neighbours have been studying overseas or have been planning to study overseas, which inspired me and also

encouraged me to go to a different country and [...] therefore here I am', says Huiyun.

International students living in a foreign country must independently face a new environment, a new culture and new challenges. Personal safety, mental health, and legal disputes are commonly encountered by international students. These problems largely stem from the use of a foreign language, difficulty of integrating into a new society, cultural shocks, and different living habits. Social media provide indispensable communication platforms for international young adults in adapting to overseas study and life, as well as for maintaining and expanding interpersonal relationships.

### **Staying connected while mobile**

The mobility of Chinese young adults leads their parents to use social media in order to keep in touch with them. Many Chinese parents create their own Sina Weibo and WeChat accounts after their children have travelled overseas as they want to have access to their child's updates. Given the increased numbers of Chinese young adults travelling overseas, the worldwide trend of studying and working abroad is affecting not only the lives of young adults and their social media behaviour, but also the social media practices of their friends and relatives:

The first thing I [did after I] arrived at my homestay was to ask for the Wi-Fi password, then I was able to tell my Mum on WeChat that I'd arrived (in Melbourne) safe and sound. (Xinyi, 21)

With the rapid development of information technology, people have become closely connected through the Internet, with many people linking their physical lives and online lives. Young adults often write updates on their social media pages. They comment on their daily lives including physical and mental activity such as their thoughts, their feelings and their understandings on social events and social phenomena, suggesting that the two basic motivations of using social media are belonging and self-presentation.

Young adults studying or working in foreign countries strongly desire to be connected with their old and new communities, and to present themselves to their communities by sharing information with their followers who may or may not be their 'real friends', but nonetheless share common interests or common friends (Nadkarni & Hofmann 2012; Seidman 2013). The vast majority of international students stay globally interconnected through the use of email, VOIP (i.e. Skype) and social networking sites such as Facebook and Weibo (Herold & Marolt 2011). Social media represent a modern digital collection of the opinions of young adults, because they reflect and exhibit the young generation's views of life and the world in general, which are shaped by their own life experiences while at the same time simultaneously shaping their own lives.

At different stages in their lives, expected and unexpected life changes impact upon a person's Internet habits (Anderson & Tracey 2001). While many researchers in various disciplines analyse how social media reflect and affect the lives and opinions of young adults, very few have investigated the impact of life changes on the social media practices of young adults (Kwak et al. 2010; Williams, Terras & Warwick 2013).

Therefore, in my research, I propose to study how young adults who are confronted with life changing events or circumstances use social media. The focus of my research is on Chinese young adults who are currently pursuing further study or who are working in Australia.

### **Main strands of social media research**

With the rapid development of digital media technologies, social media platforms have emerged one after another. I use the term 'social media' in this research broadly as 'the sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content' (boyd 2013, p. 6).

Microblogging platforms refer to social media platforms that allow users to share short real-time information within 140 characters in text, picture, video and other multimedia forms. The earliest and most famous microblogging platform is Twitter which is originally created by a US company. Weibo is more than a microblog, for it combines the features and functions of Facebook and Twitter. WeChat has been developed further from Weibo. WeChat not only has the feature of private message, i.e. the one-to-one chat, it also has group chat and Moments-which is called *Pengyou Quan* (朋友圈), and the direct translation is Friends' Circle. WeChat Moments enable people to make text posts or text posts combined with uploaded photos, or short video posts. Unlike the 140-character limit of Weibo posts, WeChat Moments' text posts are free of word limit (McDonald, 2016; Wang, 2016). An individual is able to access another individual's Weibo posts even if he or she is not a Weibo user. Unlike



Weibo, WeChat requires reciprocal following. WeChat Moments can only be accessed by people who are on one's WeChat friends' list. In addition, when posting on one's WeChat Moments, one has four options of deciding who can see their posts, i.e. to share one's Moments to the Public (All friends), Private (Just me), Share List (Just selected friends) or Do not share list (Exclude selected friends).

The most popular platforms that my participants frequently use are Facebook, Weibo and WeChat. Based on their using habits, I made a detailed comparison among Facebook, WeChat and Weibo, please see Table 1.1:

Differences in my participants' uses Social media platforms	Frequency of use	Followers	Purposes of use	Language	Openness	Unique functions
Facebook	The least frequently used platform.	Start the account with the aim of making some foreign friends but some participants may end up having more Chinese friends than foreign friends on Facebook.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Make local friends</li> <li>2) Practice English</li> <li>3) Out of curiosity</li> </ol>	Both English and Chinese versions are available.	Facebook users.	Users have to use a separate software — Messenger, for private messages.
WeChat	The most frequently used platform.	Friends and families. Also able to subscribe to subscription accounts.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Daily interaction with friends, partners and families</li> <li>2) Work related communication</li> <li>3) Information seeking and sharing</li> </ol>	Both English and Chinese versions are available.	WeChat followers only. WeChat Moments has the function of setting different audience groups.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Drift Bottle</li> <li>2) People Nearby</li> <li>3) Shake</li> <li>4) Red Packet</li> <li>5) Transfer</li> <li>6) Wallet (pay bills, utilities, mobile top up, public services and etc.)</li> </ol>
Weibo	The less frequently used platform.	Friends and some celebrities, i.e. Big V.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Information seeking and sharing</li> <li>2) Social interaction</li> <li>3) Entertainment</li> </ol>	Both English and Chinese versions are available.	Everyone on the Internet.	Weibo users can repost another's posts but on WeChat Moments there is no 'repost' button.

Table 1.1: Table of comparisons among Facebook, WeChat and Weibo

In my research I am not focusing on the functions of a specific social media platform, rather, I am taking social media platforms (for instance, Facebook, Twitter, Weibo and WeChat) as a whole, to study my participants' social media practices. The information that my participants obtain on social media; the content that they make and distribute; the rich stories that are behind those contents; and the relationships that my participants aim to adjust and manage through their social media practices are the main focus of my research.

The content that people distribute on social media can be divided into two categories, one is what they see and hear; the other one is how they feel and think. Traditional media used to be the main choice for people to get information, but now, more and more young adults are turning to social media to obtain information. Therefore to study the content that they make and distribute and the relationships that they try to manage on social media, it is useful to understand how social media is related to different aspects of society.

Facebook and Twitter are mostly studied by Western scholars, while WeChat and Weibo are mostly studied by Chinese scholars, although the theories and methods used in the research are common or interlinked. Also as scholars prefer to focus on a specific platform to carry out their studies, it is unpractical to study literatures about social media platforms separately hence there are so many different social media platforms and there isn't sufficient space to introduce all of the relevant academic studies about each of the platforms here. In addition, as Twitter and Weibo do not require reciprocal followings and they are more likely to be used in a public way, I decided to split the review on social media research in two parts. The first part is a

broad overview of research articles on social media, in five key areas that emerged from the literature: politics, education, business, communication and entertainment (Cheong & Lee 2010; Kwak et al. 2010; Williams, Terras & Warwick 2013). I will discuss each of these five areas in turn in the next section. The second part is a review on social media and interpersonal relationships. Also in the following chapters I will review studies specifically on Facebook, Weibo and WeChat together with a themed topic in each chapter, i.e. friendships, romantic relationships, parent-child relationships and work-related relationships.

The first area is social media in relation to political communication and government (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan 2012; Wigand, FDL 2010). Some research examines election campaigns: for example, the Swedish election campaign in 2010 (Larsson & Moe 2012) and the general elections in the Netherlands (Vergeer & Hermans 2013) in 2010. A growing number of scholars explore their own countries' current governmental social media practices. Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers (2010, p. 1612) find that the US Congress use Twitter to disperse information and to report their daily activities. Similarly, Liu (2013) and Ma (2013) examine how different levels of Chinese governmental social media organize their e-government communication with citizens on Weibo. Ausserhofer and Maireder (2013) provide an early study examining the interrelation of individuals, Twitter topics and their connection to political participation on Twitter.

Another popular research focus is education, from both a teaching point of view and a learning point of view. Ebner and Reinhardt (2009, p. 2) claim that 'microblogging can be seen as a completely new form of communication that can support informal

learning beyond classrooms'. Gao, Luo and Zhang (2012) and Domizi (2013) argue that microblogging has the potential to encourage the class participation of students, their study engagement, and their reflective thinking, as well as collaborative learning. Dayter (2011) requires students to tweet comments on their readings in her experiments shows that educators always include Twitter as a means of class participation. Furthermore, there are a number of studies of social media in education for new literacy (Gillen & Merchant 2013), language learning (Lomicka & Lord 2012), teaching Chinese politics (Sullivan 2012), nanotechnology (Veltri 2013), pharmacotherapy (Wang et al. 2013), and drama education (Wotzko 2012).

I classify the third research stream as social media in profit and non-profit organizations and marketing for business uses and commercial promotions. Chelmiss and Prasanna (2013) and Schöndienst et al. (2011) both carry out empirical analyses of social media behaviour in enterprises. In China, the way social media is used for business is studied by Chen (2012) and Zhang et al. (2010). Coyle, Smith and Platt (2012) point out how companies' social media responses to consumer problems impact on brand promotion. In contrast to Coyle et al (2012), Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) shed light on the Twitter practices of large non-profit organizations in the United States. They reveal <sup>5</sup>three key affordances of updates, namely, 'information', 'community', and 'action'.

A fourth research stream concerns itself with communication. A large number of social media studies focus on social presence and social interaction (Dunlap & Lowenthal 2009; Fischer & Reuber 2011; Hughes et al. 2012). Others highlight the

---

<sup>5</sup> The original source calls them functions but arguably these would be better characterised as affordances.

role of social media in the transmission of rumours (Liao & Shi 2013; Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch 2012), the relationship between social media and social change in China (Lu & Qiu 2013), and Twitter spammers (Yang, Harkreader & Gu 2013).

Finally, some scholars (Schedl 2012; Bennett 2012; Lee & Goh 2013) explore social practices in the entertainment field through a range of case studies. They observe the social media uses of musicians, movie stars and other celebrities (Schedl 2012). By keeping in touch with their fans on social media platforms, celebrities can reveal more information to their fans when they launch their new albums or new movies; they can even involve their fans in their new creations (Bennett 2012). For example, after the death of Michael Jackson, many fans used Twitter for ‘spreading of rumours, expressions of hatred, and spam, also occupied a large proportion of tweets’ (Lee & Goh 2013).

### **Social media and interpersonal relationships**

From the mid-2000s, there was a boom in the development of social network sites, these days usually referred to as ‘social media’. Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that ‘what makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks’. Nancy Baym (2010) identifies seven key variables – interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach and mobility – for understanding personal connections through digital media under different contexts, and for both communication and maintenance of relationships.

Since 2007, privacy concerns around social media have become a popular research topic. Much of the debate concerning privacy is in regard to how much you should

reveal of your personal life. Parents' invasions of their children's privacy online have also attracted attention from researchers. More recently, the study of Kanter, Afifi and Robbins (2012) explores the effect of having a parent on Facebook. They conclude that it does not result in perceptions of greater privacy invasions, but rather it is associated with decreases in conflict in the parent-child relationship. Prior to the parent joining Facebook, if the parent and child had a more conflicted relationship, then the parent's presence on Facebook enhances the child's closeness with the parent. This finding corresponds partially with my discussion in Chapter 5 'Friending your parents'. Moving on from parental to romantic relationships, in 2010 Gershon studied which medium people employed to break up with someone. She emphasizes the moral consequences of switching media from one to another for a specific purpose, which in her study is disconnecting or dissolving a romantic relationship.

Gershon's emphasis on the individual's choice of medium is also one of the dimensions that Miller and Madianou's (2013) theory of polymedia highlights. Miller and Madianou argue that the theory of polymedia is about how users exploit digital affordances in order to manage their emotions and their relationships. In other words, the social act of an individual's choice of a shift from one particular medium to another actually constitutes that social relationship.

Today, with the proliferation of digital media technologies, young adults living overseas have numerous options for staying in touch with their friends and families back home. Which media affordances they choose and which social media platforms they use in order to contact a certain individual is a reflection of how they

experience a type of relationship and, more importantly, how they want to manage this relationship. Miller and Madianou (2011, 2013) developed the theory of polymedia by studying transnational families, mainly focusing on the parent–child relationship. In my own research, I apply polymedia to examine and theorize the interpersonal relationships of young adult migrants with their friends, lovers, parents, customers and potential employers.

To date, many researchers in different disciplines have analysed how social media reflect young people’s lives and opinions based on their different academic backgrounds and perspectives. However, very few researchers, with the exception of De Choudhury et al. (2013), touch on the impact of a major life event on people’s social media behaviour. By studying the impact of childbirth on the tweets of new mothers they demonstrate that after people experience a life event, people’s social media practices change as well. They find that approximately 15 percent of new mothers show significant changes in their online activity and emotional expression, and show linguistic changes in their social media posts. De Choudhury et al. (2013) demonstrate that young mothers’ social media practices change as they experienced childbirth. However, my study aims to develop further. I am looking at the two-way relationship between life changes and social media with a focus on how people use social media to help themselves to redirect their interpersonal relationships and to live through life changes. I use an ethnographic approach in order to account for these changes within a complex and nuanced context. My study generates new insights into how people’s social media practices change when facing the challenge of living in a new sociocultural environment.



By being exposed to a new living environment in Australia, young adults from different countries are faced with a range of challenges such as cultural barriers, language limitations, employment difficulties, academic pressures, etc. The interpersonal relationships of young adults, and their technological mediations, change as they experience life changes. Drawing from long-term ethnographic research among mainland Chinese young adults who moved to Australia for further education or employment, I argue that social media are crucial in assisting young adults to navigate their life transitions, however this plays out differently depending on their types of relationships and social contexts (friendship, love, family and work). This thesis makes an important contribution to the scholarship of interpersonal relationships and social media by studying the digitally mediated communication of young adults during life changes. The theoretical approach combines Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation with Madianou and Miller's conceptual frame of polymedia to propose that with the affordances and the integrated communicative environment that polymedia provides, young adults living overseas are able to present themselves and their life changes to different groups of people in order to mediate different types of interpersonal relationships which in turn are affected by their life changes as a result of moving overseas.

### **Life changes**

In every individual's life, there are at least four main life changes: birth, life transitions, life interruptions and death. From the time we are born, we learn how to talk, walk, sing, dance and etc. In modern urban societies, we then go to school and

some of us pursue further education at universities, TAFE institutions<sup>6</sup> or graduate schools. After that we transfer from tertiary education to the job market. These milestones are rites of passage that mark each individual's traditional life stages, although within different cultural and social contexts there will be some different rites of passage as well (Van Gennep 1960). However, associated with these rites of passage there are always unpredictable and uncontrollable life events, which interrupt our lives, i.e. disease, loss of family members, accidents, etc. (Massimi, Dimond & Le Dantec 2012). It is not only 'bad' events that interrupt our lives. Sometimes even the 'good' things can interrupt/disturb the blueprint of our lives; for instance, falling in love with someone and deciding to marry before finishing high school.

There is a large amount of research on life changes, most of it from medical and psychological perspectives (Engberg et al. 2012; Rahe 1979; Rahe & Arthur 1978; Smith, Johnson & Sarason 1978). Turfboer (1975) and Lin et al. (1979) look at life changes specifically through the lens of stressful life events. Others, such as Cowan and Cowan (2000), study a specific life event from the viewpoint of examining what happens to a couple's relationship when they have their first baby. With the increasing popularity of the consumption of the Internet, research has started to draw attention to the relationship between stressful life events and the use of the Internet (Leung 2006; Li et al. 2010). It has been shown that the use of the Internet is closely associated with stressful life events as people turn to the Internet for mood management and social compensation.

---

<sup>6</sup> TAFE is short for technical and further education. TAFE institutions provide training in fields such as finance, hospitality, tourism, construction, engineering, visual arts, IT and etc.

Leung (2006, p. 204) finds that 'stressful life events are significantly associated with the consumption of the Internet for mood management (such as entertainment and information seeking) and social compensation (such as recognition gaining and relationship maintenance) motives'. More recently, Li et al. (2009) and Li et al. (2010) analyse the relationships between stressful life events and problematic Internet use among adolescents and college students.

Within the context of life events and social media, De Choudhury, Counts and Horvitz (2013) explore the impact of a major life event, such as childbirth, on the mood of new mothers and their behaviour as reflected by their Twitter posts. They examine the impact of childbirth on the new mothers' Twitter posts with three social media-centric measures: patterns of activity, emotional expression and linguistic style. Their results demonstrate that after people experience a life event, their social media practices show significant change. In contrast to the quantitative research methods of De Choudhury, Counts and Horvitz (2013), I adopt an ethnographic design for a different research participant group. I am researching on a group of young adults who experienced a more complicated life change which is moving from China to Australia.

### **A working definition of 'life changes'**

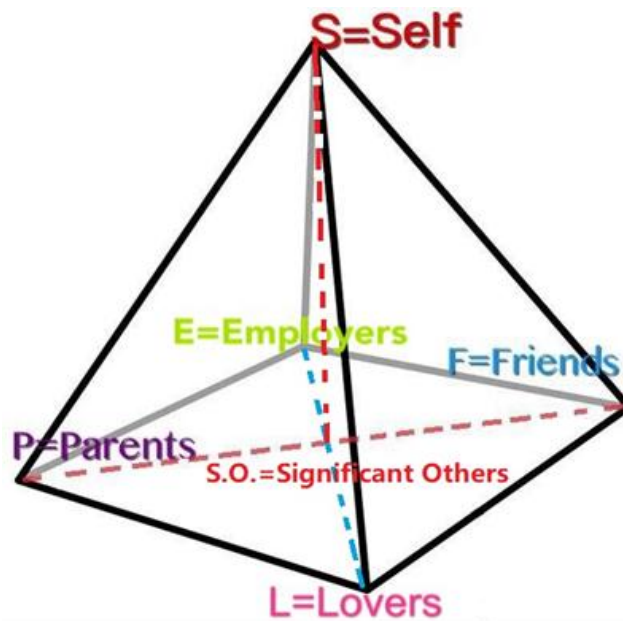
'Life changes' is a highly complex and ambiguous notion. I define 'moving to Australia' as the major life change for the participants in my ethnographic study. This major and overarching life change encompasses a variety of more specific life changing events, such as starting a new intimate relationship, breaking up, being separated physically from your parents, or failing an exam.

As my project unfolded, I focused on four types of interpersonal relationships that has changed along with young adults' social media practices as a result of going through a range of life changes associated with living overseas, namely:

1. friendship
2. romantic relationship
3. parent-child relationship
4. work-related relationship

My research goes beyond the social media surface to explore the philosophical roots of the interrelationships between social media practices and life changes, by looking at my participants' interpersonal relationships with the lens and culture specificities of Confucianism (Yum 1988; Ho 1995; Hwang 2001).

As Ho & Chiu (1998, p. 353) argued that 'the strategic units of analysis are not the individual or the situation alone, but the person-in-relations (focusing on a person in different relational contexts) or persons-in-relation (focusing on persons interacting within a relational context)', therefore when I study my participants life changes and their social media practices, I pay close attention not to separate the self from the persons-in-relation, and I have developed a pyramid model of self and significant others (parents, friends, employers and lovers) on the basis of my empirical research. (See page 228 in Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion of this model).



**Figure 1.1 The pyramid model of self and significant others  
(parents, friends, employers and lovers)**

### **Research questions**

As a Chinese international student myself, I have noticed changes to my social media practices related to the impact of moving overseas to Australia, that I have found to be extremely interesting. Even though Twitter and Facebook are blocked in China, information still does flow among netizens (Hughes & Wacker 2003; Lu & Qiu 2013), as no one can actually stop the transmission. When I was in China, I did not feel I was blocked from the outside world, as I could always obtain some information on Twitter and Facebook through the updates of the microblogs of some Chinese international students. As I pursued my PhD study in Australia, I began to feel that I was not only experiencing a big change in my life but that it also provided a chance for me to open a window for my family and friends towards different sources of

information and knowledge. So, after I moved to Australia, whenever I saw some interesting news on Twitter or Facebook, I would tell my parents about it when we chatted on video and I would also I share it on my Chinese social media pages. Since coming to Australia, I have checked Weibo much more frequently than I used to, because I feel that Weibo is the most convenient way for me to keep up-to-date with what my friends have been doing as well as to catch up with Chinese news. I

gradually noticed that my social media practices had significantly changed since moving to Australia. And, by observing the social media activity of other students I realized that my case was reflective of a larger pattern of changes in the use of social media among Chinese international students. Many students feel very lonely when they study abroad so they spend more time than before on Weibo, posting and reposting about their lives in foreign countries. Some of them would even take screenshots of the interesting pages of Facebook or Twitter and share them as pictures on Weibo with audiences in China. This became the basis for my study.

This study fills a significant gap in the literature about social media by applying an ethnographic approach of participant observations and interviews to a group of Chinese young adults, aged from 20 to 40, who have moved to Australia to either pursue a further education or be employed. The aim is to investigate the role social media play when people are confronted by life changing events or circumstances.

The findings of this study will be of value to both Chinese and Australian governments, educational institutions and businesses.

As this review of the literature on social media and life changes shows, many researchers focus on the role of the Internet in the social and academic transition of

first year college students; however, less research is undertaken on the role of social media in the lives of graduate students as they transition towards further education or employment. Even less is understood about the huge life changes associated with studying and working in a foreign country and the profound influences these life changes have on the social media practices of young adults. Thus, my aim is to fill in this gap by carrying out a study on the impact of life changes on the social media practices of young adults. My research participants are young Chinese adults who are currently pursuing further study at Master's or PhD level or who are currently working in Australia.

This study contributes to the understanding of the complex relationship between life changes and social media practices. I ask, how do social media interact with people's life changes and how do people's life changes affect their social media practices?

My research questions are aimed at the intersection of three key areas: social media studies, interpersonal relationships and life changes studies, with a focus on life changes associated with studying and working overseas. Specifically, my questions are:

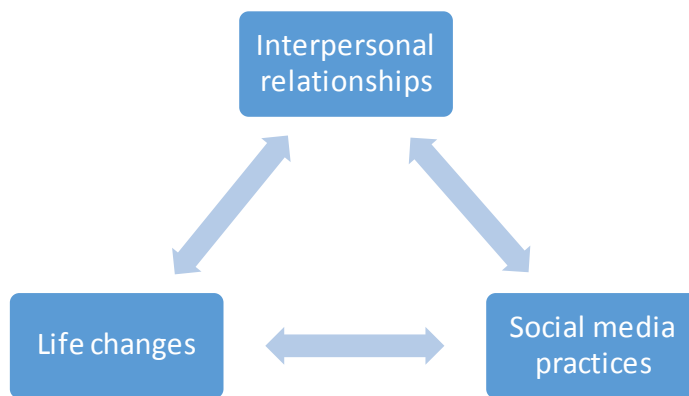
1. When confronted with a life change, in what ways, if any, will people's social media practices change? For example, are there changes in daily routines or patterns of social media activity? And, how do these reflect people's life changes?
2. When people's social media practices change, does this affect the social media practices of their friends and families as well?

Most of the existing research on social media and China focuses primarily on how Chinese people in China use social media (McDonald 2016, Wang 2016), whereas my research aims to look at how Chinese people outside China use social media. To explain the dynamic relationship between social media and life changes, I examine how life changes are affecting the way people choose and use social media to deal with their personal relationships. Life changes influence people's personal relationships, and social media have become the platform where people present their lives and interact with their social networks. I aim to explore not only the differences and commonalities in the use of social media by young people before and after going overseas, but also how young people mediate their relationships through their experiences on different social media platforms.

Before I started the research, I assumed that moving overseas would affect people's social media practices in simple ways such as changing platforms, increasing or reducing the frequency of using social media, following different groups of friends, or posting in different languages. However, my ethnographic fieldwork has yielded a rich set of data, which has led me to a better understanding of how interpersonal relationships influence the way people use social media during life changes.

Life changes impact on interpersonal relationships. Moreover, life changes change people's social media practices, and interpersonal relationships change social media practices. Interpersonal relationships change along with life changes. Therefore, to investigate the impact of life changes on social media practices, I suggest that we should study the changing interpersonal relationships reflected on people's social media practices.





**Figure 1.2: Mutual relationships between life changes, social media practices and interpersonal relationships (author)**

Before examining the impact of life changes on social media, we should acknowledge that all these life changes affect people’s interpersonal relationships. It is unwise to study the changes in people’s social media practices in isolation, without understanding how people are engaging with different levels and dimensions of interpersonal relationships. This study explores how people employ social media to get through life changes associated with moving overseas while managing changing interpersonal relationships.

### **Thesis outline**

After nine months of fieldwork studying 188 young Chinese adults aged from 20 to 40 years old living in Australia for further education or for employment, I found that a life change is not just about a single individual. In fact, a life change influences people who surround the individual, or people who have connections with this individual even in a geographically isolated situation, such as parents, old friends and partners back in China. I identified four types of interpersonal relationships from my fieldwork, namely friendships, intimate relationships, parent–child relationships and

work-related relationships. Understanding the role that social media play in dealing with four types of relationships is of great importance in helping young adults adjust to life changes in an unfamiliar place with a different cultural and social context. An outline of the rest of the thesis is as follows.

Chapter 2, 'Research process', outlines the ethnographic approach I apply to my fieldwork and how I employ digital ethnography as a method to investigate the social media practices of my participants through online observations. The fieldwork was conducted in Melbourne in 2014, for a period of nine months from March to November. My research participants are young Chinese adults who use social media, and who share at least one common life change, which is the experience of moving from China to Australia. In this chapter, I present my research process in three stages, namely 'stage one: plan the fieldwork', 'stage two: conduct the fieldwork', and 'stage three: write up the research'.

Chapters 3 to 6 of the thesis are organized around the four key findings, which I explore to consider the impact of life changes on the social media practices of young adults in certain aspects, namely: (i) friendships, (ii) romantic relationships, (iii) parent-child relationships, and (iv) work-related relationships. The following four chapters explore each of these themes.

In Chapter 3, 'Sharing your life with friends', I explore how moving overseas affects young adults in aspects of their daily life presentations online. Building on Goffman's 'presentation of self' (1959) and Bernie Hogan's (2010) study which extends 'self-presentation' into 'exhibitions' and 'performances', I argue that with the practice of presenting daily life online, young adults help themselves get through a series of life

changes associated with living overseas and integrate with local culture both online and offline.

Chapter 4, 'Reaching out for romance', explores three ways in which young adults use social media to begin or maintain their romantic relationships online: (1) trace back and play back, (2) a show of affection on social media, and (3) seeking advice and support. Chambers (2013) provides an overview of digital dating and romance, including jealousy and stalking online. Taking inspiration from her work, I discuss three ways in which young adults collect information about their potential partners online, 'showing off' and 'over-communicating' (Goffman 1959) to their friends how much they love each other via social media, and seeking advice and support when they are confused about their relationships.

Chapter 5, 'Friending your parents', examines an 'invisible' relationship. Unlike a romantic relationship, which is quite visible online, the parent-child relationship normally takes place behind the scenes. Many scholars find that young Chinese adults living overseas are 'looked after' by their parents in mainland China (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Chao 1994). Building on these studies, I argue that young adults living overseas use social media to alleviate the concerns of their parents about their lifestyles, by presenting positive images online to show that they are engaging in responsible behaviour (Vitak 2012, Hogan 2010).

Chapter 6, 'Working it out', explores two case studies to examine how *Daigou* business is being conducted on social media and how young adults plan their careers by collecting information on social media.

Chapter 7 addresses my triangle model of self, interpersonal relationships and life changes by combining five principles: self-presentation, polymedia, co-presence, social comparison theory and collective decision-making theory.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, summarises the thesis and discusses the major contributions of the research. I also examine the limitations of the research and propose possible future work.

In this chapter, I have introduced the background and the context of my research, and I have provided a review of my research discipline and an outline of the thesis.

Now, I will move on to Chapter 2, introducing my ethnographic fieldwork in terms of its planning, conduct and analysis.

## **Chapter 2: Research process**

### **Introduction**

I undertook fieldwork in Melbourne for a period of nine months from March to November 2014. My research participants were young Chinese adults who use social media, and who share at least one common life change, which is the experience of moving from China to Australia. While most of my research participants lived in Melbourne, a small number of them lived in Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide and Wollongong. I have applied an ethnographic approach to conduct my fieldwork, which included four research methods: questionnaires, in-depth interviews, online/offline participant observations and focus groups. These were all aimed at gathering basic demographic data and information on the social media practices of my research participants and their life changes before and after they came to Australia.

First, I will provide a brief overview of the specific ethnographic approach that has guided my inquiries: social media ethnography. Then, to explain my research process chronologically, I present my methodology in three stages: the first stage of planning the fieldwork, the second stage of conducting the fieldwork and the final stage of writing up my research.

### **Social media ethnography**

As Fetterman (1989), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), O'Reilly (2008, 2012), Horst, Hjorth and Tacchi (2012), Postill and Pink (2012), Boellstorff et al. (2012), Boellstorff (2015), Hine (2000, 2015) have argued, to do ethnography is to understand social

phenomena by observing and participating within the context where they occur. It is important in this study to observe and to understand the changes in the social media practices of young adults both online and offline caused by life changes within the context of moving overseas. For this reason, I have used an ethnographic approach to the research.

According to Geertz, 'What a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to places, coming back with information about how people live there...not lounging about in libraries reflecting on literary questions' (1988, p. 1).

Ethnographers work inductively, engaging in 'ground-up theorizing' – a process open to new questions and lines of theorization as the fieldwork unfolds (Postill & Pink 2012). In this spirit, I endeavoured to build rapport with my research participants by involving myself in their daily lives; we went shopping, had dinner, watched movies and studied in libraries together. By doing this, I made my participants feel relaxed when I interviewed them. I recorded what they said on a voice recorder. They trusted me and generously shared their personal stories with me. They did not treat me as a bored researcher but as a patient friend who is always ready to listen to them when they complain about their pressures, share some anecdotes and talk about how they handle the life changing experiences of graduation, their internships, and the ups and downs in their intimate relationships through the usage of social media.

The rise of digital technology has led classical ethnographic research in a new direction: organizing the settings of the current research field as multi-sited, from a physical location to online digital sites (Coleman 2010; Garcia et al. 2009; Horst,

Hjorth & Tacchi 2012; Marcus 1995; Postill & Pink 2012). Murthy (2008) reviewed four new emerging technologies in relation to ethnographic studies: online questionnaires, digital video, social networking websites and blogs. He stated that 'a balanced combination of physical and digital ethnography not only gives researchers a larger and more exciting array of methods, but also enables them to de-marginalize the voice of respondents' (Murthy 2008, p. 837). One year later, Garcia et al. (2009, p. 52) published a paper in which they showed 'how the online environment requires adjustments in how ethnographers define the setting of their research, conduct participant observation and interviews, obtain access to settings and research subjects, and deal with the ethical dilemmas posed by the medium'. Most of my participants are international students (Bachelor, Master and PhDs), they were worried that I may know their teachers and supervisors, and therefore at first they hesitated to share their personal stories with me, especially when talking about their experiences at school. Also when having interviews they could decide what to talk about or not, but when I observe their online posts, they couldn't cover anything, they are all out on display.

Before I conducted my fieldwork, I have applied for ethics application. I have asked my participants to sign the Participant Information and Consent Form before attending my research. In the PICF I have talked about how I would treat the participants and how I would ensure the participants' confidentiality.

In order to look at the impact of life changes on social media practices from different dimensions and to triangulate the data more objectively, I employed four key

research methods in this study: questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observations (both online and offline).

### **Stage one: planning the fieldwork**

After successfully completing the milestone of confirmation, I started planning my fieldwork while also applying for ethics approval from my university. Building on my research proposal, I split my plan of fieldwork into the following three parts: research sample, multi-sited research fields (both online and offline) and research methods.

The participants of this research were young Chinese adults living in Australia. At first, I also planned to include Japanese and Australian young adults in the research sample, since I could take advantage of my Japanese language skills in speaking and writing, but considering that this is ethnographic research, what really matters is not the numeric size and scale of the sample of research participants, but rather the depth and richness of the actual materials collected from the participants (Fetterman 1989; Amit 2003). More importantly, I needed to spend time with my participants, to observe their everyday habits to achieve a deeper understanding of their life information (O'Reilly 2008, 2012; Hine 2000). The aim was not to make cross-cultural comparisons; rather, I wanted to know how young Chinese adults manage their use of social media at a critical time in their lives, as they become gradually more independent from their parents and start facing major life decisions. As a Chinese international student myself, it was also easier for me to gain access to the Chinese community in Australia. For these reasons I decided to focus my study on Chinese young adults who came to Australia rather than on young adults from



other countries. As a native Mandarin speaker raised in mainland China, I am very familiar with the Chinese cultural background and cultural nuances. Being able to understand and join in most of the 'language games' (Wittgenstein 1953) played by fellow Chinese, I was able to analyse both the social media feeds of my participants and our interview conversations with relative ease.

With the development of social media ethnography, participants no longer need to be physically located in one single research site (Marcus 1995; Sade-Beck 2004; Postill & Pink 2012; Horst & Miller 2012). I was located in Melbourne when I conducted my research but my participants were not physically located in the same city. They were scattered geographically. With a small portion of them living in Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide and Wollongong, I decided to choose Melbourne as my main research field site. It is worth noting that I never felt isolated from my research participants. Even though we were not located in the same place, we were always connected via social media. The social media sites of my participants were important components of my field sites (Hannerz 2003; Hine 2007). I used these social media sites as spaces where I could observe my participants online as well as gain more insights into their everyday lives. These sites allowed me to observe my participants across different time periods and in different spaces. It meant that I did not need to be geographically and temporally located in the same place as my participants. Also these social media sites provided me with a relaxed place to ask my participants about their posts. I could leave comments under their posts or send them private messages to seek answers to my questions. In addition, I could make my own posts on those social media sites. I aimed to make my participants feel that they could

observe my posts anytime they wished and I was always happy to discuss about my posts with them as well. The relaxed communication environment and the trust communication patterns we created together enriched my research with more detailed materials.

On the basis of the social media habits of Chinese young adults, and because it was easy to observe and interact with my research participants, I identified the following three social media platforms as my primary online field sites: Sina Weibo, WeChat and Facebook (Herold & Marolt 2011; CNNIC, 2014). Initially, I had planned to use Twitter as well but I found that very few of my participants used Twitter actively. Although many of them had a Twitter account, they seldom checked it or updated it. For this reason, I decided to exclude Twitter from the online observation field sites. From March to November 2014, I carried out a nine-month online observation on these three social media platforms. I took screenshots of the posts and reposts of my participants and later organized these screenshots together with my field notes. I also interacted with my participants quite often on these three social media platforms by commenting, liking and reposting their posts.

Following the guidance of researchers such as Miller and Slater (2000), Coleman (2010), Postill and Pink (2012), Boellstorff et al. (2012) and Creswell (2013) for conducting my fieldwork, as stated earlier, I decided to employ four research methods: questionnaires, semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observations. An important advantage of employing four research techniques is that it provides a way to triangulate the data and thus provides a broad snapshot as well as a nuanced and chronological approach that enables the

identification of the impact of life changes on social media before and after coming to Australia. In the following section, while reviewing my four research methods, I present how I conducted my nine-month fieldwork.

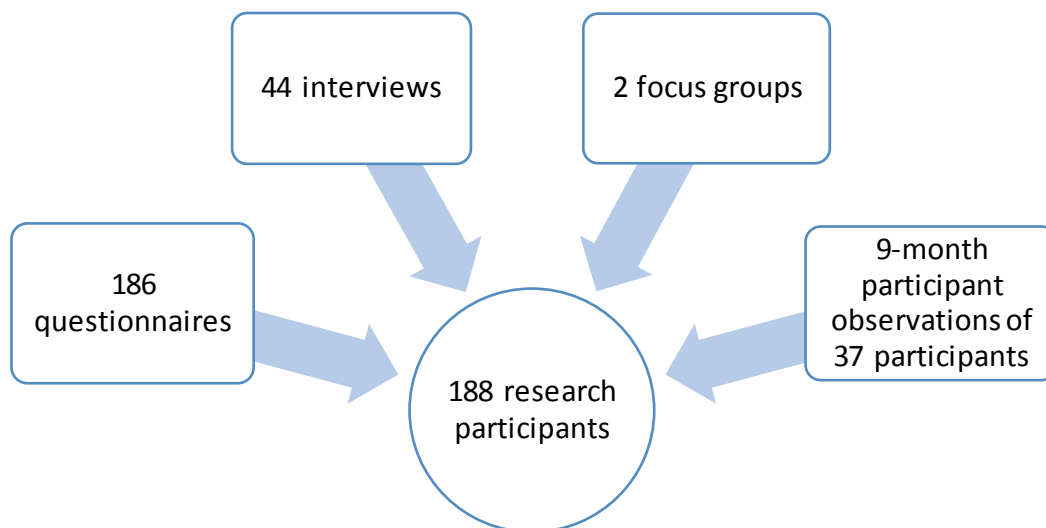
### **Stage two: conducting the fieldwork**

In March 2014, the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee granted me permission to conduct fieldwork. To ensure that all the research participants were fully informed and willing to participate in my research, each of them were given a consent form to sign. It was written in both English and Chinese.

The original impetus for undertaking research on life changes and social media for my PhD came from my own experiences of studying overseas while using social media to stay connected with my friends and families and to help me adjust to different living and cultural environments. Therefore, when I carried out the fieldwork, I was not only present as an ethnographic researcher who was an outsider but also as an insider with similar experiences to those of my research participants, that is, as a Chinese international student pursuing further education in Australia.

The merit of my double role in the fieldwork was that it made my research participants feel relaxed and thus brought them closer to me. As a result, I was able to collect more detailed and reliable materials from them. They considered me a peer since we were in the same age group and they told me they did not fear that I would judge their online behaviour in the way that an older school educator may have done. During the entire process of interviewing and participant observation, they were generous in sharing their stories with me, even those about the hard times (Gillham 2005; Johnson 2002).

After I received approval from the ethics committee, I started recruiting my research participants. To ensure diversity of participants in the sample, I adopted three strategies (Silverman 2013). The first was based on my personal social network where a call for volunteers was posted on the homepages of my personal social media accounts. The second strategy involved handing out questionnaires to students at a Master's class and a third-year class at the University of Melbourne. These were relatively large classes with sizes of 200 and 400 students respectively but I only handed out questionnaires to Chinese students who were willing to fill in the questionnaire. The third strategy for selecting participants involved snowball sampling whereby participants who responded to the questionnaires and attended the interview were asked to nominate additional potential participants (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). In total, I have delivered roughly 300 questionnaires both online and offline, including the questionnaires that I physically handed out in person and the ones that I sent out via emails and social media. As a result, I collected 186 effective questionnaire answers. But in total, the number of my participants is 188, since there were two participants who didn't fill in the questionnaire, but have agreed to attend my interviews. Therefore the total number of participants who contributed to this research is 188. In addition, I conducted 44 in-depth interviews, held two focus groups, and observed 37 participants during nine months of participant observations – among which I followed 21 accounts on Sina Weibo, 31 on WeChat, and 17 on Facebook, as summarised in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: Distribution of research participants**

When I first started the fieldwork, I did not prepare a formally designed questionnaire. Instead, I sent prospective participants a simple and informal questionnaire to fill out online, which resembled a personal information form. The aim was to collect the participants' personal information: name, gender, age, etc., and their preferences for attending either a focus group interview or a one-on-one in-depth interview.

After I conducted eight interviews I reflected on how the interviews went with the participants. I noticed that the first ten to fifteen minutes of each interview were spent on 'breaking the ice', introductions, and gathering basic information from the interviewees, such as: Do you use social media? Which social media platform are you using? I realized that these ten to fifteen minutes could be used more productively if I had gathered more information about their social media habits beforehand. In addition, some of the research participants kept asking me questions such as: 'Are

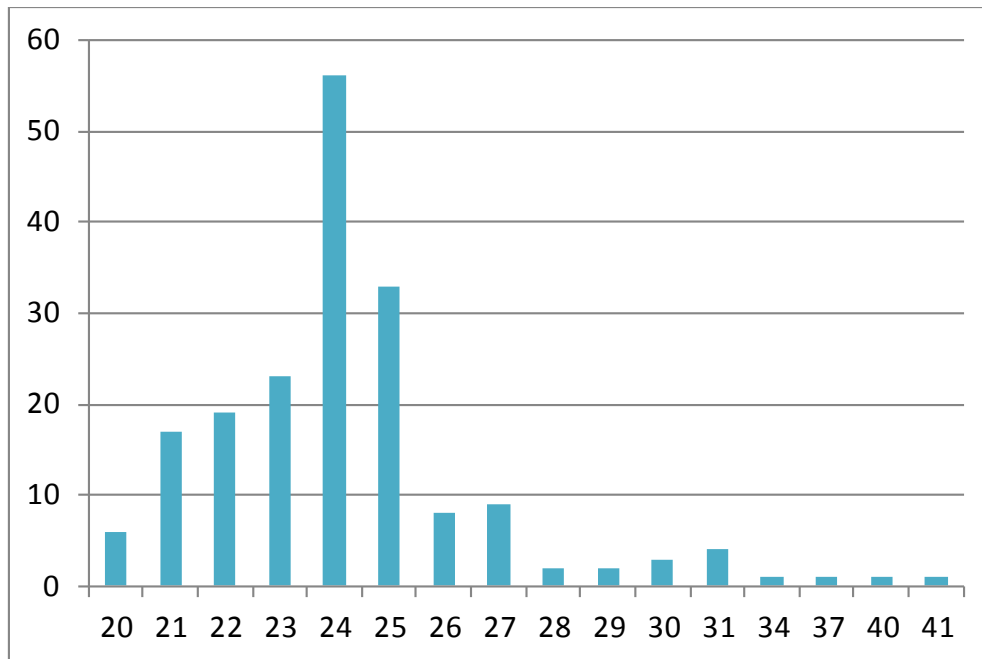
you seriously doing research at PhD level? Why aren't you using a scientific method? Where is your questionnaire? How can you do scientific analysis by just talking and hanging out with me?' As none of my participants had conducted nor participated in ethnographic research before, it was not surprising that they were unfamiliar with ethnographic research methods. Boellstorff et al. (2012) suggest that ethnographers should be open to modify methods and research questions to respond to unexpected encounters in the fieldwork. Following their advice and in response to my participants' perceptions of a scientific research approach, I decided to extend my initial informal questionnaire into a more formally designed questionnaire, with the aim of saving time for in-depth discussions during interviews and attracting more potential research participants into my ethnographic interviews and participant observations, as well as of collecting demographic data from a larger sample pool. I wanted more credibility as a researcher with my participants. I designed the questionnaire in Chinese first and then translated it into English. Even though it was a short questionnaire with only 13 questions, the process of designing and revising the questionnaire took a long time. It included the choice of questions, the style of the questionnaire, the choice of the range of numbers and the order of the questions, the understanding of the language of social media and so on (Oppenheim 2000; Stone 1993; Willis 2004). Before settling on the final version of the questionnaire, I also sent out trial questionnaires to a small group of participants to ask for feedback as a pilot study. After 19 revisions, partly in response to the expectations of what social science research should look like, I was finally satisfied with the final version (see Appendix 3 for the English version, and Appendix 4 for the Chinese version).

Once I had designed the questionnaire, I asked the potential participants to fill out the questionnaire before attending the in-depth interviews. It contained questions about key informational characteristics including education, working status, social media usage preferences, frequency, etc. (Creswell 2003).

### **Characteristics of participants**

In total, I have delivered roughly 300 questionnaires both online and offline, including the questionnaires that I physically handed out in person and the ones that I sent out via emails and social media. As a result, I collected 186 effective questionnaire answers. The total number of participants was 188, since there were two participants who didn't fill in the questionnaire but agreed to be interviewed. To identify important demographic characteristics underlying the social media behaviour of young adults who have moved from China to Australia for either study or for work, I identified the following seven main variables from the questionnaires: 1. Gender; 2. Age; 3. Location; 4. Duration; 5. Education; 6. Enrolment status and 7. Work status (see Figures 2.2 to 2.6 respectively). Each of these seven factors represent one question from the questionnaire (see Appendix 3 for the English version, and Appendix 4 for the Chinese version).

In this study, to identify the impact of life changes on social media practices as a general and common phenomenon rather than being driven by one gender's using habits, I made an effort to approximate a gender balance. Fortunately, and surprisingly, among the 186 effective questionnaire answers I collected, there were 94 males (51 percent) and 92 females (49 percent).



**Figure 2.2: Age of participants**

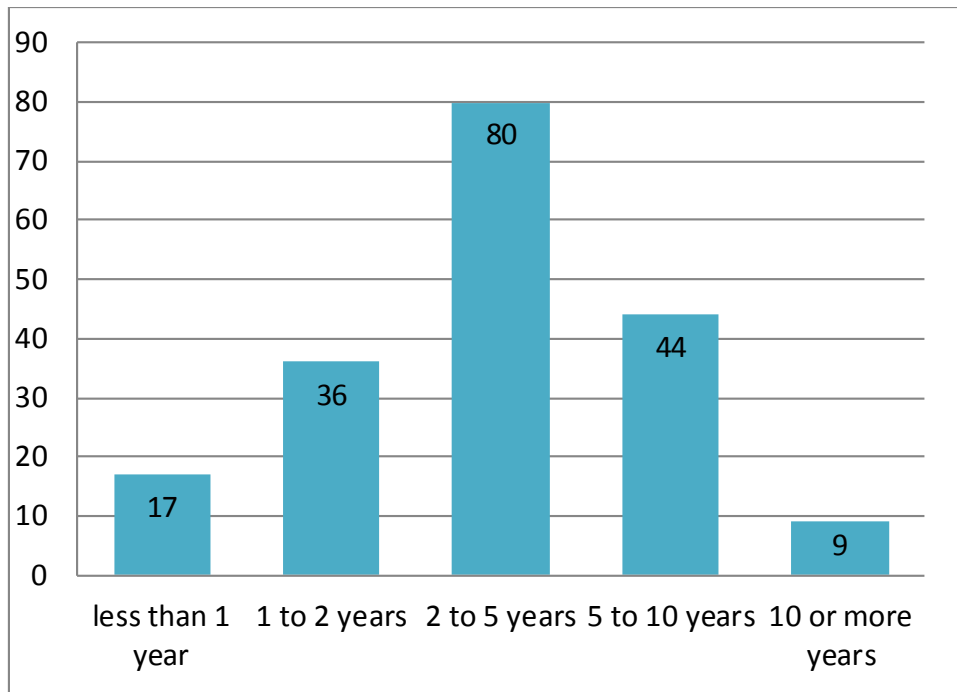
As this study mainly focused on the social media changes of young Chinese adults before and after moving to Australia, Figure 2.2 provides the age distributions of the participants in the sample. The modal age is 24.

While conducting the fieldwork I was living in Melbourne,<sup>7</sup> thus the majority of the participants I recruited in the study were located in Melbourne. Only 18 participants who filled out questionnaires online live in other cities, with 2 participants from Sydney, 4 from Canberra, 5 from Wollongong and 7 from Adelaide. Among these 18 participants, I interviewed 12 of them by telephone or online by video. When I went to Canberra to attend a participant's graduation ceremony, I also conducted a focus group discussion face to face with the four participants located in that city.

---

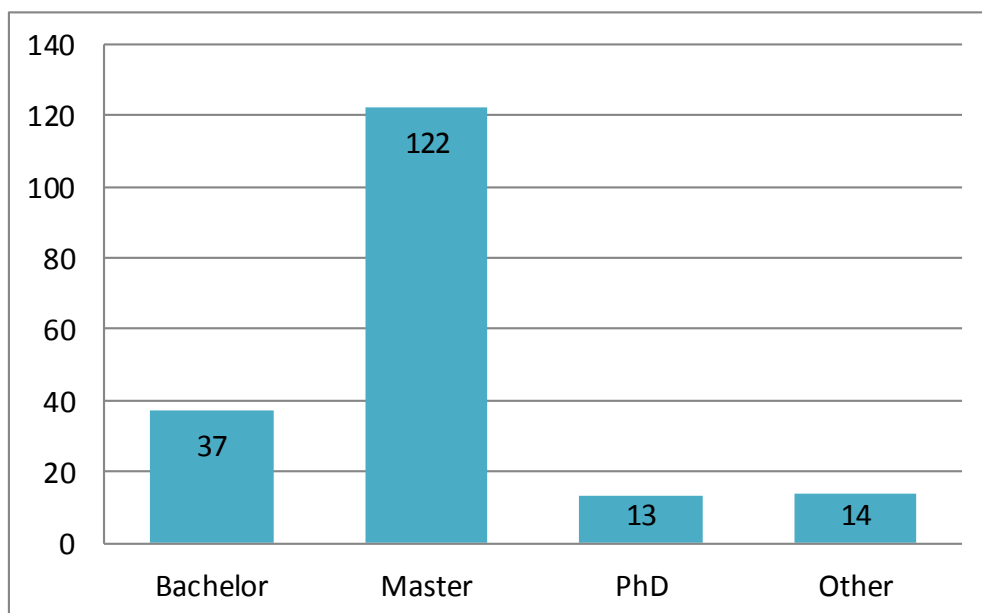
<sup>7</sup> The survey respondents and interviewees overlapped. Not all of the survey respondents attended the interviews. Also not all of the interviewees filled in the questionnaires. Therefore I prefer to name them as participants.





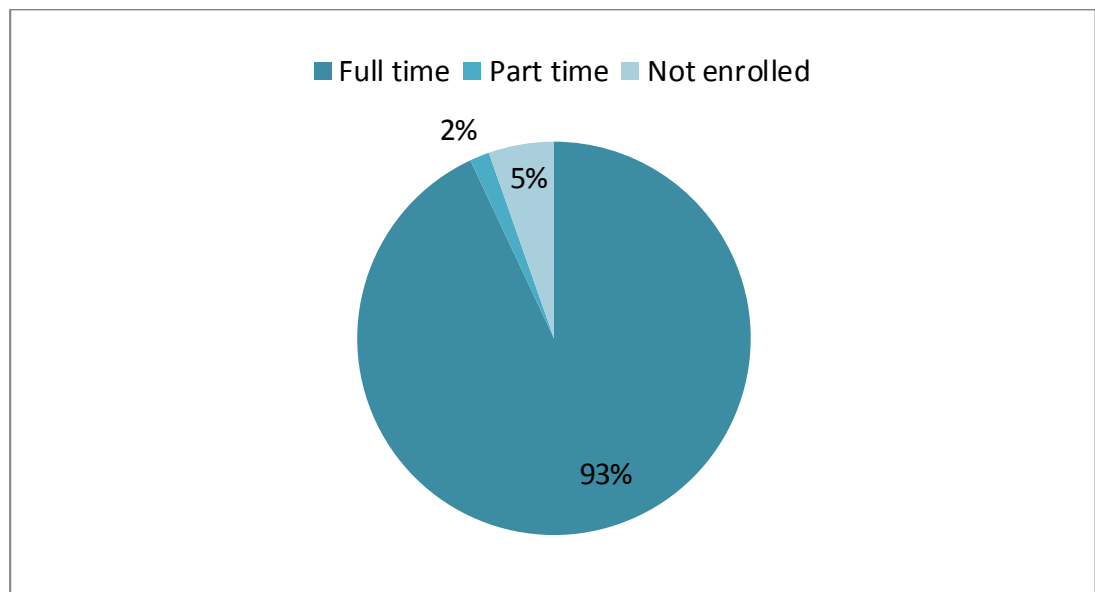
**Figure 2.3: Number of years participants spent in Australia**

Figure 2.3 illustrates the number of years my participants have spent in Australia. The largest group of young adults who participated in this study have spent more than 2 years but fewer than 5 years in Australia when they filled out the questionnaire.

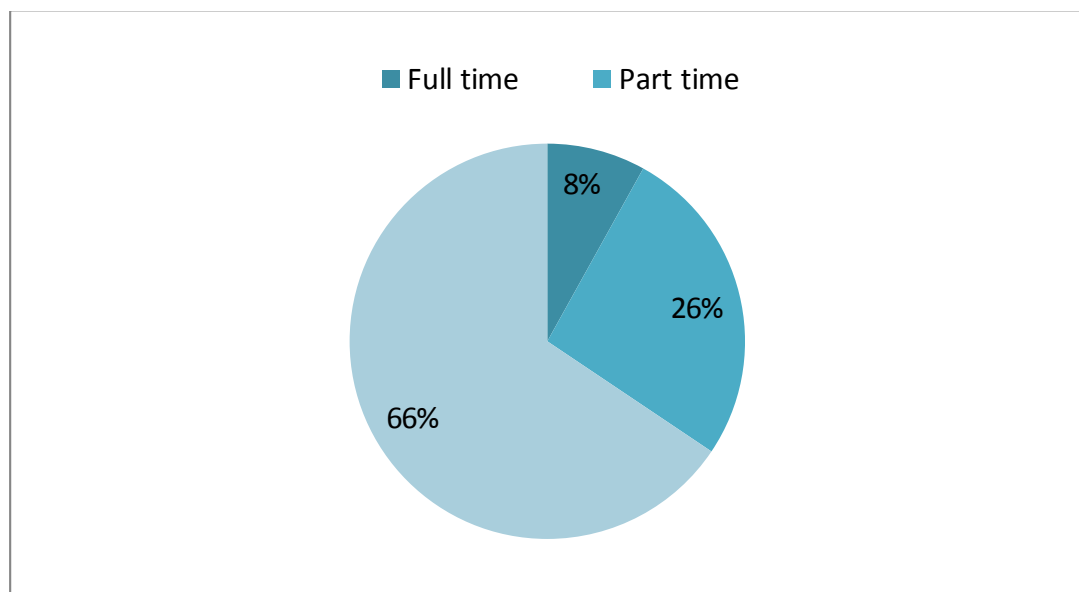


**Figure 2.4: Education level of participants**

Figure 2.4 displays the education levels of the participants. Most of the young adults who participated in my research were pursuing tertiary study in Australia, which corresponds with their enrolment status (see Figure 2.5) and work status (see Figure 2.6).



**Figure 2.5: Enrolment status of participants**



**Figure 2.6: Work status of participants**

(NB. 40 hours or more per week is 'Full-time' and less than 40 hours is 'Part-time')

Building on the demographic data collected from my questionnaire respondents, I carried out 44 in-depth interviews, 2 focus groups and spent nine months in participant observations both online and offline. In the following section I lead you through my ethnographic fieldwork.

### **Ethnographic approach**

#### *Interviews*

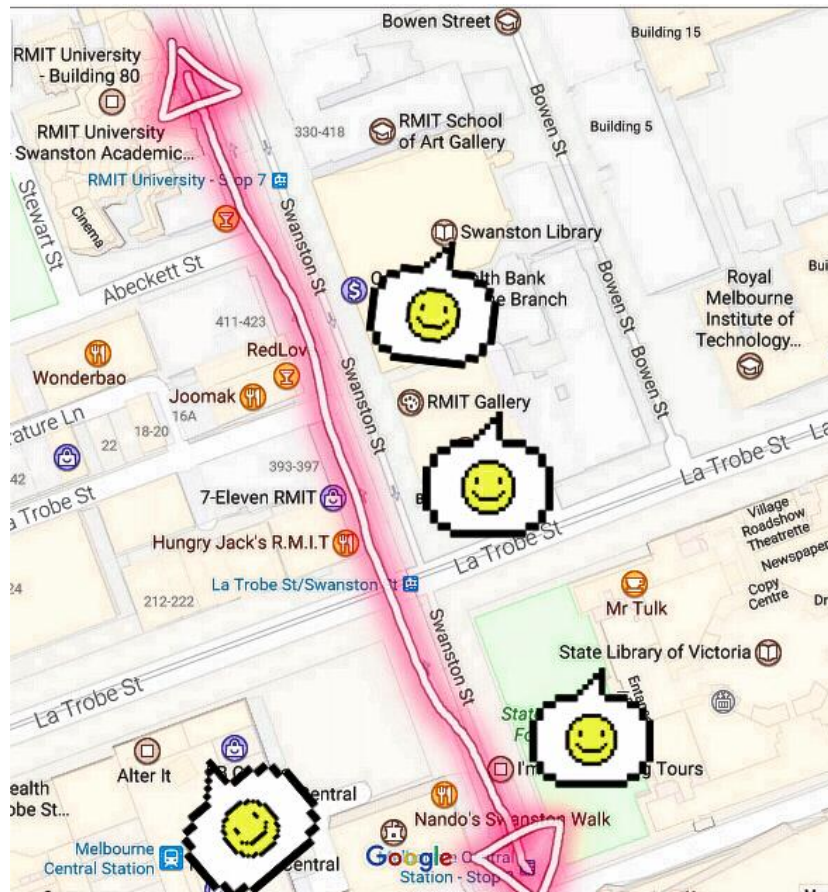
The total number of my main interview questions was 20 (shown in Appendix 1 for the English version, and Appendix 2 for the Chinese version). It was formed by four sets of questions which were: ice-breaking questions, social media experience questions, questions regarding life changes after coming to Australia, and questions relating to reflections on life changes and personal social media practices (Gillham 2005). I adhered to my proposed questions and in the meantime, I made sure my questions were also flexible enough to respond to the conversation and interests of the interviewees (Spradley 1979). Before each interview, I studied carefully the questionnaire filled out by each interviewee as well as his or her online social media activity. To reveal a deeper insight into the impact of life changes on the social media practices of my participants, in addition to the main list of 20 interview questions, I was prepared to ask another 5 to 10 'customized' interview questions based on the responses of my interviewees to the questionnaire. Furthermore, to keep the conversations open-ended, with the aim of extracting more detailed information, I utilized probes as sub-questions as needed (DiCicco, Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Johnson 2002).

To 'break the ice' at the beginning of each interview, I started the conversations with questions such as: 'Do you like Australian food?' 'Can you understand Aussie English?' 'How did you come here? Was it by train or tram, or do you live close by?' I would also start by commenting on today's weather in Melbourne and then follow the flow. I asked my participants to compare the weather in Melbourne with their hometown in China, which naturally led them to talk about their life changing experiences before and after coming to Australia (Jack & Anderson 1991; Johnson 2002.).

Minichiello et al. (1995) discuss numerous techniques for carrying out a successful in-depth interview. Making eye contact is one of them. However, while it is easy to remember what the textbook says, when do you put it into practice? I have been struggling with making eye contact with my participants at the same time as taking down every piece of important information. During the first few interviews I noticed that as the interviewees were sitting in front of me, whenever they saw me writing while they were talking, they would either slow down or totally stop and wait for me. They were curious about what part of their responses I was writing down. I wanted to improve the quality of the interviews, and to keep the flow of our conversations smooth, so I practised taking shorter notes and if possible I prepared the interview transcripts immediately after each interview.

As for the choice of locations to conduct the interviews, I normally provided some options and then let the participants decide where to meet. I always made sure that the place we both agreed on was safe, convenient and comfortable for the participants and importantly, not too noisy. Two institutions became my favourite interview sites as well as my participant observation sites. The first was the

University of Melbourne, where I handed out most of the questionnaires and conducted most of the interviews discussed above. Students feel safe and are familiar with being on campus, and also have more flexibility with their time. The other was the State Library of Victoria. I would meet with participants on the lawn in front of the State Library. The State Library of Victoria, as one of the most famous landmarks in Melbourne, is easy to find and is also close to both the Melbourne Central station and a tram stop. Since RMIT University is located across the road from the station, at La Trobe Street (shown in Figure 2.7), after the interviews I normally offered to show my participants around RMIT. Conducting interviews at the university and library, where the place itself is secure, public, and peaceful and has the authority of knowledge, helped make my participants more respectful of my research. They felt that they were contributing to the wellbeing of international young adults by truthfully sharing their own experiences and stories.



**Figure 2.7: A map of my main field sites<sup>8</sup>**

### *Focus groups*

My research participants share one common life changing experience, which is moving from China to Australia. Many of them are studying at the same university, therefore they have either direct or indirect personal connections. This makes them more co-operative when interviewed in a focus group. Migration was always an important topic in the interviews and many of the participants liked to raise it in the conversations. They were curious to learn whether or not I was planning to apply for a permanent resident (PR) visa. Some shared good news with me, for example, that they had recently obtained the PR visa. Others told me that they had been trying

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.google.com.au/maps/@-37.8091063,144.9637819,18.13z>, accessed on 3 April 2017

hard to obtain a visa for over five or six years. Being able to stay in Australia or not has had an influence on their choices of partners and careers. Those that were intending to stay would have to study for another degree or diploma to ensure that they collected the required points in accordance with Australian PR policy. The discussion about having a migration plan is important in relation to my participants' career aspirations and development. I will address these matters in Chapter 6.

Holding focus group interviews is advantageous because I can collect information which some of my participants may be hesitant to provide during one-on-one interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani 2014). Furthermore, within a group, people are more inclined to talk freely as they are discussing the subject with their peers and not just with me, the interviewer. However it is also important for me to keep in mind that as the interviewer as well as the group leader, I need to control the situation and encourage all of the participants to share their stories (Cameron 2005; Fontana & Frey 1994).

I held two focus groups with four participants each. I acted as the group moderator to lead the discussion and to make sure our conversations stayed on track. For example, one day I held a focus group with four students who were about to graduate the next day in Canberra. They went to the same university and were good friends. Because they were very excited about their graduation ceremony, during the group interview they could not stop discussing what they were planning to do after their graduation. I saw the situation and I totally understood their feelings. Although the interview was hard to control due to their excited discussions about graduation, I was not upset; instead I regarded it as a wonderful opportunity to gather some

interesting information about what young adults planned to do with their social media accounts before and after a big life event. I tried to lead the interview by asking questions such as 'Are there any plans for your social media pages considering tomorrow is a big day?' 'Are you planning on posting some photos of you wearing your gown?' 'Will there be any big social media announcement about your graduation?' 'What are you going to do after your graduation, start to work or apply for a PhD?' The group interview turned out to be very informative. At first, my participants were very surprised when I asked them if they had any plans for their graduation ceremony on the social media, and then they had a lively discussion about their plans. During the discussion, I noted down their 'social media plans'. The next day, after their graduation ceremony, I compared their 'social media plans' with their actual social media practices. It is interesting to learn how young people are celebrating their life events such as graduation and synchronizing their big events with their digital platforms. They posted many photos of themselves wearing a gown and a trencher cap and standing with their friends and families in their favourite spots on campus. As one of my participants said, 'I never liked this campus as much as I do now'. We also had many discussions on their career aspirations and possible future plans. I explore these matters further in Chapter 6.

### *Participant observations*

As I built up rapport with my participants, I commenced the offline participant observation. I asked my participants to decide where and when they would be happy to be observed and shadowed: at a library, at workplaces, or using public transport (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010; McDonald 2005). When permitted by my participants, I



quietly observed and shadowed their daily routines. This included observing what they were doing when they started to log onto Sina Weibo, when they would have a coffee break while scanning through their WeChat Moments, and how, with the purpose of posting many beautiful photos on their Facebook Timelines, they would plan for a one-day trip on the weekend. I shadowed them when they went shopping and even when they took a tram, train or bus. Given that my presence could affect my participants' behaviour, I shadowed them many times until they did not get nervous by my following them. During my observations, I sometimes quickly jotted down a few points on my notebook leaving gaps to fill in later; other times I texted my field notes on my mobile, or voice recorded it on my way back from my observations (Sanjek & Tratner 2015).

Along with the regular observations I set up with my participants, I also 'went with the flow'. I walked along Swanston Street and followed groups of Chinese young adults, no matter where they took me. I visited RMIT's international student information centre, the library, the career centre, student service, the banks on campus, Melbourne Central station, local supermarkets (Coles, Woolworths and Aldi), cinemas and shopping centres (shown in Figure 2.9). Through this process, I focused on the daily lives of these young international adults and achieved a better understanding of how my participants live in Australia.

Given the general social media practices and habits of Chinese young adults as reflected in their questionnaire responses, I identified three popular social media platforms as the online observation field sites for my research (Herold & Marolt 2011; CNNIC, 2014; see previous chapter). These consist of: Sina Weibo, WeChat and

Facebook. The total period that participants were observed online and offline was nine months from March to November 2014. For WeChat, I observed 31 participants' accounts, while on Facebook this number was 17. Sina Weibo enable users to set up different groups for their following accounts. You can name your groups and if you put some of your following accounts into a group labelled as Special Focus (特别关注 *Te Bie Guan Zhu*), a special following group set up by Sina Weibo, you will be able to get all of these accounts updates whenever you log on and their updates will be prioritized to display on your homepage and the Sina Weibo app would send you a pop-up notice or an alert to your mobile.

In order to observe 21 participants' updates on Sina Weibo, I categorized them into a Special Focus group to make sure that I wouldn't miss their updates and also wouldn't be distracted by my personal following accounts' posts when I conducted online observations during the fieldwork.

As argued by Postill and Pink (2012), ethnographers should understand the making of social media ethnography through concepts of routine, movement, and sociality in relation to the Internet as an ethnographic site. Since the aim of this research is to conduct research on the impact of life changes on the social media practices of young adults, I needed to have a well-rounded understanding of their social media behaviour both online and offline. Consequently, the parallel dimension of online observation is as fundamental as offline participant observation (Boellstorff et al. 2012; Hine 2008). As well as observing my participants, I also analysed all the information that I had collected. This was a combination of both online and offline observation, which meant I tried to connect their posts with their individual

personalities and their offline practices. According to Boellstorff et al., 'a virtue of participant observation and other ethnographic methods is that they allow us to treat data as culturally situated: the value of the data is linked to the contexts of its collection' (2012, p. 160). The combination of online and offline observations can provide more detailed and precise information about participants' social media practices before and after life changes. I kept detailed descriptive and reflective field notes in order to build a record of what the participants did with their social media accounts. I included what I had observed and reflected about from their online activity.

It was difficult to identify all the participants' updates, as sometimes people would delete their posts soon after they had posted them or leave only some days online before being removed. I discussed this phenomenon with my participants in the interviews because of my personal experiences of deleting my own posts and finding out that my commented posts on my friends' pages disappeared when I went back to look for their reply to my comments.

Participant Zhang told me that he posted twenty times the first week he arrived in Melbourne, but later he deleted most of these posts. The reason was that 'I didn't want to feel like a monkey in a zoo... letting people look at me and judging my life from my WeChat Moments'. Another participant, Zhou, deleted all her posts about her stay in England on both Weibo and WeChat, since she had a break-up and a tough time since that time. She told me that she wanted her Melbourne life to be a new start for her. But she said that she regretted having deleted all her British life posts when we discussed this during the interview.

Doing online observation requires patience for feeling and observing the participants, who are remotely co-present (Ito & Okabe 2005). In other words, I was spending time with them by logging onto my social media accounts, but I was physically invisible. In the meantime, I observed my own social media practices regularly as well and I kept both descriptive and reflective field notes. I was participating as an insider in my research by observing, reflecting and recording online behaviour.

The process of observing my participants' online behaviour as both a neutral outsider as well as an insider helped me to collate many case studies of people's social media practices. As I read my participants' posts I felt as if I was talking to them. If the posts were funny I could see my participants laughing. By the same token, if the posts were sad stories, I could see them crying. As I read the words that they had written down, I felt I was having a conversation with them again. As an international student myself, I could understand their loneliness, their ups and downs: the excitement of living in a new environment, the loneliness and homesickness during the local holidays; the expectations from parents and the motivations that drive us when living abroad. I used my own social media practices and overseas living experiences as possible norms and as a reference for possible discussion topics for my interviews. For instance, I have deleted my posts on Weibo and WeChat after posting them for a few days, I thought this may occur to others as well, so I brought this question in the interviews and also paid attention to see whether they have deleted any posts I have already seen online. In addition, the reflection on my own practices and experiences provided me with a better understanding on my participants' practices. Auto-ethnography was not my focus

but I did draw on it in so far. I was able to study my participants' practices not as a total outsider but an insider with an object view. When observing an international student studying and working overseas, a researcher may see the student as an individual, but what the researcher may not see is that behind this individual there is support from the parents. In a Chinese cultural context, every young adult living overseas is like a kite flying high into the sky with a string held by their parents.

By conducting online observations, I was able to study my participants' posts, and later on in the interviews we were able to discuss the meanings of those posts. We talked about both the content they posted online, and the topics they had not posted online. I explored how my participants dealt with their relationships with their friends, parents, partners and potential employers. I connected the results of my observations with interview questions to collect more precise and objective material (Creswell 2003). As Skinner (2013, p. 218) says '[T]he prominent feature of my ethnographic interview was that it took place within the context of long-term participant observation...' Whenever I reviewed posts or updates from my participants I triangulated their posts with their interviews and questionnaire responses within the context of my observations. The combination of online and offline observations provides more detailed and reliable information about participants' social media practices before-and-after life changes, since people easily forget or neglect changes in their daily routines or living habits as they move to a new place. I observed them not only posting, but also examined what they were doing while posting their status, and after they posted, how their posts were reposted or commented on by other followers. I was physically co-present with them

both online and offline. During the period of online observation, I actively interacted with my participants online as well. For instance, I posted something on purpose to check how much attention I could get from my participants, or I frequently reposted or commented under my participants' posts.

### **Stage three: writing up the research**

By doing interviews researchers are able to collect useful information which cannot be easily observed through participant observations. During my ethnographic fieldwork, interviews allowed me to double check my assumptions about what I had observed about my participants' social media practices online. However, the pitfalls of interviews are that they only provide information that has been filtered through the interviewer's point of view. Interviewers can easily ignore the fact that they may have influenced interviewees to answer a question in the way they want. To address this issue, firstly, I managed to frame interview questions using neutral language and to find different ways of asking the same question to cross-check my participants' responses; secondly, I got to know my participants very well over the nine months of fieldwork. As a result, the analysis from the interviews was a natural extension of my observations and participation in the online spaces. Lastly, I actively sought the details and complexities in interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Skinner 2013).

All the 44 interviews and the 2 focus groups were conducted in Mandarin. The interviews were between forty-five minutes and three hours. I spent two hours on average after each interview filling in the gaps that I had left in my field notes, and approximately another four to six hours transcribing the interview recordings (Alvesson 2010; Anderson & Jack 1991). I listened to the recordings many times to

make sure that I was not leaving out any important information, and then I translated the Chinese transcripts into English. For the data collected from the 186 questionnaires, I made use of EViews and Excel software to sort and categorize the data.

According to previous ethnographers, some data analysis can be analysed before the whole fieldwork is complete (Boellstorff et al. 2012; LeCompte & Schensul 1999), therefore I started coding interviews before I finished my fieldwork. I coded each interview two or three times. I selected the most frequently mentioned keywords and then categorized them with labels. I put different themes and categories onto different colours of post-it notes, and wrote post-it notes, which were stuck onto the floor. I moved these post-it notes to find connections between them, and I also drew a mind map to help make the picture clearer (Berger 2013, 2015). I have included a few examples of my analysis process in the following figures. Most of my analysis manuscripts are written in Chinese (my native language), but I kept some keywords for in English abbreviations as I took the note, i.e. LC for life changes, SMP for social media practices, YA for young adults. I always use my participants' real names when taking notes and analysing the data, because I find it easier to recognize the individual when looking at their real names and to reflect on the scenes of their interviews and the observations I have conducted with them. To keep my participants anonymous, I used mosaic to cover half of their names in the following example pictures of my data analysis.



Figure 2.8: Examples of my mind maps

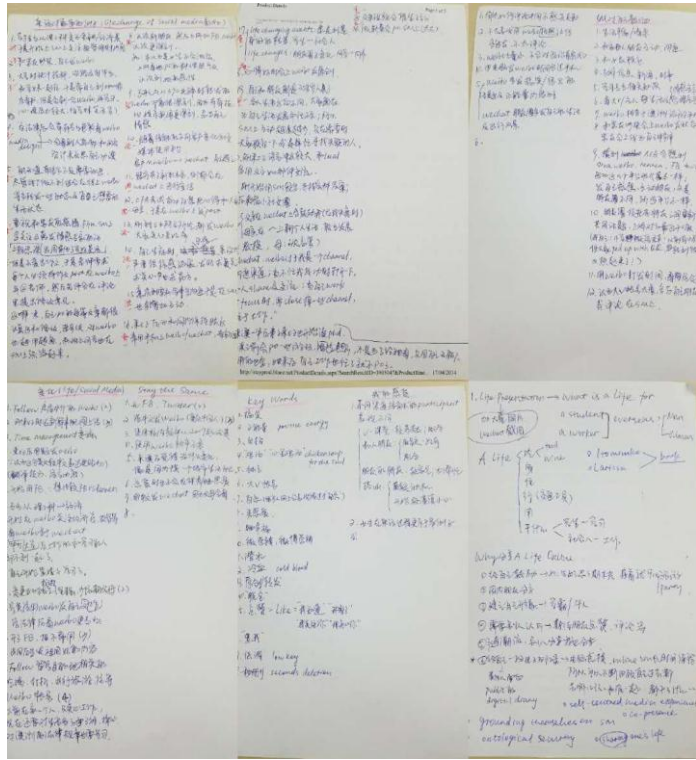
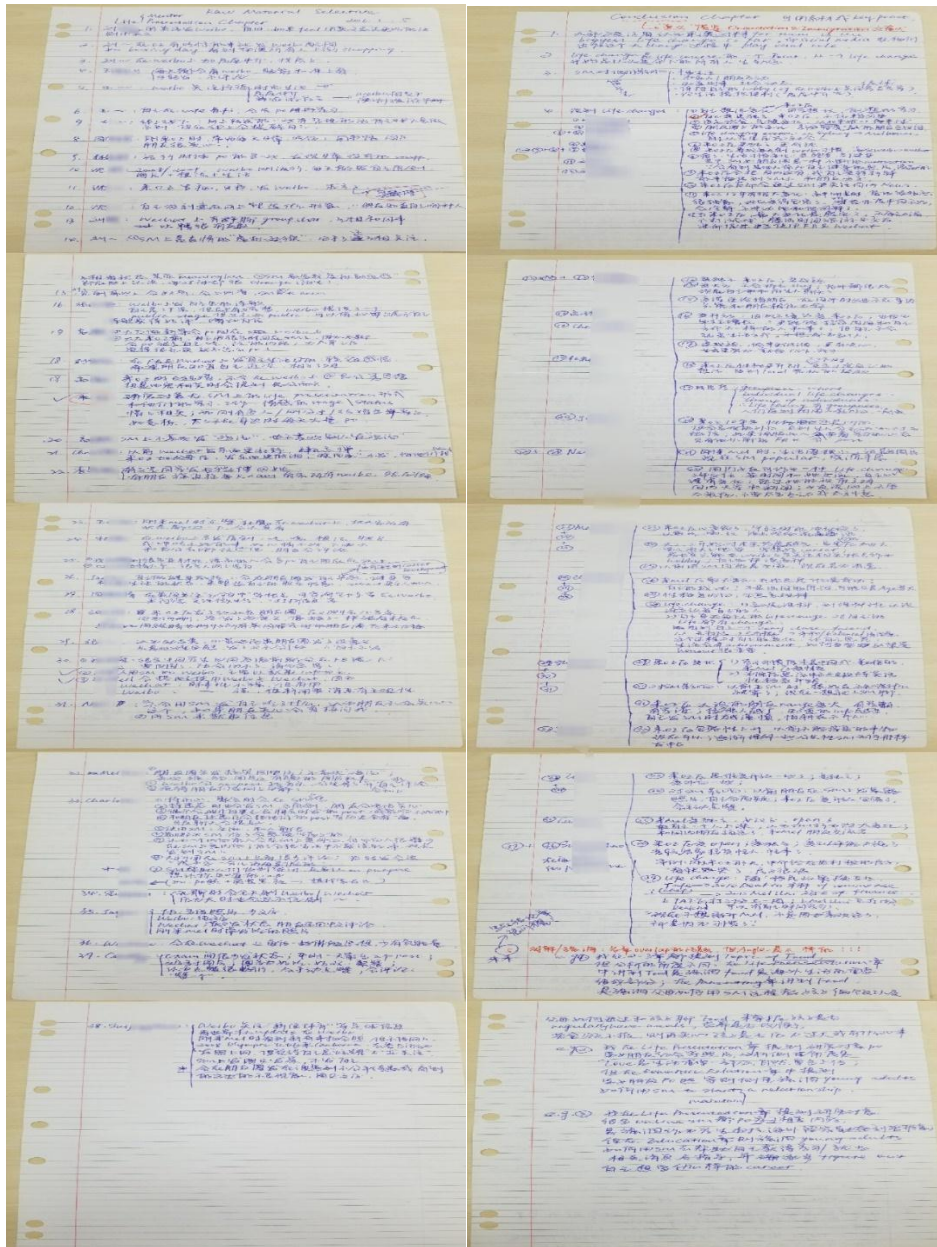


Figure 2.9: Examples of my categorizations for different themes and topics





**Figure 2.10: Examples of raw material selections for different topics and chapters**

On the basis of the coding, I searched for the keywords on my participants' social media pages and then took screenshots of the posts of which mentioned or were related to these keywords. Then I categorized these keywords into different themes. Since my research focuses on the changes in the social media practices of my participants before and after they experienced a life change, when I observed their social media pages, I not only observed their current posts, but also went to check

their posts before they came to Australia. The analysis of changes in each participant's social media practices is combined with the analysis of my online observation materials, their interview transcripts, and the answers in their questionnaires. I triangulated and cross-referenced these information sets (Postill 2006). After organizing and categorizing my ethnographic fieldwork materials, four main themes of my participants' social media practices emerged (friendship, romance, family, work). These illustrate how the participants are using social media to navigate life changes associated with living overseas as well as dealing with interpersonal relationships in a new context. I frequently referred back to the interview transcripts and field notes while choosing quotes and writing individual chapters.

### **Perception of life changes**

During my fieldwork, as a conversation opener, I always ask my participants 'if I say "life changes" what comes up in your mind? Looking back at the recent five years, what do you think is your biggest or most impressive life change?' Up to 90 percent of them would say coming to Australia is the biggest life change they have ever had so far. I followed up by asking 'has coming to Australia changed you in any way?' In brief, most told me that they had become more independent, open-minded, mature and tolerant. Below is a typical response that illustrates the kinds of life changes the participants spoke about in response to my question:

Well, after coming to Australia, I became more independent. I started doing my own laundry, I cooked for myself, and I even got a tutor job at the uni...

My mum never imagined that I would be able to do a part-time job while

studying full-time. She even worried that I might not be able to live here by myself. My dad thought that my mum should come to Australia to look after me... now, I can show them that I can live on my own. My parents are so proud of me. (Dali)

Dali is one of the many participants who moved overseas who regards his biggest life change as becoming more independent because of the move. Participants manage to show their parents that they are able to look after themselves and that they can live by themselves as adults. In Chapter 5 'Friending your parents', I provide a more detailed discussion of my participants' relationships with their parents.

A large group of participants told me that they feel they have become more open-minded after coming to Australia, since they got to know more people and have experienced more things that challenge their traditional values. Huiyun is an example of that group:

Huiyun: 'For me, I think I have become more open-minded and tolerant. Behaviours that I couldn't stand before, I have become OK with them now. I mean, I won't behave like those people, but I somehow understand them and I realize that each of us has our own mind and we have a right to make our own decisions.'

Xinru: 'Can you give me some examples of the behaviour you mean?'

Huiyun: 'Tattoos, piercings on the nose, tongue, or eyebrows...'

The reasons for studying abroad can be quite diverse. Another participant, Ivy, told me she was a 'hidden child', i.e. the second child in her family, which broke the rule

of China's 1990s one-child policy. She lived her childhood staying as 'invisible' as possible. She spent most of the time playing at home rather than going to the parks and gardens in the neighbourhood with her elder sister. Her parents tried to protect her from unnecessary gossip and sent her overseas to study in Australia early in high school:

Well, coming to Australia was a life changing event, but I don't think migration from China to Australia itself has changed me that much. I believe it was the people I met and the experiences I had after coming to Australia that really changed me... or affected me. To be honest, while I may have changed a bit, a very close friend who also came to Australia from China, she has changed a LOT! Seeing her gradually change after coming to Australia was a big life change for me. I witnessed the whole process of her changing from a very shy and humble girl to a successful and proud young lady. BUT - here comes the 'but' - she shouldn't overdo it. She has become too proud... even arrogant. As her friend, I feel sorry for her. BUT - here comes another 'but' - since she is a very smart person, she finally noticed the problem herself. She has realized that although she is proud of herself she should always stay humble. (Ivy, a Master's student)

Ivy has a unique view of life changes. Instead of going through all the ups and downs herself, she takes the experience of observing her best friend's life changes as her biggest life change or 'life lesson (一个生活中的教训)', as she names it.

Unlike Ivy, Zhixiang's perception of a life change is more concrete. He regards his experiences of doing a *Daigou* (代购) business as a life changing event. *Daigou* (代购)

is roughly translated as 'to shop on behalf of others' (to be like a purchasing agent), which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Zhixiang is a very shy person; he is not good at talking with strangers. However, thanks to his *Daigou* business, he pushes himself to talk to people he does not know but who may become his potential customers, and he proactively practises communicating with staff at shops and post offices. I will talk about Zhixiang's case in more detail later in the thesis.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have introduced my ethnographic fieldwork step by step through planning, conducting data collection and analysis, and writing up. I have reviewed how social media ethnography guided my fieldwork and I have also reflected on my research methods of interviews, focus groups, participant observations and questionnaires.

In the following chapters, I investigate the changes in my participants' social media practices, particularly in terms of the content they have shared, the people they have interacted with and how all these changes have worked together to help my participants cope with the four main types of interpersonal relationships: friendships, romantic relationships, parental relationships, and work-related relationships. In the next chapter, I start with an investigation of how young adults share their lives overseas with friends on social media.

## Chapter 3: Sharing your life with friends

### Introduction

Chinese traditional culture is broad and profound and continues to influence everyday communication including the use of social media. Yum (1988, 2007) argued that Chinese patterns of Chinese communication are influenced by Confucianism which in turn is underpinned by two of the most important principles of humanism (*jen*) and propriety or etiquette (*li*). Yum observed that “there is a need to study Eastern perspectives on communication” (1988, p374). Social relationships continue to underpin communication in China. Social relationships may be thought of as a series of concentric circles so that interpersonal communication spreads outward through the circle of kinship and social acquaintance, the innermost layer is the circle of immediate family, and outward in turn is the circle of relatives, close friends, and acquaintances, work colleagues and so on. Social media has shifted this pattern, however the Confucian principle humanism still deeply influences social media communication. Chinese young adults’ start their social media journey with their peers on QQ, Renren and then move further on to Weibo and WeChat. The first group of people who joined in their Friends list are their peers, i.e. classmates, peer friends and then comes their parents, family members, and colleagues, clients and bosses.

Social etiquette culture is a very important part of it, and it has a profound impact on the people's human relations. Yum (1988) points out that Confucian ethics and morality provide the foundation for etiquette in East Asia. Social etiquette in traditional culture originated in traditional China, which has a huge function of

maintaining politics, society and family. It has strong moral and ethical characteristics. Chinese traditional social etiquette includes the etiquette of the monarch and minister, the etiquette of the elder and the younger, the etiquette of the peers and the etiquette of men and women. These social etiquettes at different levels have very strict social rules and customs. The primary doctrine of Confucianism is '*jen*', which is usually understood as the tender feeling in people's communication, which emphasizes '*li*', i.e. '*courtesy is reciprocal*'. As a philosophy of humanities and social relations, Confucianism plays an important role in influencing interpersonal relations and communication modes (Yum 2007, Hu et al. 2006). I now turn to mainstream USA social media and communication scholar, Sherry Turkle whose work examines how social media is influencing interpersonal communication to provide an additional frame for unpacking the data from my digital ethnography with regard how my participants used social media to communicate with their friendship circles.

Sherry Turkle, social media scholar, stated '*I share therefore I am*' in her Ted Talk.<sup>9</sup> It is this phrase that motivates the title of this chapter, because her catch phrase sums up the reasons why social media are so important to the participants in my ethnography. For young adults living overseas, posting their daily life online is the most convenient way to tell the friends and family that they left behind what they are doing in the host country and how they are getting along with the new living environment. When people want to share something, for example some progress that they achieved in their study or work, they do not know to whom they can send a

---

<sup>9</sup> Ted talk: Connected, but alone? by Sherry Turkle.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry\\_turkle\\_alone\\_together](https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together)

message. They want others to learn about their achievements, but sending a message or calling someone seems harder than sharing 'the good news' on their WeChat Moments or Facebook Timeline.

Turkle (2012) has argued that people are turning conversations into connections. When they want to talk to someone, they do not know who is available to talk to them and how they can start a conversation. By contrast, making a post or updating a status on social media is much easier to do. My participants told me that when they want to share a piece of good news, they would first post something on their Moments and would wait to see who comments on it or who likes it. If someone responds they become aware of who is online, which means they may be available to chat with them. 'Modern Loneliness' makes people present more about themselves online, this is an expression used to describe the awkward phenomenon that nowadays, with hundreds of contacts in our mobiles, we hesitate to contact a friend in person to talk to and to share things about our lives. We may look 'rich' with the number of friends we have online, but we are actually very 'poor' as regards the number of real friends with whom we can share our good news and bad news in a phone call. We have more friends online, and we stay 'alone together' (Turkle 2012). However, social media help international students and workers to stay connected with their friends and families when they are living overseas.

Social media shorten geographical distance and enable people to communicate and present themselves online. Presenting oneself online has become an important consideration for the international students and workers in my ethnography.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach is frequently applied to research of social



media as a useful tool for understanding the online presentation of self (Papacharissi 2002; Schau & Gilly 2003; Marwick 2005; Boyd 2007; Robinson 2007; Boyd Boyd & Ellison 2010; Marwick 2011a). Hogan (2010) and Zhao et al. (2013) have extended Goffman's 'presentation of self' (1959) into the concepts of social media 'exhibitions' and 'archives'. Greengard states that 'today there is an increasing desire to use online social media as a way for archiving life experiences and reflection on identities' (2012, p. 15). Building on these studies, I argue that through the practice of presenting one's daily life online, young adults help themselves to get through a series of life changes brought about by living overseas, while at the same time, they manage to mediate their friendships through online communication.

People's perceptions and understandings of life changes are different. Life changes build on each individual's own life experiences. In contrast to the deep discussions about people's thoughts on 'life changes', the way young adults present their life changes online is much easier to observe and to understand, which is why I use the term 'mirroring life changes' for the following section where I provide a set of snapshots of what my participants presented of their new life on social media after coming to Australia. I propose that life changes are observable and mirrored in the way my participants use social media. The changes are exhibited in their social media use where they create online archives of their changing identities (Greengard 2012) and their experiences as international students. In the next section, I examine these changes in greater detail. The chapter then follows up on how, and in what format, their life is presented and exhibited online. Finally, the chapter examines why young

adults living overseas are presenting themselves and sharing their daily lives with their friends online.

### **Mirroring life changes**

When people present their daily life online, they present what they wear, what they eat, where they live and how they travel. This can be described by a Chinese idiom, *Yishizhuxing* (衣食住行, clothing, food, shelter and transport). There is a clear performative dimension operating in someone's daily posts of *Yishizhuxing* because you make decisions about which aspects of your daily life to reveal and what impression you wish to create. Zhao et al. (2013, p. 4) observe that:

Consistent with Goffman [7] the performance region is where users make decisions about creating and managing content for current self-presentation needs. The content is usually targeted to or associated with contexts and audiences relevant to the moment.

The relationship between content of posts and the context as identified by Zhao et al. (2013) was something I needed to consider carefully in my study of the effect of life changes on the social media use of Chinese international students in Australia. In my ethnography, what emerged through my online observations is that young adults living overseas generally post and repost within four themes:

- 1) lifestyle (i.e. food, transportation, parties, etc.)
- 2) emotional content (i.e. homesickness, culture shock, etc.)
- 3) new encounters (i.e. sightseeing)

- 4) interpersonal relationships (i.e. romantic relationships, parental relationships and work-related relationships)

These four themes generally refer to the life changes they have gone through after moving overseas. As Zhao et al. (2013, p. 5) argue, 'it was important to keep data on their profile relevant, both in the sense of content and temporal relevance'.

Therefore, participants living overseas post content that can mirror their new life changes as well as their new understandings about personal relationships and life experiences. The following analysis discusses the top three themes: 1) lifestyle, 2) emotional content and 3) new encounters; the fourth theme of interpersonal relationships will be discussed in the following chapters.

#### 1) Lifestyle

Many participants started cooking after they came to Australia. They frequently present their own cooking online with the aim of showing how much they enjoy it. They have discovered that social media can be a platform where they can demonstrate their cooking skills and provides encouragement to keep learning new recipes so they are able to better look after themselves as international students residing in a foreign country. Most of them did not cook when they were in China, as they lived with their parents, and their parents would do the cooking. They were in the process of acquiring a new life skill in response to the changes to their lives once they became international students living in Australia. In this context, it becomes an advantage if a young adult is able to cook. The development of cooking skill in response to their lifestyle changes became a popular topic for social media postings.

Figure 3.1 below is a screen shot of what Liming, one of the participants in my ethnography posted on his Weibo homepage about his newly acquired cooking skills in response to his life changes as an international student. Liming came to work in Melbourne in 2012. He very seldom cooked when he was in China as his wife always cooked for the family. After his company sent him to work overseas, he started learning how to cook. Figure 3.1 is a photo of the dumplings he fried. He didn't make the dumplings by himself; instead, he bought them frozen. All the cooking he had to do was to boil and fry the dumplings. When I asked him why he posted this photo, he told me that after a day's work, he felt relaxed and satisfied eating the dumplings that he fried for himself. The post was like a reward, encouraging him to work hard and 'cook harder' (Ryan & Deci 2000). He tried to present himself as someone who could look after himself and was a fast learner of new skills.



**Figure 3.1: 'Fried dumplings for my dinner, they taste so nice...'**

Like Liming, most of the participants in my ethnography started to cook for themselves after coming to Australia. They occasionally cooked for their roommates as well, and they liked to share different recipes. Some of their roommates were

from other countries, therefore it was a good opportunity to try different cuisines as well as to have more topics to talk about, which is also a good chance to practice oral English. Cooking was a common theme and a great conversation starter. Some participants were staying with other Chinese international students or workers, and they held dinner parties on weekends and invited their colleagues and friends to try their hometown specialties. Again cooking food became a topic for conversations. Through these cooking experiences, my participants were able to stay within Chinese ethnic groups as well as to engage with other cultural groups to expand their understandings of people from different cultural backgrounds.

In my ethnography I found that cooking becomes a great way for an individual to make new friends and get more involved in a new community. The experiences of cooking with foreigners also facilitate cultural exchanges as well as language learning. Social media plays an important role in communication about cooking. It enables the communication to last much longer than the event itself - a happy and easily forgotten dinner party. Communication about cooking encourages the sharing of recipes and cooking methods and techniques in order to become a better cook. The young adults in my study use social media to keep a more consistent relationship with their cooking partners and even develop into more enriched relationship.

Another lifestyle theme for social media posts that emerged in my ethnography was transport. Access to appropriate transport is important for adjusting to a new living environment when living overseas (Bohon, Stamps & Atilas 2008). Ivy, the Master's student we met earlier, said that when she took a train home, she observed what local people wore to obtain a sense of Melbourne's taste in fashion. Another

participant, Yunbang, came to Australia ten years ago and was working in Melbourne when he participated in the research. He found it enjoyable taking public transport to work. He posted photos of trains and trams in Melbourne as well as humorous anecdotes of his train trips. He wanted the people he interacted with to see what he saw. Figure 3.2 below is an example posted on his WeChat Moments.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 3.2: ‘On my way home today there was a guy standing next to me talking quite loudly on his phone, I turned to look at him, “eh... I have an antidote, do you want some?”’**

Another participant in my ethnography, who also posted about transport was Cunli, a third year PhD student in Melbourne. Before his wife Mingzhu came to Melbourne, he posted quite frequently on his social media homepages. The way he explained it was that he had too much spare time and wanted to share his daily life with Mingzhu in China. One day, Cunli reposted a post from his friend on Weibo, shown as Figure 3.3 below. His friend was sitting on the Route 86 tram and heard a bang. He then made a joke about the tram saying that it may have been crashed into by another vehicle. Ironically, when he got off the tram he noticed that this had actually happened.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 3.3: ‘Rear-end, really!’**

From my observations, most of my participants spend their spare time hanging out with their Chinese friends. They get together on traditional Chinese festivals or

birthdays, or have dumpling parties and cook some Chinese dishes. On special occasions, such as Halloween, Easter and Christmas, they would celebrate with their local friends. They told me that posting about Western events and parties on their social media is a way of archiving their happy memories in Australia as well as showing their friends a different cultural experience. However, sometimes it causes misunderstanding. Although my participants are studying and working really hard in Australia, the relatives who have been left behind occasionally take these posts as evidence that they are partying all the time instead of working hard at university.

I observed that during the final examination period, students' social media accounts are full of photos of piles of books and papers, late night study at the library, praying for a pass, etc. Student participants told me that when they are tired of studying, they would post something online to encourage themselves while, at the same time, showing their parents and peers that they are studying:

When I'm tired or bored, I take a break and have a quick scan of my Moments. I know my friends are posting lots of stuff about how hard they are studying for the exams. I actually enjoy those posts, because seeing my friends working hard encourages me to keep studying hard as well. (Xiaming, a male Master's student in Melbourne)

Similarly, Hongmei points out that during the exam season, her Weibo and WeChat Moments have become her 'study-petrol-station'. This is translated directly from Chinese when she says of '学习加油站 (Xuexijiayouzhan)', meaning a place where she gathers inspiring pep-talk, just like a car get filled up at a petrol station:

I always tell myself, look, your friends are all preparing for exams, and everyone is working hard to attain their dreams. I should keep up with my work, I should stop complaining about how difficult it is, and I should bear in mind why I came to Australia. (Hongmei, a female Master's student in Melbourne)

Hongmei wants to work in Australia as a banker. She is a very hard-working student and has made a very detailed life plan for herself. Hongmei uses social media to collect the information that she needs, and to obtain emotional support and encouragement. She does not use social media for entertainment.

Many researchers have investigated online self-presentation (boyd 2007, 2008; Schau & Gilly 2003; Seidman 2013; Bareket-Bojmel et al. 2016). Most people want to receive positive feedback after presented themselves. My participants reported that to avoid the influence of the negative feedback they began to use group settings and inside jokes, coded messages, lyrics that indicate a background story, which has been studied as 'social steganography' (boyd & Marwick 2011; Oolo & Siibak 2013; boyd 2014), to make sure that their posts and presentations are somehow free from judgement. In addition, some are fed up with the rule of 'think twice before posting', they choose to shut down their Moments. I think they are creating a more relaxed and burden free 'out of sight, out of mind' online environment. They only keep WeChat for necessary one-to-one communication.

## 2) Emotional content

*'Posts about feeling homesick'*



Many international students experience loneliness because of relocating to an unfamiliar place, as well as being isolated from their own cultural and linguistic setting (Sawir et al. 2008). Sometimes my participants miss their families and hometowns, and from time to time they reveal their homesickness in posts on social media. To show their homesickness, they post photos of their hometowns, photos of the colleges they graduated from, and old photos of them with their families.

Qingkai, a PhD student in Melbourne, misses his hometown very much. He posts very often about his hometown's beautiful scenery and unique culture. Qingkai is from Yunnan Province, one of the most beautiful places in China, but not as famous and popular as Beijing, Shanghai and other well-developed places. Considering that the new Chinese friends he made in Melbourne may not be familiar with his hometown and they may have no idea how beautiful his hometown is he always seeks chances to make posts like this about his hometown, as a way to introduce to more people about his 'place of pride' for both the marvellous natural view and the unique cultural traditions.

Figure 3.4 below is an example of his posts on Weibo showing his homesickness. A friend of Qingkai posted that she feels very relaxed while sunbathing in her hometown. Qingkai reposted her post with a line commenting as 'missing the sunshine in my hometown'.

His followers forwarded his post and also left comments about their homesickness. Reading their comments, Qingkai realized that he is not the only one who is homesick.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 3.4: 'Missing the sunshine in my hometown...'**

Living overseas does not only bring feelings of homesickness, but also the joy of living in a new country for these young adults. This is exactly like what Xiaofang, a PhD student in Melbourne, posted on her WeChat Moments in Figure 3.5. The image on the left was saying 'I walked past my favourite song' with hashtag *#One of the one hundred things that I love about Melbourne#*. The other image on the right was presenting the beautiful and peaceful scenery that took her breath away. In Figure 3.6, Xiaofang posted how she encountered a thunderstorm without taking an umbrella with her. She complained a bit more in the comment to her friends, saying that Melbourne's weather is variable and unpredictable like a baby's face – one second it is sunny the next second it will pour with rain. Also by presenting how much she enjoys living in Melbourne, Xiaofang releases her homesickness and guides herself to focus on living in the present rather than missing the past. From Xiaofang's story, we can see a very clear picture of the dual presence in Australia but also in China. She is standing on the land of Australia and making posts of Australian scenery on Chinese social media in order to help herself focus on the present life in Australia instead of missing her hometown in China.

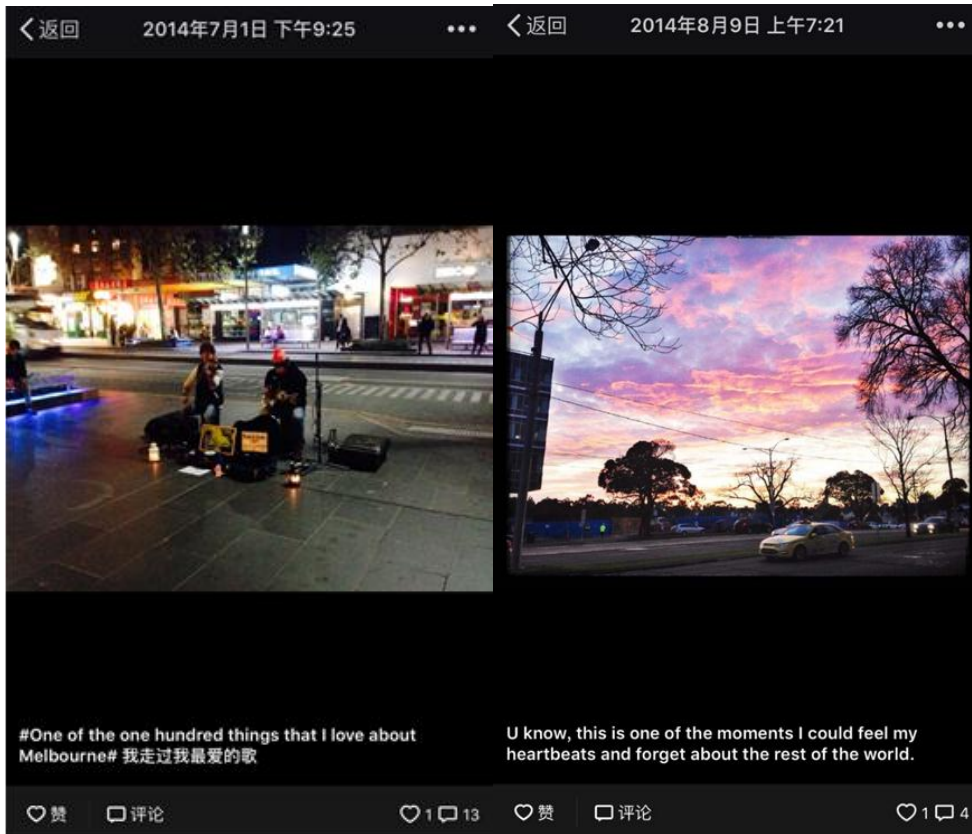


Figure 3.5: Posts of beautiful things that Xiaofang loves in Melbourne



Figure 3.6: 'Forgot umbrella again... I don't understand Melbourne'



**Figure 3.7: '80 days left before I go back to my motherland...'**

*'Posts about counting down the days'*

When Katy was close to finishing her undergraduate study in Melbourne, she found it hard to leave as she had been living in the city for four years. She used a mobile app, Days Matter, as shown in Figure 3.7, to count how many days she had left before she would go back to China. She took a screen shot of her Days Matter when there were 80 days left. Katy posted the image on her WeChat Moments with the following description:

Today I attended my last class as a student! Although I have been longing to go back to China, as the days here get fewer I have started feeling sadder. It is definitely not easy to leave a place where I have been living for four years.

Katy told me that she missed her home very much when she was studying in Melbourne. Katy was also quite sure that after she finished her degree and returned to China, she would miss Melbourne very much. Haiqing, a Master's student, shared the same feeling and thoughts. He summarised it as 'people miss the place where they suffered'. By saying he had 'suffered (受苦 *shou ku*)', he meant he had experienced a lot of challenges.

Some young adults post things on their social media without intending to create any specific impression on others. They just want to put their feelings and thoughts out there no matter how their audiences will perceive those thoughts. As the Swedish proverb says, 'Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half sorrow'. They embed their emotions and feelings of homesickness in their online posts to motivate and to empower themselves to embrace the life changes and challenges associated with moving overseas.

#### *'Posts about sympathy-seeking'*

Keywords such as, '孤独 (*Gudu*)' '寂寞 (*Jimo*)' '孤单 (*Gudan*)', meaning 'lonely, alone' in English, are typical of the '求安慰帖 (*Qiu Anwei Tie*)'— sympathy-seeking posts. Participants post their status updates with expressions meaning or including the above 'lonely' keywords as well as other keywords, for instance, '悲伤 (*Beishang*)' '难过 (*Nanguo*)', meaning 'so sad' 'unhappy' on their WeChat Moments, Weibo or Facebook, so as to gain sympathy from their friends and followers on the platform. They will also attach a picture or two to emphasise the 'sad' and 'lonely' atmosphere.

These types of posts are designed to elicit sympathetic responses from family and friends.

*'Posts about music'*

Yufeng, a PhD student in Melbourne, told me that after she broke up with her boyfriend she felt very sad. She did not want to tell people that she had broken up with her boyfriend and was heart-broken. She kept listening to sad love songs and could not stop sharing those songs with others on her WeChat Moments. She was hoping someone could also listen to the songs she was listening to and feel the same as what she was feeling, 'Listen what I listen to, and feel what I feel'. Figure 3.8 below is one of the posts about music that Yufeng made.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 3.8: 'The female singer's qi of middle-jiao is quite strong'**

A friend of mine texted me after I shared about five songs in three days. She asked me what was going on, why I was sharing all these sad love songs [...] I didn't want to tell her the truth at first, so I joked that I was just in the mood of listening to them. She stopped me and said, 'I guess you broke up... because I have done the same... you will get through it. Cheer up, listen to some bright and happy music, you will feel better.' (Yufeng, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

Sharing music on WeChat as a solution of dealing with broken-up reflects how life changes influenced on people's social media practices. Yufeng's case is only one story behind the 'Posts about music'. Other participants have varied reasons for

sharing music on their WeChat Moments. Below are the key points I sorted out from the interview transcripts.

1. *It is such a great song therefore I want more people to know about it.*
2. *The lyrics of the song really describe my feelings at the moment. I want to share my feelings but find it hard to describe in my own words therefore I choose to share the song instead.*
3. *Just to share something on my Moments to let my friends know that 'I am still there'!*
4. *I saw others share some songs, but those songs are too 'low' for my taste. I have a much 'higher' and better taste of music... so to share a song or two of my favourite is to show my friends my taste (of music).*
5. *Simply to draw attention from the person I had a crush on.*
6. *I believe music represents one's personality, likes and dislikes. 'Great minds think alike' therefore I'd love to share some music and wait to see who will be attracted to my taste of music and who will share the same mind with me.*
7. *It is easier for me to come back to my Moments to find all the music I like later on.*
8. *Next time when I go to a concert, I know who may want to go with me.*
9. *...well, Moments is like my digital musical diary, where I store my ups and downs through music... Perhaps one day in the future, when I want to review my feelings and stories in the past, I will be able to go through my Moments and listen to that music and to feel the 'Yesterday once more'.*

The function of sharing music on WeChat Moments brings unique features beyond posting textual and virtual content. It enables people to share their feelings and thoughts through sound and lyrics. However Moments is not the only way my respondents shared music. I noticed that my participants reported that they share their favourite songs with their partners and among their friends through private messages on WeChat. The meanings and feelings a song conveys are different from a text message or a photo. Young adults want to exchange their real-time feelings when listening to a specific song or music.

Some participants even exchanged their playlists with their best friends or lovers to show how close they are. They want their friends and lovers to listen to the same music as they do, enjoy the same style of music and experience the same emotions as they listen to the songs. This mirrors wider social practices amongst Chinese young adults. Also by sharing one's playlist, young adults are able to sing many songs together when they go to Karaoke shops in a group. Being able to sing a song together as a group is one way of showing two individuals' closeness.

#### *'Posts about feeling unwell'*

It is said that when living overseas you cannot afford to be sick. You must look after yourself. Even when sick, you must still cook and do everything for yourself. Young adults, who have been well taken care of by their parents in China, must look after themselves when they go overseas. Many participants said that they were worried about getting sick and did not want to go to hospitals. Part of the reason is that they find it difficult to explain their symptoms in English. They often have to look up medical terms beforehand, in order to communicate with the doctors and nurses.



They feel quite sorry for themselves if they are sick, therefore posting about their situation online is a way of telling their friends that they need care and attention. In the meantime, most of them do not want their parents to get too concerned, so normally they block their parents from seeing that 'Posts about feeling unwell'.

A few days after he arrived in Australia, Liming, who works in Melbourne, posted on Sina Weibo about having a toothache and asked what he could do to feel better. His friends back in China responded to his question with a lot of caring words. Boyd (2010) has also observed this social phenomenon of adjusting posts for intended audiences:

On social network sites, people's imagined – or at least intended – audience is the list of Friends that they have chosen to connect with on the site. This is where participants expect to be accessing their content and interacting with them. And these are the people to whom a participant is directing their expressions. (Boyd 2010, p. 44)

In other words, people post in order to interact with and impress people in one's friend's list. I found numerous instances of this in my ethnography including Liming's appeal for sympathy for a toothache when he first arrived in Australia. A further example of this kind of post identified by Boyd (2010) is Xiaofang. The cute injured kitten shown in Figure 3.9 below represents Xiaofang, who sprained her ankle and posted it on her WeChat Moments to tell her friends that she could not go outside today. The reason for choosing such a cute kitten as a form of self-presentation is to obtain lots of sympathy and likes. Xiaofang said,

I'd rather not post my poor injured angle there [...] too ugly [...] no one would want to look at a photo like that. You see the cute cat? Her cuteness is much more attractive than a person's injured angle. Besides, I don't want my friends comment to say how reckless I was. I need someone to comfort me not to educate me!

She did not want to show the photo of her injury as she thought that it was not beautiful to look at and she thought that the photo of her injury would not attract as much attention and expressions of sympathy as the cute kitten would.



**Figure 3.9: 'Ankle sprain Day 1~ going out having fun is not an option any more, can only stay home and reflect on myself~'**

### 3) New encounters

After coming to Australia, many participants face new life experiences. When coming to present these new life experiences, some participants found that a tension exists between showing their exciting life in Australia and having to avoid looking like they are 'showing off' or being boastful. These participants have mentioned a bit about the need to find a balance in their interviews, and that depending on the audiences of their posts, it is difficult to find this balance. Some audiences interpret everything positively while some don't. The 'negative' audiences interpret participants' posts of exciting moments in Australia as a way of showing off and sometimes even make 'jealous' or envious comments under the posts. To avoid such comments, some participants simply post the 'facts' about them trying new things and making new challenges without any commentary about their feelings. For example, they start going to a gym. They post a great deal on social media about themselves working out at the gym, such as photos of their muscles and photos of themselves lifting weights. These kinds of posts appeal to their friends back home, since most of the participants did not go to a gym when they were in China. Ivy, a Master's student in Melbourne, posted a photo of the screen of the running machine after she had run 5.16km (see Figure 3.10 below). For a similar reason, she posted 'Please monitor me!' By posting status like this, participants want their friends to urge them to keep doing the exercises.



**Figure 3.10: ‘Please monitor me!’**

Many participants try to self-present as an energetic person who keeps doing exercises and staying fit; they employ a self-enhancement strategy in their online presentation (Sedikides 1993; Paulhus et al. 2003; Seidman 2013). Building on previous studies, Bareket-Bojmel et al. (2016, p. 791) summarise that enhancement status updates are composed with one or more of the following attributes: ‘(a) presentation of the self in a positive manner (behaviours, attributes, attitudes, and feelings), (b) presentation of the self in a socially desirable manner, (c) self-promotion designed to impress an audience with one’s competence or talent’. This aligns with my observations of the participants in my study as well. There were a number of participants who use a reading app called MintReading, which encourages readers to share on their WeChat Moments as a way of signing in (打卡 *Da Ka*). This

attractive reading app encourages their readers to keep reading only 10 minutes each day and in 100 days readers will be able to finish four English books. Also, if a reader is able to keep signing in on WeChat Moments for 80 days, he or she will receive paper books (worth 200 RMB) delivered to their homes. Figure 3.11 below is an example of a sign-in photo of MintReading posted by a female participant. She has been reading on MintReading for 119 days, and she has read 153,000 words so far. Her daily sign-in posts have inspired many of her friends to join in MintReading. Checking through her Moments for the past four months, you can only see her MintReading sign-in posts. She didn't post anything else. 'It is amazing to see that I could stick to reading English books every day for four months. With this perseverance, I feel like nothing is impossible. I am capable to face any challenge'.



**Figure 3.11: 'Sign-in MintReading'**

Most new encounters are not unexpected, as it is well known that living overseas involves speaking a foreign language, meeting new people, eating new food, and

experiencing culture shock. However, by posting some specific new encounters that happen in these young adults' daily lives, positive images of these young adults working hard to improve themselves and facing challenges can be created, which in turn is a useful way of self-promotion and staying motivated as Bareket-Bojmel et al. also noted (2016).

Watching movies in a cinema is not new, but watching English-language movies without any subtitles is exciting and is a topic worth posting about for some Chinese young adults. They post photos of the tickets, selfies in the cinema, and group photos in front of movie posters. Many Hollywood films are released earlier in Australia than in China, so young adults who work and study here have the advantage of watching a new movie earlier than their friends in China. They post their thoughts and comments on the movies on their social media platforms and try to avoid a spoiler. If it were a great movie they would say something like 'strongly recommended', suggesting that their friends in China should watch the film.

In addition, participants share many photos and texts introducing some interesting Australian events, days, and activities. Some examples are Zombie Walk, Prosh Week (naked running week) at the University of Melbourne, and the No Pants Subway Ride, which is shown in Figure 3.12 below, as reposted by Qingkai.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 3.12: Reposts of the No Pants Subway Ride**



**Figure 3.13: ‘This is what we call harmonious co-existence between man and nature’**

Figure 3.13 above is an example of another post by Qingkai, which provides a picture of himself working in a room when a pigeon flew in and landed on the desk next to him. Most of my participants find it quite surprising that birds in Australia are so ‘involved’ in people’s daily lives. ‘You can see them everywhere! They can be found inside an underground train station, flying through a shopping centre and even standing on the table looking at your chips while you are eating at a food court. This time the bird becomes interested in the computer! Hahahaha’, said Qingkai. Again, the differences of living in another country are used as a topic for social media posts in order to attract attention.

Another interesting phenomenon I observed from my participants’ online activity is that some of them will post something like, ‘I made a big decision. I hope I won’t regret it in the future.’ Or, ‘Wish me good luck.’ The person appears to be asking for attention and encouragement, but when some of their friends ask, ‘What

happened?', and 'What's that big decision?' they simply ignore those questions and do not reply to them. I asked participants why they behaved like this and discovered three main reasons from their responses: first, they were just in the mood for posting, and they did it for self-encouragement, it did not matter what their friends commented about it; second, they were hoping their intended audiences would read their posts and get the message they wanted to convey, which is what boyd talks about and calls 'Social Steganography', i.e. 'using lyrics, in-jokes, and culturally specific references to encode messages that are functionally accessible but simultaneously meaningless' (2014, p. 66); third, when they posted it they did not think about any follow-up questions that their friends might ask, and they did not want to reveal the reason why they posted such a status. Therefore, ignoring their friends' comments was the simplest way of dealing with it. However, if their friends sent them a private message to ask what had happened, they would then tell them the truth. People post something on purpose to seek attention as a different kind of self-presentation. They look forward to someone among their friends paying more attention to them. In some cases, they wanted to attract a certain individual's attention or interest.

Participants posted photos of their food, their new outfits, or beautiful scenery they had taken with a mobile phone while they wandered around the city or went to parties with their friends. They were like tourists, always reminding themselves to take photos in order to document what they were doing. I found it intriguing to observe how my participants discussed with their friends what they should post when they went out together. A conversation like the following would arise:



‘[...] this looks fun to post! We should post it.’

‘Yes, you go ahead, post it, I’m, ready to LIKE your post.’

Even when the participant sat in a cafe with a group of girlfriends, the girls would quite often take photos of fancy food and post the photos to their Moments on WeChat. Then the group would start to Like and comment under that specific post. Instead of talking to each other face to face, they preferred to make comments under each other’s posts as a silent but unique way of communication. They would sit together to post about their food and happy get-together time. People always would seem very busy with their phones; they kept checking their emails and WeChat to avoid embarrassment when they are together with their friends - friends who they want to meet and talk to. I asked them why they did not talk to each other and why they held their mobiles as a shield from making eye contact with their peers. They told me it is awkward if you and your friend looked at each other and do not know what to say.

Therefore, even when they are physically co-located with their friends they still want to get online and keep the online co-presence as well. They prefer to hold conversations both physically and digitally. For example, they enjoy sharing the moment of having coffee both physically and digitally and making comments to each other online as well. It is apparent that smart phones make access to social media much easier and more convenient in daily life. Social media on smart phones reshape the social space-time system, the corporeal proximity is not necessary for communications and interactions and the time of these communications and interactions is not dependent on the location of the communication partners

(Andrade 2014). Through smartphones and social media, people are enabled to communicate co-presently with each other both online and offline. This is an example of self-presentation where online and offline co-presence becomes entwined. This could well be an emergent norm for social interaction and is worthy of further investigation, however, this is beyond the scope of my current ethnography.

If one of my participants was going to post a group photo, he or she has the responsibility to choose a photo in which no one looks too bad or too good. If a participant posts a photo where he or she looks better than the others in the photo, the others may start complaining. This is also an example of collective production where the perceived value of the online performance is subject to negotiation.

Young adults use social media to record their life changes, to attract attention from their followers, to display their success and failures and to ask for help and get motivated. They normally assign their followers into different groups to make sure that their certain posts could only be viewed by a certain group of people. There are participants who have had unfriendly experiences in Australia, but they don't want to regard those experiences as issues of racism and as far as I observed none of them posted anything about it. They prefer to treat those unfriendly experiences as small probability events. On one hand they think that they may just met some unfriendly people, while on the other hand they don't want their parents in China worry about them in Australia.

## **Different platforms, different presentations**

The ways that participants post on Facebook, Weibo and WeChat vary. This relates to the different motivations for using the three social network sites. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) find three key motivations for using Facebook, which are peer pressure, social connectivity, and curiosity. From the interviews, many participants told me that after coming to Australia, they started using Facebook: mainly because they were curious about Facebook, as it was blocked in China. In addition, they wanted to see how the locals communicate with their friends and families on Facebook. Finally, they wanted to stay connected with their foreign friends, as most of their non-Chinese friends are users of Facebook. Figure 3.14 below is what Liming posted on his Sina Weibo homepage when talking about his Facebook experiences. Before coming to Australia, he has heard many discussions about Facebook and the restrictions on accessing Facebook in China makes him even more curious about it. He created his Facebook account the second day he got access to the Internet in Australia. Although Facebook has a Mandarin version, Liming prefers to use the original English version so as to fully 'experience' Facebook. His Facebook experience was not as fun as what he expected. Liming posted his experience report on his Weibo page, 'the page layout of Facebook is quite simple, Sina Weibo possesses all the features Facebook has and it has even more functions'. Liming very seldom uses Facebook even though he now works in Melbourne. Since most of his clients are Chinese and he has very few local friends therefore he mainly uses WeChat and Weibo for his day-to-day social networking.



**Figure 3.14: 'I registered for Facebook out of curiosity; I find that the page layout of Facebook is quite simple, Sina Weibo possesses all the features Facebook has and it has even more functions.'**

In contrast, Lanlan find Facebook brings a lot of joy to her daily life oversea. Lanlan loves traveling, she has been traveling to many countries: Canada, USA, Greece, France, Italy, England and etc. Instead of joining a tourist group, Lanlan prefers to travel by herself and at her own pace. Wherever she travels, she loves making friends with the local people. She always exchanges her Facebook account details with her new friends, and then they can keep in touch with each other on Facebook. 'I check my FB every day and get my daily dose of inspiration from my friends globally. Thanks to FB, I don't have to worry about losing contact with those great people I met in those wonderful places'. Lanlan not only checks her friends' posts on a daily basis she also frequently shares details about her life on Facebook, especially when she travels to a new place. She enjoys uploading group photos with her new friends on Facebook and tags each person to keep Facebook as her 'memory book' or personal archive.

When I asked Harris, a Master's student in Melbourne, who was making a choice between Weibo and WeChat, which platform he preferred, he told me that he always used the two platforms at the same time, combining their features and

functions to double-check information. 'Weibo is convenient for getting updates about breaking news, while WeChat is more useful for personal communication', he reported. In addition to the functional differences between these two platforms, the contact lists of Friends participants interact with are different as well. On WeChat, most of the people on the Friends list are the user's actual friends or acquaintances, which means people who have a close tie with each other. In contrast, Weibo, where anyone is able to follow any account, is open to a much broader audience than WeChat. After observing and analysing my participants' online Weibo activity, I found that only a few of my participants regularly update their original posts. Instead, most of them just repost some funny jokes and some cute and lovely pictures of animals or GIF images. When people use social media, they take into consideration the potential audience. This is what I observed in my ethnography. Audience is an important consideration for, as Marwick claims:

[...] the networked audience combines elements of the writer's audience and the broadcast audience. It consists of real and potential viewers for digital content that exist within a larger social graph. These viewers are connected not only to the user, but to each other, creating an active, communicative network; connections between individuals differ in strength and meaning.

(Marwick 2011a, p. 129; also see Haythornthwaite 2002; Boase et al. 2006)

I watched the social aspects of networked audience at play out in the timelines of my participants' social media timelines. I observed that Chinese young adults seek to conduct different self-presentations on varied platforms with their targeted audiences and the potential broadcast audiences in mind. My participants realize

that their posts on Weibo could be viewed by not only their followers but almost anyone on the Internet, they become much more careful in making their original posts. They have to think twice before making their own voice being heard by their friendly followers as they are considered if their voices are misunderstood and misused by some unfriendly Internet users. Young adults living overseas are seeking a social connection or bond (Westcott & Vazquez 2016), therefore they continuously present their life experiences, emotions, feelings and thoughts on social media, where potential readers and listeners are connected. It is an invisible bond that ties together young migrants with their friends and families back in China who always 'listen to them' and who are always connected with them. They were looking for connections and as Scheff stated:

[...] the degree of connectedness, is both cause and effect of most emotions. Human beings need to be connected with others as much as they need air to breathe, a social oxygen. Interactions such as comments, likes, retweets are not simply a dialogue between two interlocutors, but a performance of social connection before a broader audience. (Scheff 2011, p. 348; also see Boyd 2010, p. 6)

On WeChat Moment, people are able to see other people's comments, but the difference from Weibo and Facebook is that, people could only have access to see the common friends' comments. Therefore the behavior of commenting and the content of the comment, to some degree, show the closeness of the two friends. My participants regard this as a performance of emotions and social interactions. Comparing with commenting on Weibo and Facebook, they paid more attention

when commenting on their friends' WeChat Moments, as they are aware that their common friends would read the comments.

The self-presentation of young adults online changes along with their different life stages, this is reflected not only in the content of their self-presentation but also in the platforms they choose to present themselves. For instance, some people post more often when they start a new romantic relationship, whereas some people reduce their online presentations after they start working. However, the choice platforms also changes along with one's life stages, for instance, after some participants moved to Australia, they started to make posts on Twitter and Facebook. Besides, some of them would choose to use Tinder after they experienced a miserable break-up and decided to move on by looking for some new dates. To some extent, the decision to use a specific platform in itself is also one kind of online self-presentation. Just like the old saying goes, 'birds of a feather flock together', different platforms gather different groups of people and represent different ideas and concepts towards working, living and socializing. The discussion about participants' social media practices and their interpersonal relationships including their romantic relationships, parental relationships and work-related relationships are presented in Chapters 4 to 6.

## **Conclusion**

My research participants present their daily life online as a way of communicating with their friends back in China. They try to maintain their friendships from a distance, as they are not able to have 'offline activities' such as hanging out in a cafe, attending a concert or playing a basketball game which they used to do with their

friends before coming to Australia. As Miller and Sinanan (2014, p. 128) conclude after reviewing the anthropological and sociological literatures, friendship generally has three dimensions. Firstly, it is 'recreational'; secondly, it is 'built on choice and autonomy'; and thirdly, it is 'a key site for self-identification and development', because friendship 'teaches us and shows us how to view ourselves'. Faced with new living environments and culture shock, Chinese young adults studying abroad gradually gain a new identity and embrace new values. They notice that after coming to Australia their posts attract more attention from the new friends they make overseas than their old friends. Common knowledge of similar living experiences is important in understanding each other's posts between friends. Miller and Sinanan (2014) further explain this. When friendship evolves following migration, it becomes 'crucial as knowledge-based and support networks'. Therefore, after moving to a new country, young adults have the need to expand their social networks and receive support from knowledge-based friendships. Instead of making new friends from a distance, they prefer friends who share the same location and similar living experiences as they do. This appears to have resonance Boyd's finding that 'many people are unmotivated to interact with distant strangers; their attention is focused on those around them' (2010, p. 13). Yet for my participants, friends in home country are not total strangers, but acquaintances who are geographically distant. However, with the longer stay of my participants in Australia, the more distant they feel from their old acquaintances in China and therefore the less content they can share with them since the common topics they have become less and less.



To overcome distance, a number of my participants, aware of this issue, have managed to allocate time to keep their friendships dynamic by occasionally voice calling their old friends in China via WeChat. They introduce their experiences and challenges in Australia, while their friends introduce changes in the lives of their familiar circles back in China. In addition, Moments on WeChat is a helpful place for them to start a conversation, i.e. it is easier to pick up a conversation by saying, 'Hey, I see your holiday photos on Moments, they are gorgeous! Where did you go? Tell me more about your fun trip'!

In this chapter, I have explored how moving overseas affects young adults' self-presentation online by studying their posts through three main themes: lifestyle, emotional content and new encounters. I have concluded that young adults encourage themselves to adjust to new life changes through the practice of presenting their overseas living experiences on social media and interacting with their friends online to both maintain their old friendships as well as to expand new social networks overseas.

When young adults living overseas travel back to their home countries, they unintentionally play the role of culture transmitters, which means they will bring back new cultures and introduce new customs to their friends and families at home. That is the time when new culture is exchanged and introduced back to their home countries. But with social media, now this process speeds up. Young adults living overseas share the culture shocks they experienced immediately with their home countries' friends and parents through their daily communication on social media,

either by updating posts or by chatting online. Social media speed up the integration and introduction of new cultures with old cultures.

In the following chapter, I move from friendships to intimate relationships to examine how young adults reach out for romance while living overseas.

## Chapter 4: Reaching out for romance

### Introduction

*'How did you meet your girlfriend?'*

*'We met online.'*

*'But how?'*

*'I knew her before I came to Melbourne. It was social media that connected us... We used to live in different cities in China. I was in the north and she was in the south. We got to know each other on a chat group online. It was a group for students who were about to go to study overseas. The aim of joining that chat group was to meet more people who were planning to go to the same host country ... and that was how I met my girlfriend. We were both applying to study in Melbourne... After we arrived here, we finally met in person and our relationship worked out quite well. I think we were very lucky.'*

This is just one of the many stories I heard from my research participants talking about how powerful social media are in connecting them with their friends and partners across time and space (Boyd 2008, p. 92). This chapter explores how young adults, who are exposed to a range of life changes associated with living overseas, manage their social media practices online as a way of either reaching out for a romantic relationship or maintaining a long-distance relationship.

Online dating has been studied by many researchers from different perspectives including psychology, information technology, marketing, and customer

management (Finkel et al. 2012; Gibbs, Ellison & Lai 2010; Heino, Ellison & Gibbs 2010). By comparing personal advertisements on American and Chinese dating websites, Ye (2006) concludes that culture plays a significant role in the style of self-presentation ads on dating websites and in the selection of prospective mates. People's self-description on the dating websites is based on their conventional culture-bound romantic beliefs. Their posts reflect what they think are the most valued qualities in mate selection in their culture. When it comes to messaging, Xia et al. (2014, p. 1) finds that, 'males tend to look for younger females while females put more emphasis on the socioeconomic status (e.g., income, education level) of a potential date', which supports theories of social and evolutionary psychology (Buss 1989; Eagly & Wood 1999; Luo & Klohnen 2005). In 2010, Gershon studied how college students in the United States break up in mediated ways and disconnect over new media in the Web 2.0 age. My study expands upon her work to explore new directions. In this chapter, I look at how young adults start or maintain a relationship through mediated practice on social media in the context of having the life change of moving overseas.

Building on studies of modern Chinese dating culture and online dating behaviour, I explore the role that social media play in helping young adults find sexual partners in the different living environment resulting from living overseas (Zheng 2013; Zhou 2012). I argue that young adults adjust their social media practices to meet their needs for relationships when they move to live overseas. They use social media to either maintain a long-distance relationship, or to search for new potential partners online. Understanding the development of my research participants' identities and

social networks after they move overseas to pursue tertiary education in Australia is key to exploring the role that social media play during a life change. Gomes et al. (2014, p. 5) reveal that there is a 'correlation between identity and social networks where individuals in a network have common singular, multiple, or overlapping identities'. With the mobility of international students and the constant exposure to different cultures and ideas, it has become difficult to identify a simple individual or group identity. This has had an important influence on how young Chinese adults living overseas reach out for romance and maintain relationships.

I suggest that after young adults move overseas, the experience of living in another country impacts on the way they interact with social media, especially when starting or maintaining a relationship. Young adults studying or working overseas are more likely to turn to social media for help to find and maintain a relationship whether it is long-distance or not.

My study differs from other studies about online dating in one key respect. Previous researchers have focused on how people date online, and especially their dating behaviour online. By contrast, my study sheds light on not only their online dating practices but also the motivations and reasons behind their practices based on my ethnographic fieldwork. In addition, I have examined their daily practices on social media which provides a background context to situate their needs and aspirations for romantic relationships when dealing with life changes overseas.

I initially analysed the transcripts of the interviews I had conducted as a part of my ethnography and observed carefully how my participants responded to my questions about romance and relationships. By coding the interview transcripts using these

expressions as keywords, patterns about how young adults using social media to present their loneliness and their longings for romantic relationships emerged. I then cross-referenced these patterns with data from my participants' social media feeds. I categorized these patterns into three types: 'vague posts', 'midnight selfie posts' and 'screenshots of TV dramas or movies posts'. These posts aim to draw attention from one's followers, sending out signals like 'I am lonely and I am looking forward to a romantic relationship'.

### **Vague posts**

The first pattern I found is deliberately 'vague' posts. Participants write something very vague or ask questions on their posts in which they are addressing to their future partners or someone they have a crush on. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are two examples of such 'vague' posts from my participants' posts. Figure 4.1 is a picture of a popular ad of traveling-'cross the world with you together' as shown in Chinese characters—'陪你路过这个世界'. In the post, the participant asked a question under the picture— 'Who will accompany me on my journey?' It's a similar situation with the example presented as Figure 4.2, the female participant implicitly expressing her wish to live with the person she admires. She hopes that the person she admires will see this post and get her message. These posts are designed to elicit reassuring responses from the person towards whom they have romantic feelings.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 4.1: 'This ad is very popular recently. Who will accompany me on my journey?'**



**Figure 4.2: ‘It would be wonderful if we could live in the same city, at least, we may have the opportunity to come across somewhere in the city.’**

### **Midnight Selfie posts**

At midnight, some participants would post a selfie or many selfies on their social media accounts to show that they stay at home alone. They desire to draw attention from their followers and to have someone to chat with them. Normally these posts are updated at midnight because this is the time when most of the people have some spare time scanning through their social media before going to bed. According to my participants they are more likely to start a private chat with someone who commented on their selfie posts at midnight.

### **Screenshots of TV dramas or movies posts**

Many participants like to take a screenshot on the scenes of a TV drama or movie that they have recently watched and then post it on their WeChat Moments and/or Weibo.

Figure 4.3 shows that one of my participants posted on her WeChat Moments with a screenshot on a very popular Chinese movie called, A Chinese Odyssey (《大话西游之月光宝盒》), together with a few sentences claiming that she really wants to have a romantic relationship. Posts like this could serve as a conversation opener where participants and their followers can start to chat by sharing their opinions on the drama or movie, move on to talk about their dreams and lifestyles, and gradually switch to talk about love and romance.

**<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>**

**Figure 4.3: 'I really want to have a romantic relationship...'**

These posts function as a way of saying things they would otherwise find difficult to say. The lines in the scenes they screenshot seem to express how they feel and what they think so they treat it as a method to express their thoughts and feelings.

Participants think it is an easy way to start a chat with their 'followers' — not only referring to the literal meaning of followers on a platform but also referring to the people who are fond of them and who they are fond of.

Compared with creating original content of romantic beliefs and thoughts, young adults tend to prefer sharing and posting popular memes and famous lines because original content may be interpreted as drawing from their direct personal romantic



experiences whereas popular memes and famous lines may simply imply that they agree with the content while at the same time widely advertise the audience about their romantic availability. Romantic relationships are a mixture of both online and offline interactions. People who are engaged in a romantic relationship normally look forward to physical interactions; even people who have a long-distance relationship normally have promises of future physical proximity (Jansson 2015; Caughlin & Sharabi 2013). Dating online is part of the maintenance of the romantic relationship.

I found four key ways in which social media help young adults to address various challenges in starting and keeping relationships. First, in dealing with a smaller pool of prospective partners, young adults turn to social media to make more friends. Second, social media help young adults track their potential partners' digital presence online when they know nothing about each other. Third, social media provide a good stage for young couples to show their affection by interacting with each other online regardless of whether they are living in the same place or physically apart. Finally, when young adults living overseas seek advice on their relationships, many of them prefer to search for relationship experts on social media.

### **'Shengnv 剩女' phenomenon**

Before I go through these four key ways in detail, I will introduce the pressures of finding a partner and getting married with which my participants have been constantly faced. In the era of pre-modern China, most marriages in China were arranged by parents or elder members of a family (Croll & Croll 1981; Xiaohe & Whyte 1990). Nowadays, although the freedom to marry for love has become

socially acceptable in China, Chinese parents and senior family members still have a strong influence on people's marital choices (Pimentel 2000; To 2013). Many of my participants related how they felt pressure from their parents and relations about suitable marriage partners. After graduating from universities, many of them were expected to have a stable relationship with a suitable marriage partner before reaching their late 20s.

For instance, every time Zijun, a PhD student in Melbourne, goes back to China to celebrate the annual Spring Festival with his family, he is forced to answer questions about his love life. As he recalls, 'the most frequent question my family relations ask is whether or not I have found a girlfriend. By saying family relations, I mean my parents, my grandparents, and some extended family members like my aunties whom I probably only see once a year.' Compared with Zijun, female participants are faced with even more pressure, not only from their parents but also from society. A recent phenomenon in China called 'left-over women' (*Shengnv*, 剩女) has gradually attracted scholars' attention (Cai & Wang 2011; Cai & Tian 2013; Ji 2015).

In 1990, unmarried women aged 25 and over accounted for only 1.04% of the total number of women in China. According to the sixth census in 2010<sup>10</sup>, the unmarried rate among young women aged 25-29 rose to 21.62%. But the data also show that the unmarried rate of women decreases rapidly after the age of 30. Unmarried women aged 30-34 account for only 5.35% of all women, and only 1.75% of 35-39 age group. This shows that 'leftover girls' in China tend to marry late rather than remain unmarried for life. In 2007, The Ministry of Education of the People's

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

Republic of China included '*Shengnv* 剩女' as one of the new terms in the 'Country's Official Lexicon in 2006'. '*Shengnv* 剩女' refers to women who are of marriageable age but remain unmarried. Typically, highly paid, university educated women 'of a certain age' (in their late 20s or in their 30s) are tagged as 'left-over women'. The late marriage of women is not only a Chinese social phenomenon. In Japan there is a similar saying called '3S woman' - Single, Seventies and Stuck. Many scholars have investigated reasons for the 'left-over women' phenomenon in countries such as China and Japan from the perspectives of gender inequality and the rise of feminism under the cultural context of patriarchal society (Fincher 2016; Gaetano 2014). Fincher (2016) argues that the 'left-over women' phenomenon was mediated through the state media discourse in China. By urging well-educated women to marry, the state aims to improve the 'quality' of the population as well as maintain social stability by helping more men find wives.

One of my participants, Tingting, relates that her relations are concerned that she will end up as a 'left-over woman':

My grandma has tried very hard to convince me not to do another degree when I finish my Master's Degree. She keeps telling me stories like how her next door neighbour's granddaughter got married last month, or how a friend from her dancing club welcomed a new son-in-law last weekend [...] you know, stories like that. I'm under a lot of pressure. Pursuing further education overseas is not easy. I want my family members to understand and I hope they can support me with my dream. I know they are just thinking of what's best for me, but I wish they would take my wishes into consideration.

Like Tingting, a Master's student in Melbourne, most of my female participants have finished a Bachelor's degree at the very least, and have experienced this type of social pressure. When they reflect on their experiences of studying and living overseas, many of them are worried that they will be labelled 'left-over women' if they keep focusing on their studies or their work. Meanwhile, their parents and grandparents are constantly reminding them to be careful 'not to become a left-over woman' when they return to China by comparing them to the daughters of their friends and neighbours who have already settled down in a happy 'in-time' marriage. With popular posts and short videos on 'left-over women' spread on WeChat Moments and Weibo, social media reinforces existing sociocultural conventions and norms in China around marriage.

In China, marriage is not only the basis for gaining social status and social recognition, but also for clan reproduction. Marriage can also provide a safety net. In the case of relatively lagging social security system, marriage is also a safety barrier for obtaining various survival and development resources, relieving social pressure and resisting social risks. Faced with the pressure of getting married 'in-time' and not being labelled as 'left-over', Chinese young adults feel the urge to find a partner even when they are living overseas. In the following sections, I shed light on the four key ways I identified from my fieldwork about how my participants use social media to proactively reach out for romance or manage their romantic relationship from a distance. I also outline some of the reasons that emerged from my ethnography as to why studying overseas adds to the pressure to find romance and marry 'in-time', and how this affects the use of microblogging and social media.

### **A smaller pool of candidates**

When young adults from China study or work overseas, they often leave behind their family and social networks and move to a new setting where they have to communicate in a foreign language, take care of their finances, find accommodation, etc. (Grinberg & Grinberg 1989; Sawir et al. 2008). Being exposed to a new living environment in Australia, these young Chinese find themselves moving in smaller social circles compared with those they had back home. This reduces the possibilities of finding suitable marriage partners and friends. My analysis of the conversations with research participants reveals six key factors shaping this process: being away from the old social circle, gender imbalance, language limitations, cultural barriers, employment woes and mobility of friends. These six factors are explained below.

Young adults turn to social media online in order to access a larger pool of potential partners. To reach out for a relationship online is both distance and time independent, which means that when people are dating online, geography and different time zones are not necessarily barriers to the relationship. Young adults can find potential partners who may not be living locally or in the same time zone. In addition, on social media where there are people from different cultural backgrounds and interest groups, young adults are able to contact anyone who attracts them without the limitation of having to work or study in the same place.

### ***Away from the old social circle***

Many of my research participants said that after coming to Australia, they missed their friends and families. Most of their former school friends are still in China. My

participants argue that their social circles in China constitute valuable social capital and that they built them themselves. Being away from their old social networks, they are quite lonely, as they have no friends in Australia when they first arrive. When looking for a prospective partner they prefer to start with someone they already know. These young adults find themselves in a situation where there is a smaller pool of candidates, which makes it more difficult for them to start a relationship (Granovetter 1973).

When I interviewed Haiqing, a Master's student in Melbourne, he told me the following:

Before I came to Australia, I never worried about finding my future partner because you know you can always find someone either from your circle of friends or from your parents' circle of friends... You went to your parents' friends' places for a party then you got to meet their children... Then, you started dating [...] It was so simple! After I came to Australia to pursue my Master's degree here, I felt totally isolated from my old circle of friends. Although we still keep in touch with each other online, it is not the same. I don't have any old friends here. On weekends, I can't spend time with them as I did before. I had to start all over again here, first by making friends and later having a girlfriend.

Haiqing is not the only one of my participants who is missing his old friends. Many other participants had similar issues. For instance, Nannan is a PhD student studying in Sydney. Although she enjoys doing research and tutoring, she sometimes misses her old school friends. She has a large circle of friends back in China – more than 70

classmates in her primary school and another 60 in her high school, and up to 100 classmates at university. Nannan's school friends in China are the basis of her social networks. By giving examples of how many school friends she has, Nannan provides a more specific idea of how big a Chinese young adults' social group can potentially be. These social connections allowed Nannan to develop a wide range of contacts by being introduced to the friends of her school friends, which gave her the opportunity to have a larger pool of potential boyfriends. This was of great importance and convenience for Nannan, as she was able to figure out whom she was fond of and therefore it was easier for her to look for a prospective boyfriend in China. After Nannan came to Sydney, her social circle of close connections shrunk. She has left her school friends and therefore she cannot attend parties and events with them until she travels back to China on school holidays. This means that only a few of her school friends remain in touch with her on social media.

Weiss suggests that 'social networks provide a base for social activities, for outings and parties and get-togethers with people whom one has much in common' (1973, p. 150). Another participant, Baoyu, who started working in Melbourne in 2013, confirms Weiss's insight. He thinks his childhood networks provide him with an important source of social activity where he might be able to meet his future partner, especially when attending events such as a school reunion in China:

When we all graduate from university, we sometimes have class reunion parties at different school levels. If you are single you can always find someone among your old school friends during these class reunion parties. They are very well qualified 'candidates' if you are trying to find a boyfriend

or a girlfriend. You have known these people since you were a child, you have memories together, and you spent the most valuable school time together.

(Baoyu, a worker in Melbourne)

Like Nannan, Baoyu couldn't attend these school reunion events after he moved to Melbourne. He was worried because he left the social networks he was familiar with and he had to build a new network in Melbourne.

Moving overseas is the one major life change that all my participants share. This life change means that most of them are apart from their old social circles. Many of them are not skilled in building a social circle in the new circumstances because the old social circle back in China was formed organically through different education levels. This means that when they graduated from a university, they had classmates from primary school, high school, and university. Potentially, they may also have had more friends if they had actively participated in school clubs and events. Being away from a familiar social circle is difficult for young adults because if they want their social life back, they have to re-build a new circle of friends all over again on their own.

### ***Gender imbalance***

Some of the young adults in my study complained that the major they applied to study was dominated by one gender. Majors such as science, engineering and information technology are dominated by male students, while accounting has a majority of female students. Arkoudis et al. (2013) argue that classrooms are



important social networking places, therefore sitting in a classroom dominated by one gender limits my participants' opportunities of finding a date:

'If you really want to have a boyfriend, dress up and go out. You can't just lock yourself up in front of your desk', this was what my roommate recommended. My roommate is a Chinese girl who has been living in Australia for seven years... Well, considering I'm surrounded by girls at university and share a flat with other female students, it's harder for me to meet a boy. I guess I'd better follow her advice and socialize a bit more...but it's quite challenging for me because I'm not a party girl. (Xinyi)

Xinyi is a student majoring in accounting, which is usually a female dominated major, and therefore she rarely gets to meet the very few male students in her classes. Also, what compounds the problem is that she prefers to share a flat with females for safety issues. In Xinyi's situation, she does not have many chances to make male friends during or after school and she finds it challenging to socialize at parties. However, by using social media, Xinyi is able to get to know more boys even though she is studying accounting and lives with other girls. For example, after she joined a group chat on WeChat (made up of some 300 students in total), she was able to friend many Chinese male students who are all undergraduates and studying different majors in different universities in Melbourne. Xinyi found it safer to make new friends this way, since any student who wants to join the group needs to have an invitation from the group owner; without an invitation one could not get into the group chat.

### ***Language limitations***

While it may appear that living overseas presents many more opportunities to find romantic entanglements with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, the reality is often different. Language can be a barrier.

Researchers such as Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977), Eley (1990), and Ledwith and Seymour (2001) have identified that the most obvious challenge for young adults living overseas is the second language they have to live with. A large number of my research participants mention that they are very concerned that their poor English is not helping them make friends with local people. Most of my participants who attend classes at universities in Australia are disappointed to find that it is hard to make friends with Australian students, considering that they had expected to make many friends with Australian students before coming to Australia and this is similar to the findings from a study conducted by Gomes et al. (2015). During the interviews, when I heard my participants saying that making friends with the local students is hard, I asked a follow-up question, 'How about working with the local students? Will group projects help you work with the local students?' Ye Quan, an undergraduate male student in Melbourne, said that doing a group project provoked the most suffering that he has ever had here. He could not find a group and he hates group projects.

Not only do undergraduate students complain about group projects but many Master's students have the same problem with their group projects:

The others will be happy to have you in a group under three conditions. First, you are really awesome in this subject. Second, you have a good personality plus your English is not too bad so you can work with them. The last is that you are their friend. (Jun Yang, a male Master's student in Melbourne)

Ledwith and Seymour (2001, p. 1301) conclude from their research that the major concern of local students is 'the impact that group work would have on grades and assessment generally and they felt that they were more likely to achieve high marks in monocultural groups'. So, when students are form a group to finish their homework it is a two-way selection. Local students will choose an international student on the basis of their level of English and their academic performance, while the international students will prefer to be included in a group with people who are patient, listen to them and who are doing well in the subject too:

Although I have been learning English ever since primary school in China, this is my first time living in an English-speaking country. From the result of my IELTS test, my listening and reading are pretty good. I thought English should not be a big problem for me, but the first two weeks after I arrived in Melbourne, I could hardly understand what the staff were talking about in the cafes. Their English sounds weird to me... Later on, my friends told me that it was Aussie English. (Meilian, a female Master's student in Adelaide)

Ivy, who is doing her Master's study in Melbourne, found it quite confusing at first when somebody said 'Ta' to her in a shop. She didn't know how to respond. Because most of the English words she learnt before she went overseas were from textbooks, an expression such as 'Ta' is hard to find in a regular English textbook in China. After

travelling overseas, Ivy said she has been surrounded with the real daily English, 'living English'. When using slang in a conversation, it is easy to make my participants confused and then they start doubting their English language ability. It does not mean that their English is not good, they just need a longer time to become accustomed to English in Australia:

You see, I'm able to understand what our lecturers are talking about at university and I'm able to chat with my local friends, but my English is still not good enough and not 'local' enough for me to get a part-time job here [...] I totally understand. If I was the boss, I'd prefer to hire someone who I can easily talk to, rather than a foreign student to whom I have to explain everything at least twice with simple expressions. (Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne)

Because of language limitations it is very hard for my participants to have close friends with local Australian people and non-Chinese residents. Thus, they limit their circle of friends to the local Chinese community and therefore make the pool of their potential partners even smaller, since they can only look for a date among the local Chinese people. However, there are some young people who have tried to improve their English through their social media practices on Facebook. They post in English on Facebook as a way of practicing their written English. Besides, they are more active in interacting with their friends on Facebook. They make a point of posting in English, even with Chinese friends.

### ***Cultural barriers***

Language and culture are thoroughly entwined. Young Chinese living in Melbourne see learning English well as a bridge to the culture of Australia and other countries. My participants are looking forward to forming romantic attachments with people from different cultural backgrounds, but they find it challenging to understand people from diverse cultures as well as to let them understand Chinese culture.

Many of my participants said that it took only a short while for them to become accustomed to the new living environment in Australia, but as time went by they experienced some unpleasant events caused by misunderstandings. In most cases, they blamed those misunderstandings on their poor English and bad communication skills. However, the more I got to know their stories, the more I came to the conclusion that although the misunderstandings may have been caused by communicating in a second language, the difficulties were often rooted in people's cultural backgrounds and different understandings of social contexts (Brody 2003; Holland & Quinn 1987; Lange & Paige 2003; Street 1993). Due to the barriers of language and culture, young adults lose confidence in communicating with local people or other international people. This affects their willingness to expand their social circle in a new living environment. In contrast, on social media people can choose to follow people who have the same cultural background, which makes it easier to communicate with them. One of my participants, Yanggang, who is a PhD student in Melbourne, told me the following story:

My boss said I should be more active at the group meeting. When we discuss a project at a group meeting, most of the time I'm very quiet. But even if I

don't say anything at the meeting, it doesn't mean I don't have any ideas or I'm not engaging with the project. It's just that sometimes I worry that if I say something I may make the others who are in charge of the project embarrassed, which I certainly don't want to do. After the group meeting I discussed my ideas with colleagues, but, of course, my boss wouldn't know that.

The misunderstanding with his boss is related to the Chinese cultural imperative of being humble and *Zhongyong* (中庸), not to behave too obtrusively, especially in the workplace. *Zhongyong* (中庸) refers to the Confucian moral standards, it originates from human nature. It means that when there are no emotions such as joy, anger, sadness, etc. in the heart of a person, it is called 'the middle' (*Zhong*, 中). When emotions such as pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy occur, we always use the state of being to control our emotions, that is, harmony. The state in which the heart is not affected by any emotions and remains calm and peaceful is the true face of all things in the world (Yao 2014). Dachuan, an undergraduate student in Melbourne, had a similar problem with his group project at university. When he gave a presentation for the group project, he got stressed about what his group members had done rather than showing off his own industriousness. Unfortunately, this confused his lecturer who thought he was a free rider and therefore gave him the lowest mark in his group. Later, he finally got the chance to explain the issue clearly to his lecturer.

Participants like Hongmei (a Master's student), who is very shy and lacks self-confidence, find it difficult to participate in a group discussion. Hongmei wanted to join a discussion, but she did not know how and when to get into the conversation.

Compared with the local students, who talk very fast, Hongmei was nervous and reluctant to interrupt their conversation. She wished that the local students would stop talking for a second and give her an opportunity to share her ideas and opinions since they were having a group discussion. Similar with Hongmei's experience, Xianping, who is a PhD student, also has difficulties joining a conversation:

Whenever I want to join a conversation, no matter whether it is at a party or at my workplace, I rephrase my first sentence again and again in my mind. I want to figure out a way that I can get into the conversation without being rude. I really don't know how to jump into a conversation in English. I miss the time when I was in China. It was so easy to join people's discussions and start chatting with them. Here in Australia, even you are invited to the party as a guest, you have to figure out a way to join people's conversations.

Zhibin, who is an undergraduate student in Melbourne, has had the unpleasant experience of being laughed at by his classmates because of his bad English pronunciation. 'I know my English pronunciation isn't perfect, but they shouldn't make fun of me. They should know that I'm trying to live in their country; I'm trying to communicate with them in their language. My Chinese pronunciation is perfect, but how many of them can speak Chinese?' This issue has bothered him for a while, every time he wants to say something at class. 'People may say that a laugh means no harm, but it hurts my feelings'. Zhibin told me that when he led group discussions with foreign students at his university in China, he asked his group members to take turns talking about their ideas. His group members would always patiently listen to the foreign students sharing their opinions and speaking in Chinese. Young adults

living overseas are far from home, and they can easily feel lonely, isolated and even abandoned. As they are not confident with their English, they become very sensitive and fragile.

During the interviews, participants who have been living in Australia for less than two years told me that when working or studying with Australians, they are always concerned about cultural differences. Some participants try to spend more time with the locals to become integrated into Australian culture, but others choose to stay closer to the local Chinese community. This phenomenon to a certain extent has limited their social circles.

Another participant, Xuening, a third year undergraduate student majoring in business, told me that after he created his Facebook and Twitter accounts, he followed the social media accounts of a few lecturers in his university. When I asked why he was interested in his lecturers' social media accounts, Xuening said:

I don't mind if they teach me or not, I just want to follow their Facebook accounts to have a closer look at their personal lives. I want to know how my Australian lecturers are living when they are not at the campus. But not every lecturer accepted my request to be a 'friend'. That makes sense as well. If I'm a lecturer, I may want to keep my personal life from my students.

After moving to a new country and living in a different cultural context, it is not easy for young adults to understand the culture and to become integrated into it in a short period of time. But, with the help of social media, young adults can observe how local people live their lives. Young people I interviewed reflect on their social



media practices on Facebook as one way of learning the local culture. On Facebook they are able to find out how local people celebrate their anniversaries, vacations, home parties and they think by reviewing people's posts about local news, it is also a fun way of learning about people's opinions on certain issues. Social media are like prisms; they reflect people's colourful cultural lives.

### ***Employment woes***

Having a part-time job is a way to expand your social circle, as it helps international students to get out of the daily routines of student life - lectures, libraries, and dining hall. A few participants who think they can maintain a good balance between their work and leisure time prefer to have a part-time job. The reasons are very simple. One of the most common reasons is that by undertaking a part-time job they can get to know more people outside their university, and they can look more closely at Australia by working in it rather than being protected behind the university's walls. But, with the job market becoming more and more competitive and with fewer available positions and more candidates, many international students have difficulty finding a job:

Recently, it has become very difficult for us to find a job in Melbourne. Even local graduates don't find it easy. The job market is getting tough, not to mention the 'hidden job market'. I am just a student; Australia is totally new to me, and I know nobody here. How am I supposed to find a job through my personal network? Many jobs require a PR (permanent residency), which I don't currently have, but to be honest, the reason I want to get a job is that getting a job is one of the possible ways I could apply for a PR. I have sent out

many CVs, and one day I received a phone call from a company, which I had applied to weeks earlier. I think I totally ruined it, because I didn't realize it was a phone interview until he hung up. Besides, the HR representative who called spoke too fast and the signal was not too good [...] Anyway, I didn't get the job. (Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne)

The difficulty in finding a job in Australian companies and shops limits my participants to working in local Chinese communities. This situation further limits my participants' circle of friends, as they are focused only on a small group of local Chinese people rather than on local Australian people or people from other countries. My participants told me that they don't want to feel like they are still living in China by having social networks with only Chinese people in Australia, and they look forward to getting to know people from different industries. On social media, people can make friends with people who have all kinds of careers, as it doesn't matter which company or institution you are working for. In Chapter 6, 'Working it out', there will be a more detailed discussion about how young adults use social media to cope with getting a job.

### ***Mobility of friends***

Young adults studying or working overseas commonly stay for a short period in the country of their destination if they are not applying for a permanent resident visa. In Australia, PhD students normally have a three to four year program; Master's students, a one to two year program; and for Undergraduate students, it is generally a three-year program. People who work as expatriates usually have five-year

contracts. This situation makes it hard for young adults living overseas to have 'stable' friends, because they are constantly moving around and travelling abroad:

When it comes to the end of a semester, I will be sad. My friends are leaving me. I have been studying in Australia for seven years. When I finished high school in Brisbane, I moved to Melbourne. My friends held a farewell party for me. They were my first group of friends in Australia. When I started my Bachelor degree, I was very proactive in making new friends in the university. I had a great time with all my friends. But then, when graduation came, many of my Chinese friends either decided to go back to China or applied for further study in a third country. Very few of them stayed in Australia. Anyway, they all left me. We were good friends for three years, and they were like my family. When I started doing a Master's degree, I became more careful about making new friends. I did not want to be hurt. I felt uncertain and unsure of my friends. You have no idea what are they going to do or where they are going to go. It's not their fault, I know, as they can't decide by themselves. It depends on where the jobs are, which tertiary institutions are going to accept them, what their parents want them to do [...] That's how things like that work [...] Now, I want to make sure that a person is going to stay in Melbourne before deciding whether or not I'm going to make friends with this person. (Ivy, a Master's student in Melbourne)

Ivy says she feels 'uncertain and unsure' of her friends. When young adults live overseas, they are keen to have a highly mobile life as they are prepared to travel to a third country for study or for work (Gomes 2015). One of my participants explains

that many of her new friendships were temporary. She says that while social media helps her stay in touch with new friends, the relationships are often transient and shallow:

When I was working part-time at a cafe in my neighbourhood, most of my friends were the staff who were working at that cafe. Later on, I moved to another suburb because the transport there is more convenient. But, unfortunately, I gradually lost 'contact' with my friends from that cafe. By saying I lost contact, I mean we didn't hang out any more, and we became so-called 'Facebook friends', which means we only 'hang out' on Facebook, like commenting on each other's updates. I'm busy with my schoolwork, and they are busy with their lives too. What can I complain about? (Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne)

Along with Katy's life change, some of her strong ties, such as her old neighbours and colleagues, later became weak ties. Katy spent less amount of time with her old neighbours and colleagues owing to the moving of her residence; and devotes less emotion comparing to her daily greetings and communications in the old time (Granovetter 1973, p. 1361). Actually without the connection on social media, these weak ties may even be downgraded to the absent ties. Social media thereby enable the maintenance of one's weak ties.

Everyone is the centre of his pluralistic social network, and at the same time he is a part of the social network of others. Social interaction is no longer an actual localized group or community based interaction, but a networked connection among individuals, conducted both online and offline (Rainie & Wellman 2012).

For young international students, factors such as the length of the program they are studying, the work they are doing and the neighbourhood they are staying in are very important in keeping social circles stable and secure. However, with friends of high mobility and flexibility, it is hard to maintain a face to face friendship, not to mention a romantic relationship, if both parties can't stay in the same place for the long term. In contrast to this, friendship online is mobile and flexible. Although people are physically apart, they can still feel connected via the Internet on social media. In the following sections I will explain how my participants use social media to maintain their relationships.

### **Trace back and play back**

There is a magic button. Once you click on it, you start friending and connecting with the outside world. You open yourself up to welcome people you are interested to know and friends who you want to be involved with and whom you want to connect to your life. When you start travelling to a foreign land, you are physically far away from your previous local friends. You don't want the physical distance between you and your previous friends to become a barrier to your relationship, and therefore you desire to build a virtual connection with them on social media. By reading the posts of your friends online, you seek to understand the living status of your friends, and you compare the ups and downs of their lives with your own ups and downs (Sawir et al. 2008; Weiss 1973).

Many participants told me that they search for accounts, which are located in Melbourne or Australia in order to follow more people who are currently living in Melbourne. With the 'Nearby Function' and 'Add a Location' in the mobile WeChat

app, Sina Weibo and Facebook, it is much easier to search for people who are in the same location. My informants do not ask all of these new friends to go out socially; rather they mainly check their updates to gather more information about living in Australia. However, for some followers who happen to be in the same university or even in the same school, they will try to send private messages to chat with them and seek the opportunity to get to know them in person:

Leaving my old circle of friends has made it hard for me to find a girlfriend. So I started to use social media to look for a prospective partner. I often post something on my Weibo with the location function on, in the hope that girls who are close to my location will notice my posts and then notice me.

(Haiqing, a male Master's student in Melbourne)

When I go out to have lunch or dinner I always provide a check-in of the restaurant on my Weibo and Facebook accounts. I carefully write my comments on the food, the service and the atmosphere of the restaurant. I want to find a boy who has the same taste as I do. I enjoy trying different foods and visiting different restaurants and if I have a boyfriend we can try all these wonderful cuisines in Melbourne together. (Xinyi, an undergraduate female student in Melbourne)

In general, most of my research participants will try to remain within their own comfort zone, but that may further restrict their social circle, which is small, and affect their selection of romantic partners. Social media helps young adults who are living overseas to 'reach out' for new possibilities of more friends and partners, to increase their current pool of candidates but at the same time keep those young

adults 'safe' and relaxed behind the screens of their devices. By using WeChat People Nearby function, people are able to search for other users who are around them within certain metres, from 100 metres to up to 5 kilo metres or even further, depending on different personal settings. Although this function is available in China, my participants reflect that they almost never used this function until they went to Australia. Since they are aware of that most of the WeChat users are Chinese, therefore when they first arrive at a new country and want to make some Chinese friends, People Nearby function come up to their minds. By making new friends with strangers on social media, young adults build up weak ties to help them get to know the new place and to integrate with new communities. These weak ties may develop into strong ties as they find more and more common topics in their communication or get more engaged through online and offline activities (Granovetter 1973).

Many participants I interviewed do not believe that using Weibo for finding a boyfriend or girlfriend is online dating. They think social media are platforms with many possibilities for them to explore:

After we exchanged our Weibo account names, I was so happy. I couldn't wait and I followed him on Weibo immediately. I was very excited to visit his Weibo homepage, and I have read and tracked down all of his posts. I paid attention to his posts especially his relationship updates and his hobbies.

(Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne)

To some extent (see my discussion in Chapter 3 of self-presentation and social media uses), Weibo is like a stage where people can present their skills and abilities to the world (Goffman 1959; Hogan 2010; Chen et al. 2011; Gao, Q et al. 2012). People can

use Weibo as a fairly equal and open platform to show their talents to the world simply by uploading and posting photos, videos and voice recordings. If a person thinks he or she is very good at dancing, posting a clip of themselves dancing is much more convincing than just claiming that he or she is a wonderful dancer.

On Weibo, you can embed different kinds of media formats in one post: for example, music, videos and images. You do not need to open the link with a new window. You can view all these media formats in one window, which saves a lot of time and trouble. This feature has the advantage that many people can watch a post consisting of multimedia presentations straight away. Participant Nancy makes good use of Weibo when she finds someone she is interested in:

If I'm interested in someone I may check his homepage to see if he has shown some skills or talents on Weibo; and if he does, I would also check out how many comments or likes he has got, to see how popular he is. I know I'm not employing somebody, but I do want to date a talented guy. (Nancy, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

However Nancy also explained:

I'm a very shy person. I do not talk to strangers. But if I have read his posts, I have a clearer understanding about what he is interested in so I am able to identify an interesting topic and be more confident about starting a conversation with him. (Nancy, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

For Nancy, social media is like a personal 'private life resume'. She believes that she can see into the other person's life and personality online. At the very least, she has



benefited from a 'private life resume', as she has been provided with a window through which to observe someone's life comfortably online. At the very least, she has benefited from a 'private life resume', as she has been provided with a window through which to observe someone's life comfortably online.

In examining the self-disclosure involved in online dating, Gibbs, Ellison and Lai (2010) claim that people use social media to present themselves to the audience, but at the same time the audience needs to see some 'evidence'. Establishing romantic relationships online with strangers who are outside of familiar networks means there is no way for people to vouch for others and people want to make sure that their potential partner is not a liar. In discussing the reliability of online self-disclosure, by analysing the online survey data of 3,535 users of a German dating site, Schmitz, Zillmann and Blossfeld (2013) investigate an interesting question – 'Do women pick up lies before men do? One of the key results they find is that 'women are more likely to misrepresent their physical attractiveness; while men are more likely to misrepresent information on marital status, intended relationship, and height' (Schmitz, Zillmann & Blossfeld 2013, p. 52).

If people are honest with their online profile information, it is very helpful for two potential partners to get to know each other via online communication before they meet in person. Meilian, a Master's student in Adelaide told me what she will do if she gets to know her Mr. Mcdreamy's (男神, *Nanshen*) Weibo account:

If I can get his Weibo account I will 'friend' him, and the first thing I'm going to check is his relationship status because I want to know if he is available or not. If he posts some photos of himself, it will be perfect, because then I can

tell from his photos his style of dressing, which brands he likes, what kind of cafes he likes to go to [...] But I don't like a boy taking and posting too many selfies. If he overdoes it, I will think he is a little bit self-absorbed. (Meilian, a female Master's student in Adelaide)

Like Meilian, Jun Yang reviews girls' posts and albums to find information about their daily habits and routines, their likes and dislikes:

I like following hot girls (辣妹, *Lamei*). I'm very interested in checking their albums. I want to know what kind of girl she is. Is she hot in her daily life as well? Does she go to parties a lot, what does she usually do on weekends? (Jun Yang, a male Master's student in Melbourne)

Unlike Meilian and Jun Yang who focus on people's posts online, Ivy pays more attention to the person's number of followers:

If I find a guy who has more than 500 followers, or at least he has got more active followers than I do, I would think that he must be popular. Either his writing or his photos must be attractive. I like making friends with someone who is popular online. (Ivy, a Master's student in Melbourne)

This suggests that Ivy thinks the ability to make yourself popular online reflects personal presentation skills and attractiveness. Other participants agree with Ivy, as they regard the number of followers people have on social media as a standard that shows how popular they are.

Among the 21 participants I followed and observed on Sina Weibo, the highest number of accounts followed is 1075, while the least is 77. The participant with the

greatest number of followers has 799 followers; while with the one who has the least followers has 67 followers. Some participants have more followers than the accounts he/she follows. A person who follows less does not mean he/she has fewer followers. When they start using a platform, some participants try to follow as many people as they can with the hope that people who they follow will eventually follow them back, with the sole aim of making their accounts look even more popular.

The awareness about potential readers is an important dimension of using social media. According to Vlčková (1996, p. 89) 'Personal advertisements are texts, or rather, pieces of communication, in which the writer ("speaker") is addressing an unknown "ideal" reader ("listener").' In this sense, posting on Weibo is like posting a personal advertisement online. Self-presentation is of great importance in personal advertisements, since it affects the readers' interpretation and reaction towards the information the writer wants to convey (Goffman 1959; Rao, Schmidt & Murray 1995). Furthermore, by studying people's personal advertisements on dating websites and in mate their partners' selection strategies, scholars find that online personal impression management is affected by preferences about the expected message receiver. In other words, people try to manage their self-image in accordance with their preferences about an ideal partner (de Sousa Campos, Otta & de Oliveira Siqueira 2002; Ye 2006; Zanna & Pack 1975). I found evidence of self-presentation strategies that were developed in response to potential readers in my ethnography. For example, self-presentation is important for Xiaofang:

I like people who run their social media 'seriously'. I mean, people who put their hearts into designing and managing their homepage and who are willing

to spend time interacting with their friends. (Xiaofang, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

Xiaofang indicates the attitude she thinks someone should take towards managing their social media account, but she also says that she does not think people should waste too much time 'decorating' their online profile, and they should 'definitely not expect too much from the reactions of your followers.' This goes along with boyd's finding, 'conversations happen on profiles and a person's profile reflects their engagement with the site' (2010, p. 4). People's profiles and homepages on social media reflect their character and are the first things that a follower looks at. For Xiaofang, an individual's homepage is an important part of her analysis of the person's online presentation, and it allows her to reflect more on the person's offline presentation.

On Weibo, one can read threaded conversations. One can also track down the comments associated with the posts. As Postill (2011, p. 107) discussed 'threaded discourse is not monological it is polylogical', people have to analyse one's posts through different comments and replies in order to figure out the thoughts and emotions that one shares on Weibo. This is quite convenient and simple for young adults who are eagerly trying to find out what type of person he or she admires superficially.

Unfriending an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend on social media has become a formal ritual to end a relationship (Gershon 2010a). For example, as a self-presenting 'exhibition hall' (Hogan 2010), similar to Weibo, WeChat Moments may record our various feelings and experiences over the past few years. Every message we send

originally relies on the special context and emotional experience at that time. But if others look at the posts we posted a few years ago in the Moments, the emotional experience back then does not last for now, in this way, we are more likely to be misunderstood. Therefore young people choose to either delete their previous posts on WeChat Moments and Weibo or set their WeChat Moments as three-day-visible or half-year-visible.

One participant complained that he has no idea how to chat with his girlfriend online.

I can't see her face. I can't analyse her facial expressions. I never know if she is happy with the topic or not. I might have pissed off a lot of people but I have not realized it because we were chatting online [...] For example, jokes that I think are totally innocent but may sound unsuitable to my girlfriend.

Without the face to face interaction, this participant finds it challenging to understand his friend's feelings during the conversations they have through messaging online.

### ***Computer-mediated communication and dating***

Computer-mediated communication (CMC hereafter) has been debated by many researchers for over thirty years. Despite the hesitations expressed by some of the participants in my study, based on Wong's (2014) and other CMC related research (Ramirez, Fleuriot & Cole 2014; Tong & Walther 2011a, 2011b), I argue that there are five advantages that CMC provides to online dating:

1. Online communication is distance-independent. Young adults living overseas can chat with their partners who are in different locations.

2. Compared with face to face communication, which is always synchronous, asynchronous online communication often does not require the participants to process the conversation immediately. In other words, typically interlocutors have time to think before reacting.
3. Online platforms like Weibo and Facebook can reduce the anxiety surrounding the introductory phase between two potential partners, as each one can review the other's profile page to collect some basic information like date of birth, star constellation, hobbies and so on. Also by reviewing each other's online profiles and posts, people are able to pick up some common topics to chat about and therefore help smooth their relationship development.
4. Online dating is likely to reduce dating expenses prior to the decision about either forming or not forming an offline relationship. Instead of constantly going out to have meals and other activities that cost money, for instance, shopping, watching movies and etc. to get to know each other, people could 'chat it out' with their potential partner online.
5. CMC is effective in providing different forms of communication, such as exchanging photos, emails, voice messages, video chats and the recent popular form of sexting (Gómez & Meyer 2012; Mitchell et al. 2012; Strassberg et al. 2013), which gives people multiple opportunities to present their talent and skills, for example, writing skills presented by writing emails and creating provoking and thoughtful posts, sweet and sexy voices presented by exchanging voice messages and doing video chats.

A participant doesn't have to be online at the specific time that people send a message, even if he or she is displayed as being available online. But, when talking in person, you have to give an immediate reaction as the conversation continues, because your interlocutor is looking as you are looking at him or her. Some participants do not like pressure or being pushed to give immediate reaction in a face to face conversation. As a result, they prefer online communication.

After reviewing my interview transcripts and analysing my participants' stories in detail, I will now explore several interesting points resulting from the previous discussions. Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne, told me why she was a big fan of chatting online:

One of the many reasons that I like exploring and finding people to chat with on Weibo is that I feel quite relaxed when chatting with my friends or strangers online. Although Weibo is supposed to be a simultaneous media platform, I don't have to immediately reply to my friends' private messages. Even when my status shows 'I am online', I can still do something else offline. OK, let me put it this way. If a boy asked me 'Would you like to go out with me on weekends?' when we are talking in person, I would feel quite embarrassed and pressured to think in front of him, especially when the answer might be a 'No' [...] In this case, I would prefer him to ask me by a private message. (Katy, an undergraduate student in Melbourne)

The reason Katy likes chatting online is because it is more flexible and relaxed. Other participants in my study also enjoy their online communication and online social life via the channels of social media:

Well, I find that when chatting online, I become more able to talk about intimate topics with my partner. If we were talking face to face, I wouldn't be able to, I might feel too embarrassed. But online, I feel free to discuss those topics with her. (Yonggang, a male PhD student in Melbourne)

Yonggang gives us an insight about his self-disclosure in the CMC context of online communication. Building on previous research (Henderson & Gilding 2004; McKenna 2008), Gibbs, Ellison and Lai (2010) argue that '[...]anonymity, shared interests, and lack of physical presence may contribute to a greater likelihood to disclose online, which, in turn, may lead to the development of liking and intimacy among online interactants' (p. 75), which in Yonggang's case, except that they are not anonymous, the other two factors (shared interests and lack of physical presence) both play a part.

Meilian elaborates:

Sometimes, with friends who are not very close, the way we chat online is quite flirty. I mean, I don't do it on purpose, but you know, when chatting online, you might ask what the other is doing, and the other replies, 'I just had a shower', or 'I'm getting dressed'... Well, I find that flirty, because if, late at night, we talk in person, these kinds of answers would be weird or inappropriate. But as it is online, we both know we can't see each other, we just answer the questions. (Meilian, a female Master's student in Adelaide)

Like Meilian, many other participants explore the same question, 'why do I feel intimate with people with whom I am not close but with whom I have been chatting online for a while?' Driscoll and Gregg (2008) point out:



[K]nowing from a Twitter tweet, or a status change or just the habits of long-term intimacy when certain people or groups tend to go to bed, wake up or come home from work, and the conversion of such patterns across time zones, facilitates a different sort of intimacy than the telephone or any kind of mail (Driscoll & Gregg 2008, p. 134).

### **A show of affection on social media**

If I'm happy and having fun with my boyfriend, I don't have time to think about posting something on my social media [...] You are having fun and you don't want to be bothered to Photoshop your happy face or be interrupted from chatting and laughing with your boyfriend to wonder how many people will like your posts or what they would comment on it. (Lanlan, a female Master's student in Melbourne)

When young adults are involved in a relationship, many like to 'display it on the stage', which means to show their intimate relationship online. Social media have been recognised as a 'suitable' place for showing public displays of affection. Considering most of their friends are on their social media followers' list, it is as if the audience is seated in the theatre waiting for a romantic show to start (Goffman 1959):

The moment when I want to use social media most is when I feel lonely and bad. I'm here studying in Melbourne all by myself. My boyfriend's working in China. I always hoped that social media could make me feel better, but it turns out most of the time it makes me feel even worse [...] Too many smiley

faces up there, everyone seems like they are having a really wonderful time with their lovers. But are they really happy? Those smiley faces are actually big lies! You wouldn't know that the next second after she posted she was dumped. How could you tell? (Bella, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

Once people start putting their romantic stories online it is hard to keep it perfectly honest; people manage to show only the cheerful side rather than the whole story. Besides, the audience are not easily convinced about all those smiley faces and happy moments:

I sometimes cry and talk to him on the phone. I saw my friend's posts, right now she is having lunch with her boyfriend at the beach. They look super sweet, and I want that too. Where are you??? When can we have some time together? (Bella, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

Another participant shared an example of how her bestie's one post on WeChat Moments affected her feelings and even caused her to pick a fight with her 'innocent' boyfriend who was in China.

I was scanning my WeChat Moments and a photo of a table with five dishes and two pairs of chopsticks suddenly attracted my attention. I had another look at the post and realized it was posted by my bestie with one sentence below the photo, saying that, 'My sweetheart is the world's No. 1 best cook! I am soooooo lucky to be with him...' Normally I am happy for her but that day I was just soooooo unhappy and annoyed to see that. I was thinking why her boyfriend knew how to cook but mine only knew how to eat... it is so

unfair!!! Her boyfriend can cook for her whenever she is tired but I have to look after myself, do all the hard work and the cooking and... everything all by myself while having my BOYFRIEND millions of miles away?! I immediately picked up my mobile and made a phone call to argue with my 'sour-heart'...my boyfriend.

Apparently, not everyone is happy to see other people making public displays of affection for their lovers on social media. From my interviews, participants who are currently in a relationship are more open to this showing-off phenomenon as they usually 'like' such posts but of course, people's acceptance and sensitivity towards the show-of-affection are different and not everyone is able to distinguish others' purposes behinds the show-of-affection on social media. Therefore seeing others showing off affection on social media can cause meaningless fights and quarrels between couples simply by comparing with other people's display of love story (Davies 2014). Recently there is a popular meme online called '别人的男朋友/女朋友' which means 'someone else's boyfriend/girlfriend', to describe the online phenomenon that it always seems that other people's boyfriend/girlfriend always look better than one's own.

### **Seeking advice and justice**

Studying and working overseas is not easy for any young adult. When young adults living overseas have trouble with their relationships, few of them seek their parents' opinions. Based on my interview materials, I outline three reasons for this behaviour. First, if they let their parents know, their parents will simply suggest that they end the relationship and start a new one. Second, they don't want their parents to worry

about them being unhappy. Third, they try to work out their own relationship issues as adults without the help or opinions of their parents. Female participants are more likely to follow relationship experts on Weibo and listen to the advice of experts in dealing with their relationship problems. In Chinese dating culture, traditionally girls are supposed to be more passive when engaged with a romantic relationship. Boys are supposed to be the positive 'chaser'. However, on social media, people play by different rules, everyone is supposed to be equal when it comes for finding love. Under this media ecology, female participants become more willing and active in presenting not only their love to their partners but also their complaints. On Weibo, sweetness and bitterness can be expressed side-by-side.

I seldom mention (@) him on Weibo, but I clearly remember that the day before I left China for Australia, we had a big fight. I was so mad at him. Then I posted a status talking about how sad and mad I was feeling and then I @ him at the end of my post... Surprisingly, it worked, and he apologised under my post. Later on, when I calmed down, I deleted that piece of post.

(Xiaofang, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

Some other female participants have similar experiences to those of Xiaofang. They suggest that since they have common friends with their boyfriends on social media, if they post something, like complaining about what their boyfriend has done wrong, and mention his name on the post, the boyfriend, having been exposed to the public online audience, will feel quite pressured and embarrassed, and fearful that some of his friends will criticize him for being a bad boyfriend. In this situation, the boyfriend will choose to apologize as soon as possible.

## Conclusion

Having a healthy and stable relationship is very important for an international young adult's wellbeing. Being far away from local friends and families, young adults can easily live an isolated and introspective life. By using social media to reach out for relationships, young adults can explore new social circles and break through the limitations of a smaller pool of candidates. With the functional features of social media, young adults can track their potential partners' life histories online and observe their partners from many angles. When attempting to maintain a relationship, young adults like to show their affection online; but they also treat social media as a platform where they can seek advice and justice for controversies in their relationship.

However, it is hard to gain a complete picture of someone's personality merely by reading their posts. Not everyone has the same personality online and offline. Some people may present themselves differently online to how they normally behave offline. In most cases people intend to establish a positive self-image on their social media. When commenting on specific issues, people sometimes become more open and more aggressive online, but that does not mean these people are aggressive in their daily lives.

Unlike spontaneous interactions on phone calls and face-to-face communication in 'real time', the computer screen is a shield protecting young adults from unpredictable embarrassment, pressure, shyness and immediacy (Turkle 2012). One is able to friend and unfriend anyone on social media and even to pull someone into the blacklist to clear up all the upsets. Young adults, reaching out for a relationship,

use social media to find out about the history and personal life of their potential partner with curiosity and affection. They think chatting online can decrease nervousness and can help them think calmly. Social media help young adults overcome the anxiety of talking to the opposite gender. Moreover, most people prefer to discuss deep loving questions online than face-to-face (see McDonald 2016). As mentioned several times in this chapter, my participants' dating experiences and marital choices have been influenced largely by their parents. In the next chapter, I will focus on my participants' relationships with their parents by starting to look at how they 'friend' their parents on social media.

## Chapter 5: Friending your parents

### Introduction

*'Slice the fish into even slices, not too thick or too thin, just evenly...and be careful of your fingers!'*

*'Thank you, Mum! Does this look good?'*

*'Yes! Now check the water, see if it has boiled. When it has boiled put the fish in and add some shredded ginger and a teaspoon of cooking wine...'*

*'...and keep boiling it until the soup turns white! See, I can cook fish soup now!'*

*'Yes, my baby and don't forget to season the soup with salt and pepper before you have it!'*

This is the scenario of a daily conversation between one of my participants, Hongmei, and her mother. The conversation is face to face, but it is conducted online via a mobile webcam. Hongmei and her mother are thousands of miles apart. Although Hongmei is currently studying in Melbourne and her parents are living in China, she 'invites' her mother to the kitchen to give her 'cooking tutorials' every time she tries to cook a new dish. Sending the invitation is as simple as starting a video call on WeChat. Hongmei said, 'I started my cooking adventure with my mother on the other end of the camera.'

Generally speaking, people's family life involves both mediated and non-mediated interactions (Clark 2012). The family lives of migrants are dependent on communication media since they are geographically separated (Madianou & Miller 2013). When my participants try to contact their parents in China, most of those who have access to the Internet prefer to video chat with their parents online. They can video chat with each other anywhere and anytime. In the video chat, they show their parents around Melbourne while traveling by tram, and ask their parents for advice about choosing fresh vegetables and fruit in the markets. Moving overseas for further education or for better employment is a major turning point for many young adults from China. Through the process of this life change, most young adults have to deal with two types of relationships, intimate relationships and parent-child relationships. Unlike intimate relationships which are visible online, as discussed in the previous chapter, the parent-child relationship normally takes place behind the scenes. It is invisible but quite observable to a participant-observer like me who is given access to participants' daily life situations. From my observation, I am able to tell how my participants' parent-child relationship has been reflected in their day-to-day social media practices.

Previous researchers have examined the parent-child relationship from the perspective of parenting, with a focus on geographically separated families. Many scholars have studied transnational parenting between Filipino parents who have migrated and the children they have left behind (Fresnoza-flot 2009; Madianou 2012; Madianou & Miller 2011, 2013; Parreñas 2001, 2005, 2008; Taylor 2008; Zentgraf &



Chinchilla 2012). Meanwhile, other scholars have examined this issue in other countries such as Vietnam (Hoang & Yeoh 2012); Mexico (Dreby 2006; Nobles 2011); Italy (Ambrosini 2015); or Jamaica (Brown & Grinter 2012). Most of these studies, with the exception of Parreñas (2008) and Waters (2010), who studied the role a father plays when parenting across national borders, focus on mothering or motherhood in the process of transnational parenting.

In this chapter, I study the parent–child relationship from the child’s perspective in a transnational parenting context involving Chinese international students in Australia.

I wish to examine situations in which children are away from their parents and familiar circumstances as a result of having moved to live in a new environment. I refer to other studies that also focus on the child’s perspective in order to make better sense of what my participants were experiencing when living overseas with their parents remaining in China. Smith et al. (2012) explore how college freshmen stay connected with their parents by using multiple media. They don’t study international students instead they focus on a group of American students from one single university. However, the results they find are very similar to some of my findings about how international young adults use multimedia tools to stay connected with the parents they left behind. Stewart Titus (2012) study how young adult children from Jamaica who are studying or working overseas communicate with the parents left behind in the home country. Conclude from the research data, the author addresses that ICTs have been used as ‘coping mechanisms to overcome family separation’ (Stewart Titus 2012, p. 15), which coincides with my study.

Intense communication via ICTs has enriched family relations by enabling developmental milestones and social rituals shared as a connected presence between parents and children. The concept of 'remote parenting' has replaced 'remote mothering', referring to parents caring for children while away from home (Rakow & Navarro 1993; Christensen 2009; Stewart Titus 2012). Unlike the studies of polymedia in remote parenting when parents migrated and left their children behind (Madianou 2012; Madianou & Miller 2013; Peng & Wong 2013; San Pascual 2014), I examine the impact of moving overseas on the relationships of young adults with their parents back in China. I argue that what develops over time is a remotely conducted, polymediated and mutual caring relationship between the parents who are left behind and their migrant children. Geographical distance and social media allow parents and the child to develop a more mature and friendly relationship through friending on social media. They actively seek out various forms of social media including WeChat messages, voice call, video chat and etc. in order to create opportunities for communication. In some respects, parents who are left behind communicate with their child who has migrated almost as peers or friends, mutually caring one another online by sharing information and knowledge of foreign cultures, daily life and future plans. In the digital era, geographical distance creates more opportunities for polymediated communication among separated family members. Paradoxically, in some cases this can increase the quality and frequency of communication, thereby strengthening the parent-child bond. By communicating via multiple media channels with a child who has migrated, parents are in effect

collecting information about their child's day to day life in a foreign country. In addition, most parents 'friend' their child on social media, and are thus able to observe their child's online behaviour. As part of an ongoing process of group decision-making, parents try to collect enough information to make a strategic decision together with their child about the child's future plans.

This chapter has three sections. The first section discusses the friending relationships between young adults who have migrated and their parents. The second focuses on how parents collect information about their child's foreign life by communicating on social media. The last section explores how young adults make decisions together with their parents about their future plans.

### **Friending and training your parents**

Media literacy is an important factor affecting how my participants, as both a content producer and recipient, exploit different media affordances when dealing with different interpersonal relationships through online communication. A widely accepted definition of media literacy has been made by Christ and Potter in 1998 as 'the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts' (p. 7). In the digital media and communication environment, media literacy emphasizes the understanding, comprehension, critique and creation of media materials (Livingstone 2004; Livingstone & Graaf 2010). Most of my participants were born in between 1980s and 1990s. They are the generation who witnesses the development of Internet and social media along with their growth.

In this section I provide an analytical description of how young adults train their parents to communicate using social media to maintain close family ties based on my fieldwork. Titus (2012) observed that

The ICTs were being used as coping mechanisms to overcome family separation. The new connected presence reduced the pain of separation for adolescents in a foreign country, as most of them were leaving home and their home country for the first time. Based on the ease of this ICT-enabled connectivity, there was the potential for sharing emotional and social capital between these temporary immigrants and their families and friends in their home country. (Stewart Titus 2012, p. 15)

I found evidence that the participants in my ethnography were training their parents in social media because they thought it would be a good way to stay in close touch through a different type of communication. This is similar to what Madianou and Miller (2012) found in their ethnography that many Filipina migrant mothers and grandmothers developed their media literacy skills precisely for the purpose of being able to communicate with their children living overseas.

Before Tingting, a Master's student in Melbourne, left China, she registered two WeChat accounts for her parents. Tingting likes using WeChat and thought it would be great if she and her parents could stay in touch on WeChat while she was studying in Melbourne. Tingting checks her WeChat every now and then, much more

frequently than she checks her emails or other social media accounts. Tingting told me she trained her mother to use WeChat as well:

I friended my parents on WeChat and then I gave my mum a 'tutorial' on the different functions of WeChat [...] For example, I stayed in my bedroom and sent a message to my mum on WeChat telling her that I was hungry. She then replied 'come to the kitchen, dinner is ready', not with a text message but with a voice message! We also practised doing video chats, voice calls, how to use Moments (朋友圈, *Pengyouquan*) to post photos and like each other's posts [...] My mum did quite well and she really appreciated that I helped her pick up new technology. I think she is a fast learner.

Using social media to stay in touch with friends and families back home is very convenient and also very economical compared to making international phone calls. For many young adults, ever since going overseas to work or study, social media have become the most important connection between them and their parents. Most of the participants in this research friended their parents on WeChat before they went overseas, in order to keep in touch with them. On WeChat, people can exchange photos, text messages, voice messages, and conduct video chats.

Bella is a PhD student in Melbourne who also relies on social media to maintain family communication. Here are the reasons why her mother prefers to use WeChat rather than any other media platforms to contact her daughter:

My mum is a big fan of voice messages. She doesn't like texting, because she thinks that sending voice messages can save her hands from typing *Pinyin* (拼音). She sends me voice messages on WeChat while doing other stuff, such as knitting or cooking.

Some participants told me that their parents make posts on their WeChat Moments, send friends greetings and messages via WeChat, but when it comes to contacting their child, for the first place, their parents prefer to keep the tradition of making phone calls. It is not because their parents dislike social media, it is just a reflection of their using habits. According to my participants, some of their parents are simply used to the practice of making phone calls with their son/daughter. The parents are aware that they can make a voice call online via WeChat but when coming to the need of talking to their child, the first thing that comes up to their mind is making a traditional phone call. My participants recall that in addition to the time difference between Australia and China, they sometimes have classes or work shift in the evening, therefore their parents are not sure when they are available to have a video chat. Besides when my participants turn off their mobile data or Wi-Fi, no WeChat message could be delivered to them, whereas a traditional phone call is able to reach them anytime. Considering the expense of the international phone calls, it is economically practical to make voice calls via WeChat, hence many parents just make a very short phone call to set up with their children of the time and date for their video chat on WeChat.

The use of WeChat for family communication is complex and variable. Meilian, who is a Master's student in Adelaide, would prefer not to have her parents on her friends' list. She told her parents that they could use WeChat in any way they liked, but not to try to add her as their friend on WeChat. 'Instead of WeChat, we use Facetime. Since we both have Wi-Fi, we can simply use Facetime from our iPhones... I don't want to make things difficult and complicated', she said. If her parents became her friends on WeChat, she feels that their extended family dynamics would change. She told me that were she to put her aunts, uncles and siblings on her lists of friends, 'they'd all start sending me friends' requests... and I'd have to accept them all... I know they care about me very much, and because I'm now studying in Australia and we barely see each other once a year, I'm sure they miss me a lot. I miss them too.' In traditional Chinese culture, the extrapolation of kinship is the starting point of interpersonal communication (Ho 1998a, 1998b). Social media breaks this tradition. Young adults nowadays are able to make friends with anyone online. They don't need to meet people through the introduction of their relatives. Introducing by acquaintances is no longer the only way to make friends. However, parents and relatives of young people believe that making friends should start with relatives and family members, so relatives and families are eager to ask their children to add them on their friend list.

Friending one's parents carries the risk of being monitored, which is consistent with Boyd's findings, 'it is more socially costly to include these individuals than it is to include less intimate ties' (Boyd 2010, p. 5).

Some families have experienced the rapid development of Chinese social media, and they have used QQ, MSN, Skype, Renren and Weibo. But now most of them have turned to WeChat to communicate with their family members across the borders. Although WeChat and other social media platforms provide young adults with a convenient way to stay in touch with their families, the frequency of contacting parents can be quite different from one participant to another. Most female participants contact their parents on a daily basis, while male participants talk to their parents once or twice a week. The longer they have been living in Australia, the less frequently they contact their parents. Weiyong, a Master's student in Canberra, had this to say about the process:

When I had just arrived Melbourne, I talked to my mum almost every day, and then as I settled down, the frequency of our video chat went down from once a day to four times a week, then two times, and now only once a week.

Ruisheng, a Master's student in Melbourne, considers his academic work to be his priority. He has figured out a simple but quite efficient way to communicate with his parents without phoning or video chatting, which is to 'like' his parents' posts on WeChat Moments on a daily basis:

No matter what my mum or dad posts on their WeChat Moments, I press the 'like' button. I 'like' their posts every day. By doing that, I feel like we are saying hello to each other in a very quick and convenient way. When I'm busy with my study or my work, I don't want to be interrupted by phone calls,



and I normally switch off the Wi-Fi on my mobile so I can fully concentrate on my work. During little breaks I have a quick scan of WeChat Moments to check my friends' updates. By 'liking' my parents' posts on a daily basis, we don't need to call each other. They know I'm still alive and we follow our weekly phone call routine, which means I call them once a week.

Some female participants argue that exchanging photos with their parents is a good way of sharing their life together, considering that they are physically separated and cannot experience events together:

I love taking photos. One of the reasons is that I want to show my parents what I eat, what I wear and what I see in Australia. I don't want them to worry about me, I want to show them [...] that I'm doing alright here. I know my mum misses me a lot, so I try to send her as many photos as I can... I don't post photos on my social media, but I send my parents a lot of my selfies and photos taken together with my friends. (Hongmei, a female Master's student in Melbourne)

My parents send me a lot of photos, especially when they travel with their friends. I like getting their photos. Although I can't travel with them, I do want to share their happiness. I want to see that they are enjoying themselves with their friends. (Lanlan, a female Master's student in Melbourne)

Smith et al. (2012) conclude that when choosing a tool to connect with their parents, young adults take into consideration the 'specific attributes of the conversation – its purpose, priority, depth and length' (p. 5). Miller et al. (2016) addresses that scalable socialities in different social media platforms correspond to greater or lesser privacy and smaller or larger groups, which represent pre-existing social and cultural norms. They found that platforms are 'associated with specific genres of communication which people see as appropriate for the group engaged with that particular platform' (p. 6). Here in this chapter, I argue that even when using one particular platform, i.e. WeChat, to contact one's parents, my participants choose to use alternative functions or features within the platform based on the specific issue (i.e. living expenses, relationship issues, academic problems and etc.) that they aim to communicate with their parents, both the mother and the father or prefer one parent than the other. It is more like the scalable socialities within the functions of one platform. It is a learning process for both the young adults who have migrated and their parents to figure out the best patterns and modes of communication for using alternative social media tools. During the interviews, I asked my participants to reflect on how they communicated with their parents before and after moving to Australia. They realized that moving overseas helped improve their communication with their parents. When they lived together with their parents, although they had daily conversations face to face, ongoing conflicts did exist. Going overseas brought new dynamics to their parent–child relationship. The first dynamic is that of *geographical distance*, as young adults are physically away from their parents. The

second one is *temporal distance*, as young adults operate in different time zones from their parents and cannot communicate with their parents all day long. The last one is *technological distance*, as young adults use multiple media platforms to mediate communication with their parents (Smith 2012). Therefore, it is good for both the child and the parents to mediate their relationship from a long distance with different social media platforms. Furthermore, the children are transitioning to adulthood and this is also contributing to them developing new relationships with their parents, and social media is facilitating this change.

For most families, the foundation of the family relationship consists of the provision of emotional and moral support (Baldassar 2007). Mothers and fathers play different roles in parenting, thus the way the participants communicate with their mothers usually differs from the way they communicate with their fathers. Mothers play a more caring role, while fathers tend to supervise and encourage their children's study and work (Cabanés & Acedera 2012; Stewart Titus 2012). Throughout my fieldwork, I discovered that the topics a young adult chooses to talk about with his/her mother are different from the ones they would discuss with the father. It largely depends on the role their mothers and fathers play in the family. For example, here is a compilation of how a number of my research participants talk to their mothers:

I complain about how tired/exhausted I am; I ask for a recipe; I talk about my boyfriend/girlfriend; or I will wait for mum to ask; I talk about what I wear; I

talk about what I want to buy; I ask what mum has been watching on TV recently; I ask about my grandparents; I ask for news about my friends; I talk about what I eat; mum asks if I slept well; mum asks when will I go back home to China.

By contrast, these are the topics they discuss with their fathers:

I ask for money; Dad asks me about my study; we talk business; I ask my Dad to do some favour for me, i.e. find a document; we talk about news/politics/social issues; we talk about my future career.

Young adults who used to rely on their parents greatly still rely on their parents even after travelling overseas. They continue to turn to their parents for help even knowing that their parents are thousands of miles away. After they travelled to Australia, their 'reliable' relationships with their parents moved to social media such as WeChat. When some of my participants are about to cook a meal and are not sure of the recipe, they video call their mothers and put the mobile aside to let their mothers teach them how to cook the dish. This is the scenario of Hongmei's daily conversation with her mother at the beginning of this chapter. By placing the mobile where their mothers are able to see them, they try to create an environment of co-presence. They feel that their mothers are actually physically co-present with them even though they are digitally co-present.

During Australia's winter, the time difference between China and Melbourne is two hours. For example, when my participants finish at their universities and return

home and get ready to have dinner, it is about 7 pm, which is 5 pm in China. This means that they are able to have dinner together with their parents by setting up a video chat and placing the mobile where everyone can see each other. Some parents like to keep company with my participants when my participants are writing their assignments. My participant can be writing his/her assignment while his/her mum is on the webcam doing knitting or watching TV. Some of my participants are happy about this as they think that this 'family time webcam' connection makes them feel as if they are not living far from their parents. However, a few participants do not think this is a good idea. They argue that they will miss their parents even more if they have many conversations which are only digitally co-present as they are still physically separated. Chambers makes a similar argument (2013, p. 118): 'webcam can give the illusion of co-presence and a reminder of separation.'

### **Mutual caring**

To friend your parent on social media can be the first step of accepting your parents as friends. The process of 'friending your parents' makes participants feel that their parents are similar to their peers, who have to wait for permission to get into their 'social media world'. Using social media to stay in touch with parents changes the dynamics in the parent-child relationship. It makes young adults feel that they are standing on a stage, on a digital platform, where they are equal to their parents.

There are participants who complained that their parents think when communicating with their children, they should maintain the so-called parents'

dignity. Therefore their parents are not very adapted to use social media to communicate with them. Their parents feel that when communicating with their children via social media, they are too equal-just like a normal friend, which is not helpful when the parents want to have some serious discussions with their children. Of course, some parents, on the contrary, are more inclined to communicate with their children on social media, and are willing to become friends with their children in this fashionable and modern way.

Gradually the adjustment to this new style of communication improves the parent-child relationship by making the relationship more open and mature. Young adults begin to discuss issues with their parents almost as if they were friends. In particular, within this friendly environment, parents are able to listen to the deeper thoughts of their children who are living in a different country. This feeling of equality and friendly environment—bring new dynamics into the parent-child relationship, but will not change the family power dynamics; may have some influence on it but only in a very limited period. Take an example from my personal experience: when I first taught my mother how to use WeChat, I felt like I was the boss of the family—I knew everything. But that feeling soon passed. When my mother mastered WeChat and made her first video chat with me, she reclaimed her crown. Family power dynamic is much more complicated, it relates to the parenting style in each household.

Drawing from the Baumrind theory of parenting, there are four parenting styles: indulgent, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved (Baumrind 1991). To have the child live overseas and to conduct the parent-child communication based on social

media, some parents start to adjust their parenting styles along with this new experience while others remain the same.

I gradually realized through my fieldwork that 'food and safety' (rather than 'health and safety') is one of the most fundamental topics that concerns both young adults who have migrated and the parents that they have left behind. First of all, parents want to know that their child is safe and healthy overseas. In the context of Chinese culture, when people talk about health or being healthy, the first thing that springs to mind is food. Thus, in the communication between young adults who have migrated and their parents who have been left behind, talking about food is always a good start to a conversation. 'Did you eat your breakfast?' 'Do you eat regularly?' 'What did you have for dinner?' After these initial questions, the parents will continue and ask, 'Who did you have dinner with? Just by yourself? Where?' Gradually from food they will move on to academic performance and career paths. 'Since you got all the nutrition, keep up with your study!'

As parents are concerned with their children's safety, they pay more attention to the news of the country in which their child is currently living:

If my parents see any Australian news on TV they will bring it up in conversation... especially if it is bad news, for example, an accident. They want me to stay safe [...] but sometimes, they just want to check with me to make sure that the news is true [...] I remember once my mum said that before I went overseas she only paid attention to Chinese news on TV or

newspapers. After I went to England for my Master's, she started paying attention to what was happening in England, and now that I have come to Melbourne, she has become even busier. She has to know what is currently happening in Australia. Meanwhile, she also keeps an eye on England.

Interestingly enough, many participants talk about the weather with their parents.

When people are living in different locations, people want to create a feeling of co-presence (Madianou 2016; Baldassar 2008, 2016). Temperature is something that people can build a connection with:

Melbourne has a funny weather. When I video chat with my mum, I sometimes have to explain why I'm wearing a coat when my mum saw me wearing shorts just the day before.

We want to feel how the other is feeling on the other side of earth, so we talk about the temperature. If I tell you I'm freezing cold, you won't feel too much, but if I tell you it is minus twenty here, I feel freezing cold, then you will understand how cold I'm feeling. You might even feel really cold yourself.

When young adults travel overseas to study leaving their parents behind in China, parenting becomes invisible and remote. Many scholars conclude that Chinese young adults living overseas are carefully 'looked after' by their parents in China (Chao 1994; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns 1998). However, in my fieldwork I found that young adults living overseas also look after their parents. They make use of social media to alleviate their parents' concerns about their lifestyle by presenting positive



images online to show that they are engaging in responsible behaviours, as well as showing how they are paying attention to their parents' advice and admonitions. They use social media to show that they are being dutiful and respectful children even though they are away from their parents. Moreover, throughout all of these online interactions, migrant children and their parents try to make family decisions together to solve problems such as determining what these young adults are going to do with their lives, including in which country to live, which career path to follow, and what kind of partner they will marry. This process of family decision-making 'results from the conflicts in obligation, expectation, and beliefs among family members' (Xia et al. 2004, p. 121).

Young adults who friend their parents on social media are allowing their parents to observe their social media practices, so they can communicate and make decisions in a shared system (Reiss 1981; Xia et al. 2004). Sometimes they post certain things to present their parents with certain information they want to convey to them, as they know their parents are reading their posts carefully:

I would not post things like that I feel my course work is very hard, or how lonely I feel since coming here. I don't want to make my parents regret sending me overseas; they have already done a lot for me. I can deal with my feelings and I know I'll be alright. (Nancy, PhD student in Melbourne)

Every time I want to post anything negative, I give it a second thought simply because my parents are on my friends list... I'm not scared of them finding

out what I have done, I just don't want them to worry about me. For example, after I broke up with my girlfriend, I wanted to have a few drinks with my friends. I was not going get badly drunk, I just wanted to have some shots. But if I post a photo of me drinking together with my friends, I'm pretty sure that my parents would call me to check what is happening. In their minds, they would come up with a terrible story that I'm on the way to becoming an alcoholic! (Dawei, Master's student in Melbourne)

Dawei told me that he once forgot to set up the privacy setting before he posted a picture of himself sitting at a table together with a number of empty wine and beer bottles. He was having a party with some friends, so they drank a lot of wine and beer. However, he thought he would like to make the picture look as if he was the one who had drunk all the bottles. So, he cleared the table of glasses, plates and chopsticks, removed other chairs, and made it look as if he was sitting there by himself with all the empty bottles:

That was fun! Now time for cleaning...Hmm...not in the mood.

Bottles, bottles, everywhere...it might be cool to show them how much I drank...hahaha...

Photo, taken! Uploading... Great, now, I'll hit the post button, and I will be the guy who drank all these bottles...hold on... I should write something to go with the photo too. How about 'life is hard' or 'I am all alone' ... Hmm, don't

bother, a photo is enough, it says everything... Now I can go on cleaning and come back to see the comments.

This short vignette describes Dawei's mental activity after he had a party with his friends and was about to clear the table. Unfortunately, the picture he posted was seen by his parents and other relatives, and it took him hours to explain to them that he was not an alcoholic and that he was simply joking. Nonetheless his parents still worried about him. When he explained the whole story, his parents warned him to take down the photo from his WeChat Moments, because the relatives who didn't know the background story of the photo might get a bad impression.

The way that my participants communicate with their parents is also influenced by their friends. They discuss how to meet their parents' needs by using social media with their peers. What are the pros and cons? Should they block their parents or not? Should they set up a privacy setting to stop their parents from seeing some negative posts? Young adults practise such ways of using social media with their boyfriends or girlfriends or friends initially, and then apply these experiences to their parent-child communication.

Young adults invent new rules of privacy and boundaries when communicating with their parents on social media. They avoid topics they do not want to discuss by selecting an alternative media tool to help them avoid the awkwardness.

Xinyi, a third-year accounting student in Melbourne, told me how she tried to hide her boyfriend from her parents:

My parents want me to go back to China when I graduate. So they have suggested that I shouldn't have any boyfriend unless that boy is willing to come back to China with me after my graduation. I understand one hundred percent that they are thinking of what's best for me. But, you know, when I saw him, I knew he was the one. 'Unfortunately' he is a local student, and he can't speak Chinese. I haven't asked him if he is willing to come to China with me. To some extent, I know he won't come to China [...] Anyway, on Saturday morning, my mum asked me what I was going to do on the weekend. Since I didn't want to lie to them, and I didn't want to hear them lecturing me for dating an Australian boy either, I chose to send them a message on WeChat. I texted that I was going to see some friends in the city [...] I was a bit nervous. I was worried that my mum would ask me to video chat with her. If I did, I knew she would see through me straight away. She would be able to tell from my face that I'm not just going out with some friends... I think my mum can always tell if I'm trying to lie to her or if I'm hiding anything. So, I don't want her to see my facial expressions...

Xinyi chooses different media tools to talk about different topics with her mother. She is afraid of the webcam when she tries to hide the truth from her mother. Young adults living in Australia are far from their families in China, but they regard webcam as a way that enables them to be together with their parents in the same space and at the same moment (Madianou & Miller 2011, 2013; Miller & Sinanan 2014).

Unlike other social media platforms, Chinese parents are more likely to use this mobile-based social networking application to connect with their children. For young adults, being connected with their parents on social media is similar to being observed and supervised by their parents via an online remote 'baby monitor' in their daily lives and social lives far across the world. Many participants complain that if they post anything a little too crazy or negative, their parents will call them asking what has happened and will tell them that they should delete such a 'bad' post in consideration of maintaining their 'good' self-image for their future careers. Instead, their parents may suggest that they 'say something nice and positive'. To prevent their parents from monitoring them, or to protect their parents from being influenced by their temporary mood/thoughts/feelings, some participants choose to set access permissions to block their parents from seeing crazy but temporarily real thoughts. Meanwhile, some participants feel guilty about blocking their parents, so they identify an easier solution to the 'baby monitoring' issue, by just posting good and positive information on their social media homepages. Another option is to create a family account independently from a daily socializing account and use this account to friend and contact your parents and relatives:

I put my parents into a special group, which is separate from my friends and peers [...] I can basically post anything I like on my Moments, as long as I tick the correct groups to view it. (Weiyong)

I simply start a new WeChat account, which I use only for contacting my parents. Easy and simple, and I won't get it messed up with my friends.

Family is family, friend is friend. (Nannan)

Although physically separated from their families, young adults living overseas use social media to develop new family rituals, such as celebrating a relative's housewarming party on a webcam, or celebrating their parents' birthdays by singing a happy birthday song during a video chat. Dachuan (an undergraduate student) loves doing video chat. He says that when his mother held her birthday party, he felt so happy that he was able to send his mother his blessings and best wishes via video chat on WeChat. He thought that his mother was very excited to see him during her birthday party, even though the conversation was conducted via the webcam.

Apart from on-air video chat blessings on special occasions, many young adults also prefer to post their festival greetings to their parents on the Timeline of their social media account. However, this kind of social media behaviour caused some discussion during the interviews. Ivy explained that:

[N]owadays, when Mother's Day or Father's Day comes up on my WeChat Moments, I almost always see the photos of the mothers and fathers of my friends! I just don't understand. Why do they post their parents' photos on their social media accounts? Do their parents know about that? I thought these days were designed for thanking their parents and for spending more time with their parents rather than just posting their parents' faces online!

[...] I'm not a big fan of posting my parents' photos on my social media account [...] I don't think I need to show anyone how much I love my parents. Instead, I prefer to actually spend some real, golden-family-time with my mum and dad. (Ivy, a Master's student)

Some research participants think that there are three main reasons to send good wishes to their parents and upload their parents' photos online. First, they are afraid that if they don't do it, but all of their friends are doing it, it will show that they do not show filial piety to their parents. They don't want to be judged as not caring about their parents, since their parents have raised them and have sent them away to achieve better education overseas. Second, since their parents are on their friends' list, if they did not post their mum or dad's photos, their parents will complain and say that his or her friends' child has been posting his or her parents' photos. Their parents would question them. 'Why don't you post my photos? You don't love me?' Third, some young adults do feel a little bit sad that they are not with their parents when it is Mother's Day or Father's Day. They really hope they can be co-present with their parents. They will post a photo of themselves together with their parents, i.e. an old family photo or a childhood photo with their parents, to try to make themselves feel connected and co-present with their parents (Madianou 2016; Licoppe 2004; Baldassar 2008).

But again, I do want to raise the question. Is saying Happy Mother's or Father's Day online important because they can show that they care about their parents as much

as their friends do or even more than they do? Some participants said that their parents are blocked from seeing their WeChat Moments, but they would still post 'Happy Mother's Day' online. I asked why? They said, 'Because my friends are able to see how much I love my mother.' 'But, your mum can't see it online, can she?' 'Well, my mum doesn't care about any online presence, but I do.' According to Hwang (1999) 'in addition to the authoritarian moralism of respecting the superior, filial piety also consists of an affective component emphasizing the intimacy between parents and children' (p. 179). By posting festive greetings to their parents online, participants aim to emphasize their love to their parents as a way of 'filial demonstration' (Ikels 2004). They want to establish the image of themselves as 'a reliable, trustworthy and honourable person' (Whyte 2004).

A joke that one of my participants told me about Mother's Day was that he felt he was reviewing all of his potential mother-in-laws' photos as he scanned through his friends' posts on WeChat Moments. He was analysing whose mum is good looking; whose mum looks hard to get along with; and of course whose pretty daughter may not really be pretty but only be pretty as a result of plastic surgery, because her mother does not look pretty at all.

Very few participants' grandparents know how to use video chat. So, when their parents talk to the participants, the parents try to pass on greetings from their grandparents and vice versa. When Jenny's grandma misses her, Jenny's mother makes a video call with Jenny at her grandma's place so that Jenny is able to talk to



her grandma. For Jenny, most of the time, video chat is really helpful in relieving her homesickness. However, sometimes, it is the contrary. The video chat can make Jenny miss her family even more as she recalls that 'seeing them get together having family parties on the other end of the screen brings tears to my eyes'.

McDonald (2016) argues that the presence of parents on social media was largely due to their age however according to my ethnography, it is not due to the age, but the need of using social media drives the main lead. From my fieldwork, since the young adults moved overseas, their parents have to use social media to maintain their parent-child communication. As my participants gradually settle in Australia, the topics they talk about with their parents changes over time. When they first arrive in Australia, what they talk with their parents is mostly to complain, or to ask how to cook a dish, or what they should do with the laundry, etc. As they gradually settle down, they try to find topics to talk with their parents, and start to ask more about their families, how their parents are doing and how their extended family members are doing. Festival greetings, academic performances, future plans, romantic relationships, food and wellbeing, are the most common topics.

### **Family decision-making**

Quite often, in a conversation about future plans, two topics would crop up: migration decisions and career paths. The migration decision concerns the whole family. The role each member plays in the family and their goals, values and beliefs are the main factors that influence the processes of family decision-making (Xia et al.

2004). If my participant decides to migrate to Australia, their parents may even start thinking about how to take care of the grandchildren (Da 2003).

In a Chinese cultural context, when your parents become old, because of responsibility and filial piety, the child needs to look after his or her parents.

Migrating to a foreign country concerns both the children and the parents. Some of my participants had never been apart from their parents for longer than a week, so when they moved to Australia to study, they had to live as self-reliant adults. A few participants told me that they cried very hard the first few days after they had arrived in Australia. It was really challenging for them to stand on their own feet in such a new land:

The video chat online with my parents is like a family meeting time... a quite formal and serious meeting. My parents ask what I'm going to do after my graduation. What is my plan for the future? What kind of job do I want to start with? Will I stay in Melbourne and get PR before applying for any jobs [...] questions like these, which make me feel pressured. I know I should make a decision about my future but I still feel like I need more time to figure it out.

(Nancy, PhD student in Melbourne)

Many people told me that when they video chat, especially during or after the exam season, it feels like an interview. Their parents would passionately and constantly be asking about their scores, how they were doing in the exams, and was it difficult or not? Do they think they can pass the exams or not? For these young adults, whether

or not they can achieve good academic scores is closely related to whether they can qualify for a scholarship. From their parents' point of view, if their children can obtain a scholarship, it will definitely lessen the family's financial burden. Meanwhile, for some of these young adults, if they want to stay in Australia and apply for a PR, their academic performance is of great importance. Thus, I analyse academic performance and future plans together.

When I enquired about the initial reason why my participants came to Australia, they gave me different answers. Some are understandable, while some of the reasons are totally due to the parents of the participants. In the case of Yunbang's parents, they made the decision and sent him to Australia:

I wasn't a good student when I was in high school. My parents thought if I went to a foreign country I would have to become more independent and wouldn't have much time to mess around so I would probably be more focused on my study... besides, they thought English was important. Even if I couldn't get higher academic scores, my English would at least be better than that of other students who didn't get the chance to go overseas... which would be to my advantage when I start looking for jobs in the future.

Most of my participants' parents can't speak English, but they want their child to be able to write and speak English very well, so 'wanting him or her to be good at English, at the very least' is one of the key reasons they decide to send their child to Australia.

In Fucheng's case, he doesn't know if he will migrate permanently to Australia or not, as he hasn't made the decision yet, but he wants to have the different experience of living in a foreign country. If he likes Australia he will stay here. If not, he will either go back to China or study or work in another country:

My parents have different opinions on whether or not I should stay in Australia after my graduation. My dad believes that as I have been studying for four years in Australia and I have already built up my social network, I will have a better working opportunity here. On the other hand, my mother thinks that as I'm very shy, it must be really hard for me to start making new friends. Hence my English is not very good. So, she suggests that I come back to China. Me, personally, I'm struggling as well. On the one hand, I miss my old friends from high school very much, on the other hand, I have tried hard to get a part-time job while studying at university. I think that the part-time job has helped me become more outgoing and I have made quite a few local friends. (Fucheng, a Master's student in Wollongong)

There are also some participants who are very clear about what they want. They plan to gain some living and studying experiences overseas and then after they graduate they will go back to China. A number of the participants made the decision together with their parents. There are different types of family communications. In most cases, parents are the policy makers for their family. As with governments, policy makers need to collect reliable information and analyse and gather data

before they can make a decision. Parents who are left at home in China by their young adult child manage to collect data about their children through all sorts of communication channels, i.e. children's posts on social media, phone calls, video chats, text messages, emails and photos that their children send them. It is not easy to triangulate and analyse all this data, so sometimes parents will also ask their children directly whether or not they want to migrate to Australia.

One of my participants told me that when she calls her mother, if she starts the conversation with '*Mama...*' (Chinese for mother) rather than '*Ma...*' (an informal way of saying mum in Chinese) her mother will straight away ask her 'How much do you want this time?'. If parents keep receiving similar phone calls they may come to the conclusion that the living expenses in this country are too high. They may then suggest that their child goes to another country. Of course, parents listen to their friends to learn about their friends' children's situations and help make a judgement about whether their own children have been spending too much.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, 'Reaching out for romance', Chinese parents who have a daughter in her late twenties are normally eager for their daughter to find a boyfriend and settle down. Many participants notice that, once they tell their parents they are involved in a relationship, the topic of their conversation with their parents tends to be focused on their boyfriends or girlfriends:

My mum is super interested in my boyfriend. Every time we talk, no matter whether it's on the phone or the video chat, she always asks me about my

boyfriend. If I tell her that I have a boyfriend, she will then ask me to show her photos of him and ask me about his background. If I tell her I don't have a boyfriend, again, she would start telling me how important it is to have a boyfriend at my age. (Xiaofang, a female PhD student in Melbourne)

From the parents' point of view, a boyfriend or a girlfriend does not just represent an intimate relationship, but a potential 'factor' to include in the process of family decision-making (Hollingshead 1996). A foreign boyfriend or girlfriend may totally change their child's decision about staying or not staying in Australia, and this concerns the whole family.

### **Conclusion**

Thanks to social media, young adults who live overseas don't have to wait for weeks and even months to get news from their parents. Compared with the family letters time, now they can easily connect and communicate with their parents at any time online and have options to choose between text messages, voice call and video chat. Young Chinese adults living overseas and their parents back in China develop remotely conducted, polymediated (in the sense of using multiple social media platforms for communication) and mutual caring relationships. Parents stay in touch with their child overseas and develop their parent-child relationship as a more mature and friendly relationship through the process of text messaging, photo exchanging, video chatting, voice calling and Moments sharing. Based on the information parents have gathered of their child's foreign life experiences, parents

together with their child, make a group family decision about what their child is going to do with their life in the future, i.e., whether or not they should pursue further education overseas, or which career path they should take, or whether or not they should emigrate.

Three life changes that young adults experience after they move overseas include: living by themselves, which makes their parents worry about their safety and health; being surrounded by their peers, which make their parents worry about their romantic relationships and friendships; and study/work in a foreign language, which makes their parents worry about their academic performance and future career development.

Before moving to Australia, the parenting was one-way, and most of the time it was conducted face to face, since most of my participants lived with their parents. During and after the life changes of moving overseas, as young adults are geographically separated from their parents, parenting has to be conducted remotely with the use of devices such as mobile phones, computers and iPads, and with social media platforms including WeChat, Weibo, QQ , etc., on and off the screen. As Miller and Sinanan (2014, p. 133) have discovered from their research, 'the widest generalization from these Trinidadian case studies is to suggest that webcam facilitates the transition of kinship into more friendship-like modes as children become adults, while equally facilitating a drift for some long-term friendships into something more like the deep concern and emotional support of kinship, although,

no doubt, there are many exceptions'. Decision-making switches from being one-way to mutual, on and off the screen. In the Chinese cultural and social context, keeping in touch with our parents is a way of showing filial piety, but it is also a two-way family commitment (Da 2003).

The relationship between parents and their children is not a one-way parenting relationship, but rather two-way mutual caring, as well as a friending relationship. In some cases, mothers and daughters communicate almost as peers and friends. For example, a mother will ask her daughter's advice about her party dress when they video chat. In contrast, a father and son discuss the World Cup via webcam even when they are geographically separated in two different countries. With the involvement of social media in a polymedia environment, to some extent, being long distance is not a burden for family communication. In fact, it generates more communication and thus strengthens the parent-child relationship.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, young adults aim to make a collective decision together with their parents concerning their future plans for migration and career aspirations, which is what I will elaborate on in the following chapter, 'Working it out'.



## Chapter 6: Working it out

### Introduction

Starting a career is one of the most important life changes, especially when young adults such as my research participants complete a degree overseas and are standing at the crossroads deciding whether or not to stay overseas or to go back to their home country. Before they went overseas, they believed that studying abroad could provide them with more competitive advantages, such as foreign language ability, communication ability and adaptability. Therefore, on the eve of graduation, when looking for a job, they will aim to make full use of these advantages to find the ideal job. Nowadays, there is a growing emphasis on graduate attributes, which comes from the increasing demands of business and employer organizations. Graduate attributes refer to a diverse range of generic skills, such as logical and analytical thinking skills, effective communication skills, and personality and ethical values (Hager & Holland 2006). Often, students in their final year of study start to give serious consideration to their employment prospects. Even if they have good graduate attributes, students may still not be ready for the demands of professional life. Coming to terms with their own perceptions of their personal and professional identities – who they want to become and who they want to interact with in their career life – is a major challenge. As they start their career, even the students who succeed in finding a job may be uncertain of their professional identities. This may be further affected by a bad service attitude and disappointment with the working

environment. Ronfeldt and Grossman (2008) acknowledge that since personal and professional identities are interwoven, professional education helps and supports new workers to develop their 'possible selves' into a professional identity.

For overseas students in Australia, the vital decision to remain, or whether to return to China or emigrate to a third country is greatly dependent on whether they are able to find a job. Given the sociocultural differences in overseas job marketing and working environments, it is much harder for international Chinese students to improve their wellbeing and life quality, find their 'possible selves', become interconnected within professional networks, and develop a professional identity (Gomes et al. 2014). One of the more common strategies used to develop a professional identity is through social media (Roman 2014), particularly via one of the world's largest professional networks, LinkedIn. Social media are drawing increased attention among scholars across a variety of disciplines, including media and communication, public health, business and economics, etc. Numerous studies (see for example, Boyd 2007; Baym 2010; Ellison 2007; Haythornthwaite 2002; Livingstone 2008; Madianou & Miller 2013; Miller 2011) examine how new information technology affects peoples' lives. However, there is less research devoted to how social media are used in connecting to professional networks and how international students develop their professional identities.

Previous researchers in this area (Richardson & McKenna 2003; Richardson & Zikic 2007; Richardson 2009) focus on studying international experience and academic

careers. They have found that the professional experience gained from working abroad has an advantage in an academic career as work-related and interpersonal skills can be developed. However, less attention has been given to the barriers that constrain an international student's in his or her career development in the host country. Building on Richardson's work, Al Ariss (2010) shows how Lebanese migrants in France seek to overcome barriers to their career development in four areas: maintenance, transformation, entrepreneurship, and opting out. While many researchers focus on how skilled migrants develop their career in the host countries, the career exploration of international students is an under-researched area. This is an important area tackled in this thesis.

Career theorists (Hall 1976; Super 1957, 1980) have suggested that people under normal circumstances will experience four career stages during their careers: exploration stage; establishment stage; maintenance stage and disengagement stage. Building on the career stages concept, Cron (1984, p. 43-45) proposed a career development framework by synthesizing previous research on vocational psychology and sociology. Cron discussed the fundamental career concerns, developmental tasks, personal challenges, and psychological needs in each career stage. A brief summary is as follows:

1. Exploration stage, usually between the ages of 20 and 30. One of the main concerns at this stage is to find a job where one can learn the skills required to do the job well and become a contributing member of the workplace. This is a period of

self-discovery that emphasizes the establishment of a preliminary professional self-image. The psychosocial needs include peer acceptance, support and a challenging position.

2. Establishment stage, usually between the ages of 30 and 45. One begins to make a conscious commitment to a specific career field and to use skills to produce results and to develop creativity and innovativeness with the aims of being promoted.

Challenges include balancing the conflict demands of career and family and psychosocial needs include achievement, esteem, autonomy and competition.

3. Maintenance stage, usually around the late thirties to mid-forties. It is a time of maintaining what has already been achieved, while reassessing one's career with possible redirection. Challenges include maintaining motivation and facing concerns about aging. Psychosocial needs include security, reduced competitiveness, and helping younger colleagues.

4. Disengagement stage, the transitioning stage from working to retirement.

Challenges include establishing a stronger self-identity outside of work while maintaining an acceptable performance level. One has to adjust self-image and face the detachment from organization and organizational life.

The concept of career stages is employed here for understanding and exploring my participants' career development process. Most of my participants are aged between 20 and 30, which means they belong to the first career stage, which is the stage of exploration. According to Cron, this is a period of 'discovering required qualifications

and expected rewards for success’ as well as ‘self-discovery’ with an ‘emphasis on establishing an initial professional self-image’ (1984, p. 44). In this chapter I argue that alongside the technological innovations, social media bring new possibilities to international young adults’ self-discovery during their exploration stage, offering a range of opportunities for gathering useful information and developing professional networks. These technologies help young adults deal with worries and barriers, while choosing their career paths by ‘triangulating’ their decision-making with their families and peers. In this chapter, drawing on semi-structured interviews and participant observations of 44 young Chinese adults living in Australia, I develop my argument in three sections. The first section discusses a recent popular part-time job among Chinese international students – *Daigou* (代购) (shopping for others); the second section focuses on my participants’ potential worries and priorities when planning their careers; the last section explores the role that social media play during my participants’ career development.

### ***Daigou***

*Daigou* ‘代购’ can be roughly translated as ‘to shop on behalf of others’ and is a type of purchasing agent. *Daigou* are located mainly in Australia, the United States, Japan, South Korea and some European countries. *Daigou* enterprises normally purchase luxury goods, infant formulas, health supplements, cosmetics and electronic products, such as, iPhone & Apple Watch series, electric toothbrushes, blood pressure monitors, etc. Normally these electronic products are not difficult to buy in

China but when it comes to a new product, like iPhone & Apple Watch series, the company would release the new product first in western countries, i.e. America, England, Japan, Australia, and then later on in China. Some customers in China prefer to purchase these new products as soon as they are released and that's why they turn to their *Daigou* agents. These products are sourced mostly from the manufacturer or a retail store before being packaged and sent to a consumer who is based overseas, or to international students. Internships and part-time jobs are the two main kinds of working experiences. Recently, *Daigou* has become the first choice when choosing a part-time job among my participants. According to my participants, the main reasons for starting a *Daigou* business are: 'good income, time-saving, flexible working hours, you don't have to stay in one place, you can work anytime and anywhere using mobiles or tablets to take orders and contact customers on social media/mobiles.' For girls who love shopping, they enjoy doing *Daigou* because they are able to do a lot of shopping 'officially' and can recommend good stuff to their customers. They like to share the happiness of buying the 'good stuff'. Qi ngxue added one more reason. She said that if you have a friend working as a *Daigou* agent, you can learn from the friend about how to do *Daigou* and can even work together with the friend.

Many girls conducting a *Daigou* business prefer to pair up with their friends or boyfriends by renting an apartment together closely located to transportation and shopping centres. Previous research (e.g. Zhao et al. 2015; Bonetti et al. 2017) analyse *Daigou* business from the perspective of e-commerce, economics and

marketing. Drawing from my ethnographic fieldwork with two participants, Qingxue and Zhixiang, I present two case studies to gain insight and understand this recent popular phenomenon and to illuminate how Chinese young adults use social media as a mediated communication tool to expand social networks and to build up rapport with consumers and potential customers.

### **From a shopaholic to a *Daigou* agent**

Qingxue had just started her Master's program when a friend of mine recommended that she participate in my research. I hadn't met her personally before our interview, but from Qingxue's WeChat Moments' posts I viewed her as a very fashionable girl. On the day of the interview, I recognized her the second she stepped into the State Library. She was wearing a white one-piece suit with 7-cm-high-heels and carrying a high-end handbag. She had dyed her hair blonde and wore a pair of brown contact lenses. Qingxue considered herself a shopaholic.

Before I started my *Daigou* business, my crazy shopping habit wasted a lot of money. I bought too many things that I didn't actually need. But now with my *Daigou* business, shopping makes money for me... you know, doing *Daigou* makes a big difference to me. I don't ask for spare money from my parents anymore and it feels so amazing spending money that I've earned myself. Besides, I'm happy that I could turn my hobby of shopping into something good, into a part-time job...

Qingxue told me that her *Daigou* business is utterly dependent on currency exchange rates. When she first started her business, she kept an eye on the currency rates every day. When Australian dollars are cheaper, customers like to buy more things since they treat the price difference of exchange rates as a discount... The experience of doing the *Daigou* business was a big life change for Qingxue. She has now realized that earning money is hard work, and that she shouldn't take her parents' money for granted. Qingxue is saving some money for her trip to America, and she has started considering her future seriously. 'I won't do *Daigou* for the rest of my life. I need a career. I'm looking forward to visiting the States next year... If I like the country I may then apply to do some further studies there'. Qingxue has a friend living in Sydney who is also managing a *Daigou* business. Qingxue said her friend is her *Daigou* mentor.

I learned a lot from my friend. She taught me some skills, such as bargaining, customer communication, advertising [...] my friend also introduced me to some express delivery companies, which was a big help to my business. She has established a steady customer base via WeChat and she has kept in touch with her old customers as friends. They trust my friend and discuss their needs with her, for example, asking her what would be a great birthday gift for their mothers or partners.

Qingxue uses a separate account for her *Daigou* business. She keeps two WeChat accounts, one for her friends and family, the other for posting *Daigou* business-



related ads and communicating with customers. On holidays such as Christmas Day, New Year and Chinese New Year, Qingxue offers her customers a special discount. She also gives gifts to customers who spend a certain amount of money.

Although the majority of *Daigou* are unauthorised buying agents, they upload images or videos of popular products on their personal social media accounts (for instance, on WeChat Moments and Weibo) to attract domestic clients in China. They then offer to shop for their clients in-store and post the products to China. According to a post from 'Gentlemen in China' on [marketingtochina.com](http://marketingtochina.com) in 2016, potential consumers 'will make their choice according to three main things: other buyers' experience, their relations' recommendations (Word of Mouth, or WOM) and what they have read from reliable sources (in articles or on social media)'.

Deciding which *Daigou* to choose is a group decision-making process. Potential customers collect information on a user's experience of a targeted product and the quality of *Daigou* services, both online and offline. Social media play a key role in the *Daigou* business, as potential customers are looking for evidence of a reliable shopper as well as reliable information on the products they are interested in. *Daigou* shoppers are quite close to their customers as the platform they use to communicate is the same one that they use to connect with their friends and families. Furthermore, they conduct all the conversations surrounding making orders and bargaining for prices on WeChat, although some *Daigou*, like Qingxue, may use a separate account for business only.

Abidin (2015a) conceptualises 'bloggers' 'YouTubers' and 'Instagrammers', as influencers and demonstrates how influencers appropriate and mobilise four types of intimacies with followers: commercial, interactive, reciprocal, and disclosive. Building on Abidin's four types of intimacies and especially with the focus on the commercial intimacies, I analyse the social media strategies employed by *Daigou* agents. In a Chinese context, these high-profile microcelebrities and influencers are called *Wanghong* (网红). Many *Daigou* try to make themselves become *Wanghong*. They make their posts as attractive and popular as possible because the more followers they have on social media the larger the number of potential customers. They also spend a great deal of time designing their daily posts with the aim of including the products for sale. Qingxue will sometimes post a selfie, while in the background there are shelves of fish oil capsules, vitamins, infant formulas and Weetabix. Alternatively, she will upload a video of herself using make-up, step by step, while patiently introducing the cosmetics she is using from the Jurlique brand. Qingxue makes the video look like a chit-chat with her besties while actually sharing her knowledge and experience of using these products. She hopes her followers will like her posts and therefore spread the word for her as well as contact her to buy these products. Although Qingxue is not selling her home-made brand she tries to set up the image with her followers that the stuff they bought from her, no matter which brand it is, will have her name 'on' it. Her name may not be tagged on the product, but it is from her endorsement and quite intimate product demonstration that potential customers will notice this product and get to know and even want to

buy this product. By responding to her followers' comments on her social media posts with commercial interest (Abidin & Thompson 2012), and by introducing a product in her designed videos, Qingxue develops more commercial intimacies with her followers (Abidin 2015a; Abidin & Ots 2016).

Some customers may question the quality of the products Qingxue sells, so she will sometimes shop live in stores. Qingxue uses the video chat service on WeChat to directly chat with the customer, and shop while in the store, picking up tins and boxes from the shelves. Switching between posting images on Weibo and making video calls on WeChat, Qingxue manages to create a sense of co-presence with her customers. This builds up trust between her as a *Daigou* agent and her customers.

Abidin (2014, 2015a, 2015b) coins the term 'perceived interconnectedness' to investigate the model of communication between microcelebrities (*Wanghong*, 网红) and their followers, which could be employed to understand the impression of intimacy and 'a sense of closeness and familiarity' (Marwick 2011b). The theory of parasocial interaction was initially formulated from the communication between the mass media users and the media figures such as celebrities, performers and presenters (Horton & Wohl 1956; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Giles 2010). Parasocial interaction describes a one-sided interpersonal relationship in which one person knows a lot about the other and the other does not exchange such knowledge. The one-sided relationship between celebrities and audiences or fans (Caughey, 1984) is by far the most common form of study of such relationship. The idea of parasocial interaction may be extended to include the online environment of social media

platforms, where the users and the media figures are co-producing the content and has developed the one-to-many interaction into one-to-one interaction online (Stever & Lawson 2013).

I propose that shopping practices from *Wanghong* (网红) *Daigou* agents bring parasocial interaction into a more personal interaction..

Nowadays, through live video streaming, *Wanghong* (网红) will read out the names of customers who buy their own endorsement or recommendation products in the live video to encourage more people to buy the products they recommend and actively give feedback on post-use experience (usually the positive ones) in the form of pictures or online posts. In this way, the parasocial interactions between the celebrities-*Wanghong* (网红) and the online shoppers have become a more personalized and uni-directional interaction (Fetscherin & Conway 2011) has also strengthened a shopper's brand love and brand loyalty towards a certain brand. These phenomena have been studied and theorised by Abidin (see for example Abidin & Ots, 2016) who sees influencers playing as major role in brand management through parasocial relations with their followers. She defines influencers as 'everyday Internet users who manufacture themselves into a new form of social media microcelebrity' (Abidin & Ots 2016, p. 153).

*Daigou* are not influencers, they rely on direct social connections and relationships and they follow and reinforce the impacts influencers have on consumption patterns. Here, my concern is not with influencers but rather it is on *Daigou* parasocial

practices and how the participants in my study engaged with these in order to supplement their incomes.

### **From gift shopping to business shopping**

In this section, I present how parasocial relations and commercial intimacy may evolve into a business model for *Daigou* agents. Zhixiang is currently studying for a PhD in Melbourne. He has a scholarship and doesn't have to worry about living expenses. However, the reason he started doing *Daigou* is that his mother kept asking him to buy things for her and her friends, relatives and colleagues. Zhixiang didn't enjoy it at first but he didn't know how to refuse. His mother, a seemingly kind-hearted lady, didn't want to disappoint her friends whenever they asked her if Zhixiang could help them buy some health and nutrition products, or skincare products. Zhixiang understands his mother, but thinks it is unwise to keep buying 'presents' for her friends. As Zhixiang said, 'I am not a bank. I can't afford to keep buying things for my mother's friends for free.'

One day Zhixiang came up with an idea. If he could start his own *Daigou* business, hopefully his mother's friends would realize that he was running a business rather than being a Santa Claus figure sending out free gifts. Although he feels that being a boy he doesn't like shopping as much as a girl does, thanks to his mother's informal training, he is now at home with skincare and supplement brands:

I am sure there are potential customers if my mother can spread the word...

so I take photos of the products I buy and write up a few lines to describe

them and provide the prices. Then I ask my mother to post them on her Moments [...] basically, her friends are retired so they spend a lot of time reading posts and reposting things. When they repost my ads, I can see that my *Daigou* business is expanding.

There is a difference between female and male *Daigou* agents. This reflects Chinese ideas about gender roles (see, for example, Hu & Scott, 2016), as well as reciprocity and family values which I have discussed earlier in Chapter 5. Some customers prefer shopping with female *Daigou* agents because they think that girls are born shoppers and therefore more reliable when shopping on their behalf. Females are regarded as being more careful and skilled at selecting bags and makeup. Qingxue completed her Bachelor's degree in Melbourne last year, so this year is her fourth year of living in Melbourne. She is very familiar with all the shopping malls and the pharmacy retailers, such as My Chemist, Priceline, Chemist Warehouse in the local area, and she is also an experienced driver which makes her *Daigou* business easier than those who use public transportation. Many female *Daigou* agents imply that they have been using most of the products they are selling. Qingxue said that she was confident she could shop 'for good stuff for my customers' because she really enjoys shopping and has 'the patience to select and compare goods from different brands'.

In the case of male *Daigou* agents, people think they are easy to bargain with and that they may have the advantage of more scientific knowledge about the products.

Zhixiang's experience is a good example. As a chemical engineer, he feels that people prefer to purchase health and nutrition products from him, as he will be able to spot 'bullshit' products: 'They think I am a scientist'.

I asked Zhixiang if he promotes himself and his *Daigou* business on his Moments or any other social media account. He told me that he does not post anything on purpose for his business, but he does post photos and short videos of himself and his friends having a great time in Melbourne. Zhixiang wants to show his current customers on social media that he is actually living in Melbourne. He believes this convinces his customers that the products they order from him are the real products that he bought from pharmacies and supermarkets.

Doing *Daigou* business with social media is one way for young adults to test the water and to have an opportunity to self-reflect and self-discover what kinds of job are they interested in or capable of. Among the *Daigou* agents are many Chinese international students like Qingxue and Zhixiang. They regard their *Daigou* business as a casual part-time job, which helps them relieve some of the financial burden and keeps their life abroad busy. Some students who are managing a *Daigou* business find it interesting to put what they learned at school into practice, especially those studying accounting and marketing-related subjects.

### **Social media and *Daigou***

Despite the range of online shopping websites available, e.g. Amazon.com, Tmall and Tmall Global – many people in mainland China still prefer to turn to *Daigou* for

shopping for foreign brands and products. Unlike shopping from a website, through WeChat, *Daigou* agents can interact with and immediately reply to their customers. They keep their customers well informed not only with information on the products, but also with tips on how to use a certain product. They operate like an after-sale service. The immediate and daily interactivity social media provides bring *Daigou* agents more business opportunities. Here is how Qingxue communicates with her customers on WeChat:

Sometimes if a customer is curious about a product, I will chat with her for a while on WeChat. Normally I would start with texting, and then send some pictures about the product, and after a while, if I feel that this customer is really into the product and may want to buy some, I will then have a voice call with her directly.

With the different features WeChat offers, *Daigou* agents and customers have more options about their communication style. That is, both agents and customers can exchange text messages, share photos, voice calls, voice messages and video calls, rather than just sending out inquiry emails to a product's official website or making phone calls to a customer service.

Also, on a *Daigou's* WeChat Moments, you can check the price of the product and read about the experience of users and user evaluations. If you and your friends follow the same *Daigou*, it is much easier to see each other's comments under certain products. As most WeChat contacts are family, friends, and groups of



acquaintances, it is more like a process of collective decision-making. Before making a decision to purchase a product, you may ask your friends and listen to their opinions about it. You can also check the comments and evaluations of the product on the *Daigou* agent's WeChat Moments. Having customers on *Daigou* agents' WeChat contact lists enables *Daigou* agents to analyse the characteristics of their customers because they are mutually followed friends without specific privacy settings. *Daigou* agents are able to view their customers' daily life presentation on their Moments as well. Therefore, it is easier for *Daigou* agents to provide targeted product promotion and user-friendly services on WeChat, rather than at a retail store where the retailer does not know the customer.

### **Planning your career**

In July 2014, four of my participants who were pursuing their Masters' degrees at the Australian National University (ANU) invited me to attend their graduation ceremony. I had never been to Canberra before, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to do a focus-group interview with them both immediately before and immediately after their graduation ceremony. The popular Chinese saying '毕业即失业' (*bi ye ji shi ye*) means 'graduation equals unemployment', so the career plan became the main topic of our focus group.

During the interview, when I asked my participants what they were going to do tomorrow after their graduation, two of them already had a clear plan, that is, to start working in a company or to pursue a further degree. The other two told me

they hadn't decided yet because they couldn't make the decision based upon their own interests. They had to take policies, families and other things into consideration. Among the young adults who participated in my study, some have had limited working hours due to their visa status. Al Ariss et al. (2012, p. 95) suggest that 'we should study migrant careers not simply from structural/ institutional or individual perspectives alone, but as a relational construct that is at the interplay of individual and institutions and as a multi-layered and multi-faceted phenomenon.' On the subject of arriving at a career plan, from my analysis of the interview transcripts, I categorize my participants into two groups. One group prioritises location, and the other prioritises chosen profession.

With regard to the participants in the first group, before they decide on their careers, they choose to live in a specific place. They would either decide to stay in Australia, go back to China, or go to a third country. Given increased transnational mobility (Gomes 2015), some participants are also keen to relocate to a different host country such as America or England. If my participants decide not to go back to China for work, they must then acquire an appropriate visa to stay in the host country. For example, if they want to stay in Australia, they have to apply for a certain type of working visa. Most of them would apply for permanent residency.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> According to the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 'An Australian permanent resident (permanent resident) is the name given to a non-citizen who is the holder of a permanent visa. A permanent resident can live, work and study without restriction in Australia'. <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Life/Aust-1> accessed on 6 March 2017.

Xinyi tells me that even before she came to Australia, she had made up her mind to migrate to Australia, so she chose to study accounting here. Xinyi is the undergraduate student studying accounting in Melbourne mentioned in Chapter 4, who complained that her social network was limited because she is in a female-dominated profession. According to Xinyi, most of her classmates intend to stay in Australia long-term. Therefore, they want to work as an accountant after graduation to make sure they qualify for a permanent resident visa (Jackling 2007; Ziguras & Law 2006).

Participants in the second category put their professional lives first. They don't limit themselves to staying in a certain place. Instead, they prefer to have a career they really like. They want to make sure that the education they have acquired, the dreams they have chased and their internship and experiences, all help them achieve their career goals.

Yonggang is a PhD candidate in biochemical engineering. From the time when he was a little boy, he always dreamt of being a scientist. Every day, as he conducts his PhD research, he feels closer to his dream. He says he is going to apply for research fellowships in biochemical engineering all over the world. As long as he is able to do research in a lab, he does not care where the lab is located.

Young adults are not making these work-related decisions by themselves. They make a collective decision with their parents, partners and other family members. As

discussed in Chapter 5, the parental relationship is a crucial dimension of the career development of young adults (Young et al. 2006; Whiston & Keller 2004).

### **Working it out on social media**

In China, some companies demand to see candidates' Moments on WeChat during the recruitment process. Xiaofang, who used Weibo for job-hunting, managed to make her social media posts appealing. She aimed to present herself as an active, hard-working and happy person. She posted photos of herself working with her classmates as a team to create a self-image as a co-operative person with good team-work skills.

Xiaofang reposted a post (see Figure 6.1) on her Weibo homepage when she was looking for a job. By posting and reposting examples like this, she felt motivated and encouraged every day to send out her resume as she looked for a job in Melbourne. A year after she participated in my research, she finally got a job in Melbourne.

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

### **Figure 6.1: Sharing the experience of how to get an offer from Morgan Stanley (HK)**

Many of my participants turn to social media for help once they have a clearer plan of their future career. They hope that the 'social' side of social media can bring them some opportunities. Sadly, many of my participants gradually come to realize that they should use social media primarily to get encouraged and motivated by learning job-hunting skills and knowledge shared by others. The connectedness of social media offers opportunities to expand one's professional networks, as well as to

gather job-related information. It is easy to find out where alumni and classmates end up working through social media, but it is also easy to feel pressured when participants see a peer getting ahead in the job market. Through informal conversations, my research participants learn about new companies and organizations. If something attracts their attention, they may take the next step, i.e. by enquiring about recruitment opportunities. The reason that my participants realize that they should use social media to expand their professional networks as well as to gather job-related information is because they could get motivated and connected through this process. Social media may not be able to get someone a job but it provides people with lens through which you see other people's career choices and working environment and potentially some recruitment opportunities.

In the recruitment systems of some companies, candidates are asked if they have any acquaintances in the company. For instance, Jun Yang told me that he used to look up his WeChat Moments. If he saw that his friends had posted recruitment notices from their companies or universities, he would then follow the lead and submit an application himself. Jun Yang is aware that since most of his friends started working only two years ago, they are still new to the company and are not in a senior position. What Jun Yang is really looking for are potential recruitment opportunities and background information about those companies. At the same time, he tries to motivate himself by checking which big companies his friends are working for. During my participant observation with Jun Yang, as we were sitting on a tram

going to a job-hunting seminar which he had recommended me, Jun Yang quickly scanned his WeChat Moments and said:

I know that my friends may not be able to help me find a job, but by wandering around their social media posts, I can collect recruitment information about their workplace straight away. Sometimes, if I'm really interested in working there, I may ask my friends about the working environment, whether or not the staff are friendly and how they feel about their jobs.

People are able to glimpse the daily lives of some professionals through social media. Helen's journalist friend is working in Tianjin, China. They were classmates in high school. After they finished high school, Helen took the IELTS test and came to Australia to study accounting at the University of Melbourne. Meanwhile, her friend sat for the national college entrance examination and got accepted to a university in Beijing majoring in journalism. The first time Helen heard that her friend had become a journalist, she was shocked:

Well, it's probably because I think a journalist is someone you see on television, like a celebrity. I thought you had to have a pretty face to get a TV job [...] I know that journalists work very hard, but until I saw my friend's post of herself standing in the middle of a storm doing a TV report, I didn't have real empathy for journalists [...] It's weird [...] I feel like people such as journalists are supposed to be 'on TV', which is far from my daily life [...]

however when my friend posted the photo of herself experiencing hardship as a journalist, I started to care for journalists.

However, not everyone is keen to post about their jobs. Amy stated that she had posted nothing about her work either on Moments or on Weibo. 'My job is confidential...also it's too much trouble to edit a post on Moments, and I can't be bothered to interact with people' were the reasons Amy gave. 'In my job, I'm doing what I'm supposed to do and I think everyone knows that'.

Certainly, not everyone shares the positive side of their work. Many people prefer to 'trash talk' (吐槽 *Tucao*) their job on social media, if they are sure that their employer will not be reading their social media posts. Before I conducted my interview with Dashan, I believed that no one would find this 'trash talk' useful. However, Dashan explains it differently.

I'm scared of working. I'm not sure what kind of career suits me. After so many years of education, I don't know what skills or abilities I have, or if I have the qualifications, skills and abilities required by the company. On social media, I found that most of my friends have complained about their jobs at least once or twice. That makes me feel relieved. Not everyone enjoys their work. I shouldn't be afraid of not liking my work either.

Yunbang posted three images on his WeChat Moments (Figure 6.2). Along with the image of the dog (posted on 15 July 2014) the first line reads: 'After a day's work, tired like a dog'. The one with a crying baby face (posted on 10 August 2014) says, 'I

had a very strong desire to travel, but then I counted my annual leave days...' The cat image (posted on 24 September 2014) says, 'Off duty!!! F\*\*\*!!! Ah!!!'

<Image removed due to copyright restrictions>

**Figure 6.2: Examples of Yunbang's posts on his WeChat Moments**

People, like Yunbang, who complain about their jobs on Moments don't necessarily imply that they dislike their work or are not satisfied with the pay. Sometimes they merely wish to tell their friends how hard they have been working or how much they have been through to keep their positions in the workplace.

**Conclusion**

This chapter sheds light on two related phenomena. First, on how young Chinese living overseas use social media to start their own part-time *Daigou* business. I explored why they want to do such part-time jobs, how social media helps their businesses, and how their social media practices reflect their life changes. Second, I used a group interview to examine the fears and worries young adults have about searching for jobs and planning their career paths. I then extended the analysis to a discussion of the priorities of young adults when seeking jobs. A relational 'core triangle' emerged: parents, friends and self. My research participants were trying to figure out what their parents wanted them to do, how their friends made a living, whether they enjoyed their jobs, and most importantly, what career to pursue.



This chapter discussed alternative ways in which young adults use social media as a method to navigate their work needs and to plan their careers based on the ongoing life changes and the constant changing interpersonal relationships. I argued that social media offer the opportunity for young adults to gather more information about their acquaintances' workplaces and the workplaces' potential recruitment information and career situations of their peers. This sometimes functions as encouragement and comfort and sometimes it turns out to be a distraction. There is still much ambivalence about the role of social media in planning a career. So far, I have shed light on how my participants live through the new life changes associated with living overseas in terms of four types of interpersonal relationships (friendship, love, family, and work), with the help of social media practices. In the next chapter, I walk through each finding from the previous chapters, and highlight my primary theoretical contributions to the study of interpersonal relationships and social media.

## **Chapter 7: Thoughts on social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes**

### **Introduction**

Navigating life changes associated with moving overseas is complicated. Four themes emerge from my fieldwork with young Chinese adults living in Australia. These can be understood as changes in four types of ongoing interpersonal relationships (friendship, love, family and work) reflected in these young adults' social media practices. Earlier in the thesis I devoted a separate chapter to each of these types of relationship: friendship in Chapter 3, romantic relationship in Chapter 4, family relationship in Chapter 5 and work-related relationship in Chapter 6. In the present chapter, I bring these different types of social relationships together to better understand how people's social media practices relate to their life changes. Each of these types of relationship had a clear effect the social media practices of the participants in my ethnography.

Drawing from both my own fieldwork and a critical reading of the scholarly literature on social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes, here, I propose a model of social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes to address the importance of the role of each of the different forms of social media in helping young adults manage their interpersonal relationships when faced with the challenges of living overseas. I have devised five principles in order to situate and theorise my findings within the broader fields of social media and digital ethnography.

### **Locating the ethnographic findings in line with five principles**

Below I present a way of thinking about social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes based on five key principles which I have developed from my ethnography.

The first principle based on my observations is that social media allow Chinese young adults to share their lives in different ways while living overseas. Some manage to present themselves as a different person, while others want to show their families and friends in China that they are still the same person, and that life changes have not changed who they are. This presents a complex problem of self-presentation for them whereby they wanted to reveal or conceal different sides or aspects of themselves in their new lives to different groups within their social spheres. Actions that may impress newfound friends can potentially disturb family left in the home country, so my participants spoke about the ways in which they managed different social media platforms in order to negotiate these different contexts.

The second principle is that when people present themselves online, they constantly switch media channels and platforms for different purposes, such as to stay connected and create a digital co-presence with their friends, partners and families.

The phenomena associated with digital co-presence have been extensively researched by Hjorth (2005). Digital co-presence has been very important to my participants' choices regarding their decisions to use particular media channels and platforms including whether to download or remove applications from their devices.

The third principle I have identified is that people are not simply switching between different contemporary interpersonal technologies. Their switching may be viewed as sets of emergent practices using social media as a way of navigating their interpersonal relationships, such as friendships, romantic relationships and parental relationships using the affordances of polymedia (Madianou & Miller 2013). In other words, their switching behaviours with social media are constituted by the challenges of the need to move between various social circles, for example, family, old school friends and university friends in the new home country.

The fourth principle is that social media are playing a central role in the communication between young adults and their parents, especially in the process of making collective decisions (Hollingshead 1996) of young adults and their families' future plans.

The fifth principle I am proposing has deep resonances with classic social comparison theory (Festinger 1954). The evidence from my ethnography reinforced the ways in which individuals and individual families would compare themselves constantly with what their peers and the children of their parents' friends are doing on social media, to collect information and inspiration to adjust their future plans. Social media has made this desire to compare and situate oneself in relation to others more obvious and more transparent. In the following sections I will unpack the complexities and connections involved in these five principles derived from my ethnography. However

before I do this I would like to refer to Madianou and Miller's concept of polymedia to provide a background framework for my five principles.

In 2012, Madianou and Miller developed a new conceptual frame for interpersonal communication which they termed 'polymedia'. The term describes the phenomena associated with how people utilise various media affordances to manage their social relationships in order to satisfy different emotional and social needs. Madianou and Miller (2012) explain and theorise what polymedia is by providing examples from their ethnographic studies of Filipino and Caribbean transnational families. The concept is grounded in the social practices of culturally specific family groups and sets out to theorise observable phenomena. The contours of polymedia draws from media ecology, mediation, mediatization and personal connections and digital media.

In contrast to Madianou and Miller, I am not looking at my research participants solely as individual social media users interacting with other individuals, an approach known as methodological individualism (Aggasi 2017). Rather my focus is on describing and analysing the practices of my participants within the group dynamics and social media ecosystems of people living in Australia. Another layer of complexity arises in my ethnography because I am also describing the social norms and moral concerns of people operating within the Chinese social media ecosystem whenever referring to my participants' social media practices with their pre-existing relationships in China. My participants were effectively navigating two discrete yet interconnected ecosystems comprising the various social media applications, both

Chinese and Western, for example, applications like Facebook operate alongside Weibo for the participants in my ethnography.

To return to polymedia, Madianou and Miller argued that:

Polymedia is an emerging environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an 'integrated structure' within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media. In conditions of polymedia, the emphasis shifts from a focus on the qualities of each particular medium as a discrete technology, to an understanding of new media as an environment of affordances. As a consequence, the primary concern shifts from an emphasis on the constraints imposed by each medium (often cost-related, but also shaped by specific qualities) to an emphasis upon the social and emotional consequences of choosing between those different media (p. 170).

In my study I found that the 'integrated structures' of different media influenced how these media were used. One of my participants told me that he normally starts dating on Facebook and breaks up on Twitter. He found the 140-character limit on Twitter to be especially helpful for breaking up, because 'it's over' looks less dramatic on Twitter than Facebook, and he prefers to retain all the good memories on his Facebook account. As we can see, this participant is not merely switching platforms – he is choosing different platforms for different purposes, shifting between different niches of the communicative environment.

Another example of polymedia choices in action is the case study presented in Chapter 5, in which one of my research participants, Tingting, decided when to video chat or not with her parents depending on factors such as whether she needed to clean her room, hide a bad day from her parents, prepare for her final exams or get ready to go out with her boyfriend. She told me that although she always wants to video chat with her mother, once the webcam is on her mother's CCTV is on as well, so to speak. Tingting's mother will ask her to turn the webcam around so that she can locate her daughter with her own eyes and check her surroundings. Tingting is worried that a webcam can lead to unwanted discussions, or even quarrels, with her mother. Through the manipulation of the camera's field of vision, old power relations are regenerated whereby a mother can control quite intimate aspects of her daughter's life through digital co-presence.

These observations are similar to what Miller and Sinanan (2014) describe from their fieldwork with Trinidadian transnational families, where the participants reported that the webcam put people under 'moral surveillance for tidiness they experienced as a child' (p. 36). However, young adults like Tingting don't want to be monitored all the time by their parents since their bedrooms are 'backstages' or 'back regions' of informality (Goffman 1956, p. 69-70) where they can be totally relaxed and don't want to be bothered with impression management. A parent's desire to communicate using video and webcams to set up a face-to-face synchronous digital co-presence is perceived by Tingting as a form of parental control that is no longer appropriate.

## **Reducing channels as a way of communicating**

My participants' individual stories of how they use social media are always unique and specific. I found it helpful to examine their practices with a larger lens of media ecology (Horst et al., 2012; Ito et al., 2009; Gershon 2010a), media ideology (Gershon 2010b, 2010c) and media literacy (Livingstone 2004). This broader lens helped me to realise that there are some common pre-existing social norms and guidelines that we can tease out from their practices. Although my participants have a similar cultural background, i.e. a Chinese cultural and educational background, their different 'access, analysis, evaluation and content creation' abilities (Livingstone 2004) leads to different levels of media literacy skills. How well they navigated their polymedia depended on their level of media literacy skills. I borrow Livingstone's definition of media literacy as 'the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms' (Livingstone 2004).

The concept of 'switching media' has also been approached from different perspectives in the literature. Gershon is concerned with the communication of a message whereas Madianou and Miller are more concerned with relationship management. Based on a group of local university students in the US, Gershon (2010a) studied the concept of 'switching media' by analysing how students break up a relationship with different media, while Madianou and Miller (2012) researched Filipino and Caribbean transnational families and developed the idea of 'switching channels' in address how parents overseas communicate with their left-behind



families by exploiting different media affordances and switching between alternative channels. Although they approach the phenomenon of switching media from different perspectives, they both look at how a specific individual manages one certain kind of relationship through different media channels, either ending a romantic relationship or keeping a family relationship. I acknowledge the importance of their work and use it as a starting point from which to analyse my ethnographic data.

In my study I look at how individuals living overseas use social media practices to negotiate 'a pyramid of relationships' (see Figure 1.1), consisting not only of romantic relationships but also of parent-child relationships, work-related relationships and friendships, which is a far more complicated and dynamic arrangement. These relationships can overlap, or become mutually dependent and interconnected. Building on Gershon's 'switching media' and Madianou and Miller's 'switching channels', I discovered that when individuals reduce or increase the number of social media platforms, they are actually leaving or (re)connecting a certain type of relationship. This observation is worthy of further research.

According to Madianou and Miller (2013, p. 169), people's communicative intent affects their choice of medium. The way people navigate the environment of polymedia is closely related to the way they experience and manage their interpersonal relationships. As an extension to Madianou and Miller's conceptualisation of polymedia, I suggest that polymedia is not just about switching

channels and affordances for scalable socialities (Miller et al. 2016), it is also about increasing or reducing the number of channels and affordances for different purposes. I have interviewed some participants who have downloaded up to 7 kinds of chat software applications (QQ, WeChat, Viber, Skype, Line, Facebook messenger, Snapchat) on their mobiles but after a while they deleted more than half of them and only kept three or four of the most frequently used applications.

They downloaded all that chat software for two main reasons. One was sheer curiosity. They wanted to find out what made an app popular and if the software was well designed. The other reason was that they had a group of friends who started using the new application, and thus they moved to the new platform. This is a phenomenon known as 'the network effect' (Saxton & Wang 2014). When I asked my participants why they deleted almost half of them, they told me that they were not just deleting the software, but that they were also leaving the group of friends on it. By reducing their frequently used platforms, my participants were actually making choices between different groups of friends. They may have successfully attracted some friends to come to the platforms that they had joined or they may have been led by their friends to a new platform.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the situation whereby parents observe their child's online activity to gather more detailed information about their child's daily life overseas. Parents will also keep an eye on the posts of their own friends and colleagues if their children are living overseas as well. The process of collecting information is an

exercise in comparison. To explore this phenomenon further, I turned to the work of Festinger (1954, p. 118) who claims that people evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves with others' opinions and abilities. While this work may be over sixty years old, I found that it still had strong relevance for my research findings. Many participants are aware of a situation in which their parents say that they saw one of their acquaintances posting a photo of her daughter's graduation ceremony or receiving a flower from her son-in-law on Mother's Day, or writing about how wonderful it was to spend a weekend together with their child. The parents were engaging in a comparative exercise of filial piety based on social media posts. Participants experiencing strong parental pressure tend to sign off the platform or block their parents so they did not have to suffer the pressure of constantly being compared with other people's online self-presentation and falling short in terms of public displays and performances of affection for their parents.

Another example of reducing channels as an act of communication as well as relationship management is when one of my participants posted on his WeChat Moments the following announcement: 'From today I'm shutting down my Moments to focus on writing my thesis! If you have an emergency, please call me (rather than message me)!' Shutting down his Moments was a strategy he employed to pay full attention to his thesis, which is called '闭关' (*Biguan*) in Chinese. This is a reference to an old Chinese social practice. In ancient times, some monks would choose to live in the mountains or somewhere very far from cities to avoid the distractions of social interactions. Nowadays by signing off social media accounts, people disconnect with

their friends online as a way of seeking *Biguan* (闭关). In other words, old practices and forms of seeking solitude and freedom from the distraction of social interactions without causing offence are reincarnated.

In 1959, Goffman developed a dramaturgical approach to understanding the social interactions and activities of individuals as performances on the stage of life, which he explained as 'the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers' (p. 22). When introducing the concept of impression management, Goffman argued that individuals project their idealized image during the processes of the presentation of self. As social media engage more and more with the daily life of individuals, and with the spread of the Internet and mobile phones over the past two decades, a growing number of authors have attempted to use Goffman's theory of self-presentation to explain online activity using social media. For example, Robison (2007) coined the term 'cyber performer' to name the people who perform in cyberspace. Boyd (2007, 2008) uses Goffman's self-presentation to ground her study on the identity management of teens in networked publics. Hogan (2010) extends Goffman's theory and claims that on social media, synchronous 'situations' become asynchronous 'exhibitions'. Zhao et al. (2013, p. 1), as an extension to both Goffman's theory and Hogan's exhibition metaphor, argue that 'people experience the Facebook platform as consisting of three different functional regions: a performance region for managing recent data and impression management, an exhibition region for longer term presentation of self-image, and a

personal region for archiving meaningful facets of life. Further, the users' need for presenting and archiving data in these three regions is mediated by temporality'. This functional analysis of impression management is an oversimplification of the complex social relations that play out in social media applications and platforms.

People tend to assume that everyone shares the same media ideologies with themselves and this can lead to misunderstandings. Zhao et al. (2013) did not take this into account when they proposed the three functional regions for Facebook. I found direct evidence in my ethnography that illustrates my point about the danger of assumptions about media ideology. At a casual dinner party that I attended with my research participants, a young woman asked a young man why he always posts photos in *Jiugongge* (九宫格, refers to nine photos placed in a squared box, see Figure 7.1 below) on his WeChat Moments without leaving any message, and why all the photos are either of the sky or of flowers, with no photos of himself? On WeChat Moments, the maximum number of photos that can be uploaded in one post is nine. Many young adults like to reach the maximum number because the photos will then be perfectly organized in a squared box.



**Figure 7.1: Example of *Jiugongge* (九宫格)**

The male participant's answer echoes the findings of Zhao et al. (2013, p. 1), that for him WeChat Moments is his 'personal region for archiving meaningful facets of life'. He said, 'I mean nothing by it. I just want to share the beautiful scenery I see and I want to use my Moments as my digital diary. I am too lazy to write a diary, therefore, if I post there (on WeChat Moments) I will be able to look at them whenever I miss them.'

However, with the lack of a shared media ideology, his female friend interprets his posts as 'an exhibition region for longer term presentation of self-image' (Zhao et al. 2013, p. 1). With the same presentation of the nine photos, my participant's motivation for archiving is different from his friend's interpretation of the exhibition. To put it another way, the assumptions made about media ideology can result in misunderstandings.

In 1959, Goffman argued that performers co-operate to 'present to an audience a given definition of the situation' (p. 238), however disruptions such as 'unmeant

gestures, faux pas, and scenes' occur sometimes and therefore discredit or contradict the given definition of the situation. Disruptions during a performance normally refer to unexpected interruptions. They disrupt the expected definition of the situation, although sometimes disruptions may bring applause from the audiences and thus turn a misinterpreted performance into an 'unexpected' happy ending. Self-presentation in daily life must be considered in specific contexts, that is to say, people will adopt different impression management strategies in different situations. Understanding this point about impression management can be connected to another key concept of Goffman's (1959): audience isolation. The so-called audience isolation is that we do not expect another person or a group of people to interrupt without warning when we are presenting ourselves to one person or to a group of people. These unexpected visitors may break our established acting scripts and cause us to panic.

Logically, successful audience isolation requires at least two specific premises: one is that the audience can be identified; the other is that the audience can be isolated. In everyday life, these two advances are often controllable, but on social media these two specific premises face their own threats and challenges.

Goffman (1956, p. 155) lists three levels of abstraction which are the consequence of performance disruptions, namely 'personality, interaction, and social structure'.

These three levels of abstraction can also be applied to the consequences of a life

change and are constantly reflected in my participants' social media practices. Dali told me how he first met his girlfriend in Melbourne:

When she showed up at the orientation party, my eyes couldn't move away from her. For a second, my brain went blank. I didn't know what to do. She was so beautiful and so gorgeous [...] and who would have guessed it but that party, or I should say her presence at the party, changed my life.

Dali fell in love with her at first sight. He managed to friend the girl on We Chat and follow her on Weibo. Dali became a highly active user of these two platforms. He tried to post on his Moments and Weibo at least twice a day to attract the girl's attention. He told me that if he posts anything on his Moments and Weibo, he is posting for her. He wants the girl to read his posts and like his posts, because Dali believes that 'reading my posts means she is interested in my life and therefore that means she cares about me'. The presence of his girlfriend was a 'disruption' to his 'performance' or behaviour at both the party and on his social media. Although it was unexpected, it turned out to be a rather enjoyable life change.

As discussed in previous chapters, the consequences of moving overseas not only affects young adults themselves, but also the people around them, especially the significant others (i.e. parents, friends and etc.). Later in this chapter, I present these diagrammatically (Figure 7.1).

Faced with all kinds of challenges coming from new life changes, young adults use social media to help themselves get through the changes while negotiating their old



and new interpersonal relationships, with new ties emerged and the weak ties becomes strong ties (for instance, reconnected with a high school alumni after coming to Australia) or the strong ties becomes weaker. Again, take the case of Dali. When he made a point of posting twice a day to attract a girl's attention, he caught his parents' attention. His parents started to question if he was focused on his studies. To solve the problem, Dali simply registered a new account to use with his parents. He uses one 'official' account for his parents, extended family members and friends who are not so close; and keeps another active account for his 'open-minded' friends and peers. For both Huiyun and Dali, the parental relationship has a profound influence on their social media practices.

In the following sections, I show how the interaction of individuals is reflected through polymedia and co-presence and how Goffman's 'social structure' can be understood by employing social comparison theory and collective decision-making theory.

When a performance is given it is usually given in a highly bounded region, to which boundaries with respect to time are often added. The impression and understanding fostered by the performance will tend to saturate the region and the time span, so that any individual located in this space-time manifold will be in a position to observe the performance and be guided by the definition of this situation which the performance fosters (Goffman 1959, p. 106).

Goffman talks about a specific space and time manifold in which an audience observes a given performance. However, when young adults move overseas, they are geographically separated from their friends and families in China. This means that they are physically located in a different space-time manifold. Young adults are standing on a foreign stage in a foreign country, leaving their previous audiences in the theatre of the home country. With the proliferation of digital media technologies, social media provide young adults and their friends and families back home with a brand-new stage, a stage that is digitally online and where different time zones and physical distances have collapsed. Having experienced the life change of moving overseas, young adults perform on the new stage of social media in front of both old and new audiences. It is a new stage as it is located in a foreign country and because it refers to a wider range of social media platforms— Facebook, Twitter, etc., which cannot be accessed in China. When presenting on a new stage, although the performer is the same person, the presentation may be different as it depends on the idealized impression a person wants to present and what meanings the person wants the audiences to infer.

#### *Increased frequency of using social media*

In Chapter 3, I summarised what emerged from my online observations and said that young adults living overseas generally post and repost on four themes:

- 1) lifestyle (i.e. food, transportation, parties, etc.)
- 2) emotional content (i.e. homesickness, culture shock, etc.)
- 3) new encounters (i.e. sightseeing)

- 4) interpersonal relationships (i.e. romantic relationships, parental relationships and work-related relationships)

My analysis of the 186 questionnaire responses showed that young adults use social media more frequently after they move overseas.

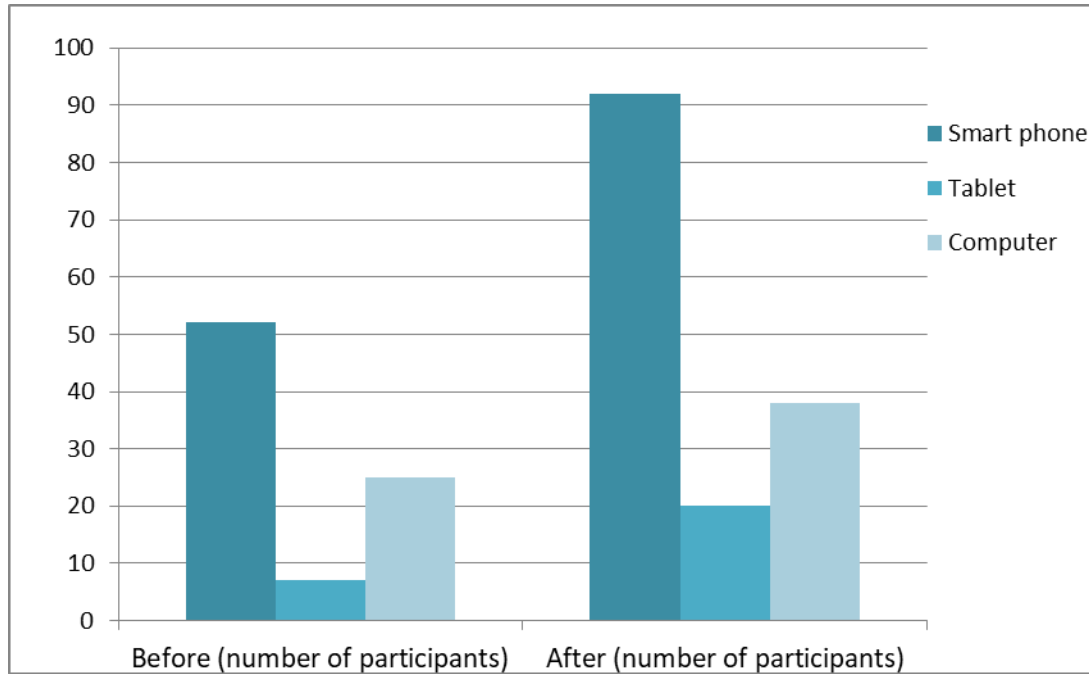
Drawing from my statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses, I found that after moving overseas, young adults make more use of social media as reflected by the increasing frequency of accessing social media via devices consisting of computers, smart phones and tablets. In particular, after moving to Australia the majority of smart phone users increased their use of social media and accessed it more than ten times per day.

Based on Question 10 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 3), the frequency of social media usage is measured as the number of times per day on average that participants in the questionnaire checked and interacted (including browsing, posting, reposting, liking, commenting and mentioning someone) on social media.

Figure 7.2 below displays the number of participants who accessed social media at a frequency of more than ten times a day under each of the three devices (smart phone, tablet and computer) before and after coming to Australia.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> There were 9 participants who claimed that they hadn't used social media before coming to Australia, therefore, making 177 the effective sample size for this question.



**Figure 7.2: Numbers of participants accessing social media more than ten times a day on each of the three devices**

The number of participants checking and interacting on social media more than ten times per day has increased on all three devices. After coming to Australia, the number of participants who used a tablet to access social media has more than doubled. This result is consistent with participants wanting to make greater use of social media to maintain contact with family and friends in China as well as to develop new social relations and connections in Australia, as happens with freshmen students in the USA (Junco 2015).

They like to share their foreign lives with friends and families left behind in China, and they choose to make different posts on different platforms with different media genres. The videos and photos people upload to social media platforms show

evidence of their desire to document and share their most ordinary moments ( Berry 2016).

The four themes that emerge from my observations actually overlap in my participants' posts. A group of sightseeing photos in Melbourne will be posted together with a paragraph saying how much someone misses their hometown. The life change caused by living overseas is complex, and this complexity is inseparable from an individual's perception of life and their self-identity. Therefore, a study of the social media practices of these young adults should not study their online activity as just a performance, but also pay attention to the nuances and the background story behind them.

### **From co-presence to co-decision making**

[t]he full conditions of co-presence [...] are found in less variable circumstances: persons must sense that they are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived. In our walled-in Western society, these conditions are ordinarily expected to obtain throughout the space contained in a room, and to obtain for any and all persons present in the room (Goffman 1963, p. 17).

Goffman suggests that co-presence involves two conditions. The first one is when individuals are able to perceive somebody in the same space and time, and the second one is knowledge that they can be perceived by others (Biocca & Harms

2002). Co-presence is a key contributor to a larger concept of presence which is defined by Witmer and Singer (1998, p. 225) as the 'subjective experience of being in an environment, even when one is physically situated in another'.

Social media overcome barriers of space and time. They bring people from different locations and different time zones to the same online space and time. Young adults living overseas rely on social media to stay connected with their friends and families back home. For instance, a participant pursuing his PhD degree in Melbourne video chats with his girlfriend in China every day to maintain their five-year relationship. It is not easy to maintain a long-distance relationship. He constantly feels pressured, because no matter how late he gets home from the lab he will video chat with his girlfriend, often for hours on end.

As Mizuko Ito (2005) has noted, the mobile phone helps facilitate communities of presence. Although social media break the barriers created by different time zones, in real time the time difference still exists. A participant who was conducting research in Melbourne told me that he felt exhausted every night after he finished a day in the lab doing an experiment for his research at approximately 10pm. However, when he went back home he had to video chat with his girlfriend who was working in China. He was too tired to talk to her, he just wanted to relax and fall sleep (not to mention that in the summer time, Melbourne time is three hours ahead of Beijing time). When my participants' girlfriend went to bed at 12 am in Beijing, it was 2 am in Melbourne. With the time difference between China and Australia, it was very

difficult for my participants to keep his girlfriend company by video chat every night and all night till she fell asleep.

The girlfriend understood how exhausted her boyfriend was, but she couldn't resist the desire of having her boyfriend co-present with her online. Their story reflects Chambers' argument that 'webcam can give the illusion of co-presence and a reminder of separation' (2013, p. 118). Sometimes my participant set up webcam with his girlfriend while simultaneously watching a movie on their own laptops located in two different countries across the Pacific Ocean. The girlfriend would ask him to do a screenshot of the movie to share their most favourite scene together. However, my participant thought 'I know it sounds quite sweet but actually sometimes I thought it was childish and silly'. This is an example of Licoppe's (2004) finding that the connected presence provided by communication technologies substitutes or compensates for a lack of face to face interaction.

Young Chinese adults don't usually make decisions by themselves. Instead, they make decisions in a dynamic situation in which they collect opinions from their families and friends. When young adults live overseas, the three characteristics of polymedia environments (visuality, mobility and locative functionality) facilitate young adults in the creation of an ambient co-presence (Madianou 2016) with their domestic families and friends, which allows them to make collective decisions about their lives, such as migration or career decisions.

When young adults plan their careers, they check their friends' social media to identify possible professions. They are making a group decision online by observing and analysing their friends' social media posts, and by communicating with their friends if they want to know more details about their friends' jobs. Festinger (1954) argues that an increase in the difference between yourself and another specific person's opinion or ability decreases the tendency to compare yourself with that person. Festinger's argument explains why young adults won't compare their career path with senior professionals, but they will choose their peers and friends as the 'role models' who they constantly compared themselves with. According to Festinger's argument, young adults would pay attention to their peers and friends' work-related posts in order to figure out or at least to have an image of their peers and friends' jobs and at the same time comparing to their own jobs. This reflects my findings and provides a useful interpretation of how the young adults in my ethnography planned their careers. They were more concerned with comparing themselves with other young people rather than with people who had succeeded in their chosen profession.

In Chapter 6, I explored the motivation of shoppers in China who ask *Daigou* to purchase products which they have seen being used by celebrities in entertainment magazines, TV shows and more often on social media. Abidin (2014, 2015a, 2015b) researched the social media celebrity culture in Southeast Asia extensively. More and more celebrities are taking advantage of sharing their private lives online with their fans, and they use social media platforms as a way for selling products and



services they endorse (Abidin 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Abidin (2014) also found that ordinary people can become social media celebrities through product endorsements on social media. This adds to the word of mouth advertising power of social media. Social media celebrities and influencers are able to use the social networking and relationship management aspects of social media for self and product marketing purposes.

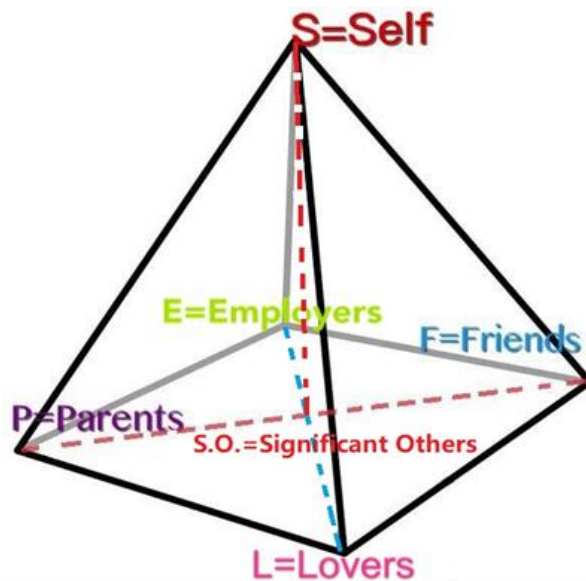
When customers search online for instructions and user-experiences concerning certain products, they are making a collective decision together with other buyers online. They won't make an individual decision of buying or not buying until they gather enough information online about certain products or services, which have been presented online by other shoppers or buyers in different media formats. In these cases, the presentation doesn't have to be about a person, it could refer to a product or service. The affordances of polymedia enable *Daigou* agents and their clients to make choices among different media to exchange information about certain products or services while managing their interpersonal relationships at the same time.

### **The pyramid model of self and significant others**

There has been an abundance of psychological research on 'self' and 'relationship' in recent years (for example, Hibbert, Dickinson & Curtin 2013; Finkel & Vohs 2006). I refer to this body of work here in order to begin to disentangle the four chief types

of interpersonal relationships (friendship, love, family, work) revealed by my ethnographic research.

Anderson and Chen (2002) argue that 'the self is relational – often entangled – with SO [significant others] and this has implications for self-definition, self-evaluation, self-regulation and most broadly for personality functioning, expressed in relation to others' (p. 619). They define 'a significant other' as 'any individual who is or has been deeply influential in one's life and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested' (p. 619). Building on their study of relational self and significant others, and combined with my fieldwork analysis on the four types of life changes and interpersonal relationships in the previous chapters, I propose a pyramid of relations between self and significant others, consisting of parents, friends, employers and lovers.



**Figure 1.1: The pyramid model of self and significant others (p. 19)**

**(parents, friends, employers and lovers)**

The pyramid model represents the various links between life changes and interpersonal relationships. As displayed in the model, the five points of the pyramid stand for self, friends (Chapter 3), lovers (Chapter 4), parents (Chapter 5), and employers (Chapter 6). The lines between each of these points represent people using social media to connect and communicate with each other, and to navigate their interpersonal relationships. People's social media practices are closely related to the way they manage their interpersonal relationships, especially when faced with life changes, i.e. moving overseas, to do with work and romance, and having to cope with relationships with employers and lovers. Furthermore, the management of these entangled relationships is not straightforward and may create tensions.

This pyramid model captures diagrammatically the dynamic, intertwined nature of these relationships for young Chinese adults, allowing us to understand their social media practices in dealing with life changes.

To illustrate this, I will provide an example. When young adults are out with their parents at a cafe, the conversation that they have is only between themselves and their parents. Young adults know how to behave in front of their parents, and how to talk to their parents to keep them happy. However, when young people hang out with their friends, the atmosphere and the content of the conversation will be entirely different. What is appropriate in one context may not be appropriate in another so that different contexts have different norms that determine how people should behave.

Nowadays, an individual's friends and parents are gathered together on the same social media platform, like two different types of audiences sitting together in the same room, watching the same performance, that is, this individual's online activity. Social media places people in situations where they have to deal with different types of interpersonal relationships on one platform. They need to be mindful of their different audiences and interlocutors and work out strategies to manage their social media environments. Danah boyd (2011) has referred to such phenomena as context collapse. This has led to different ways of managing social media. Interestingly, Costa (2017, 2018) finds that it is not really a problem for Facebook users in Turkey, since most of them have multiple Facebook accounts to deal with different groups of friends. This is different from what I found in my ethnography. I found that it is still not easy for my participants to keep both their parents and friends happy within one conversation or activity on the same social media platform. In the pyramid model, the square at the bottom, composed by four points of P (parents), E (employers), L (lovers) and F (friends) are like social media platforms, where different contexts have collapsed at one platform. This is where polymedia can be a way of navigating the complexity of different types of relationships and social circles.

To see how this works in practice, let us examine the case of Huiyun.

Huiyun has listened to her parents and been very obedient ever since she was a little girl. She has a very strong and close relationship with her parents. After she came to Australia, she met a young Chinese man called Ben. The two of them get along very

well. On 20 May, known as Chinese Internet Valentine's Day,<sup>13</sup> they went out to celebrate. During their dinner, Ben said to Huiyun that they should take a selfie together and post it on their Moments to tell their friends and families that they were dating. Huiyun refused to do this.

I had to turn him down. I didn't want to, but my parents have told me many times that I shouldn't share any personal romantic photos online. They won't let me to post them [...] Ben was really mad at me. He thought I was scared to tell my parents and my friends that we were dating [...] That's not actually true. I told my parents the first day I decided to date him. I even sent them photos of him. Ben doesn't understand [...] He says that I'm an adult now, so I can do whatever I want with my social media accounts. Well, I just can't.

Before I had this conversation with Huiyun, I had already noted that I couldn't find any photos or information about her boyfriend on her WeChat Moments and Sina Weibo. This led me to think that perhaps she was single after all, but after the interview the puzzle was resolved. It would never have been solved if I had only observed her online activity without interviewing her. Instead of having a happy celebration on 20 May Day, Huiyun and Ben had an argument over whether they should post selfies and make their relationship public online. Because of her close parental relationship, Huiyun obeys her parents' wishes regarding her online activity. However, Huiyun's obedience to her parents is affecting her romantic relationship with her boyfriend and triggering tensions. Huiyun's boyfriend hopes to share a

---

<sup>13</sup> '20 May', phonetically the same as '我 (5=wo=I) 爱 (2=ai=love) 你 (0=ni=you)' in Chinese.

photo on the Internet to inform friends on social media that they are dating and hope to get everyone's recognition of their relationship. The need to share this online confirms that he wants to integrate social media into his emotional bond with Huiyun. But Huiyun's parents remain silent on this form of public display, which is an example of two different and incompatible ways to value online impression management.

### **A triangle model of self, interpersonal relationships and life changes**

Katy used to love rice, but now her favourite main food is bread, only bread, after she has come to Australia. This may simply look like a change of one's taste, but if we zoom in, we realize that Katy's change of taste involves her identity development as well as her understanding on western cultures and her desire to integrate into the new community and the Australian society. Katy has made many new friends in Melbourne, mostly local people and international students from other western countries. '...up to 90% of them (new friends) loves bread, I tried to "brainwash" them with my favourite rice when we hang out in the restaurants, but before I noticed, I can't leave bread for a day now. I am "brainwashed and stomach-washed" ...hahaha' said Katy in her interview. Of course, Katy would not forget to announce her big 'brainwashed and stomach-washed' news on her social media. It would be very strange for her to phone hundreds of people telling them that she loves eating bread instead of rice now, where social media provides the best place for Katy to announce the change in her tastes and her love of a western dietary

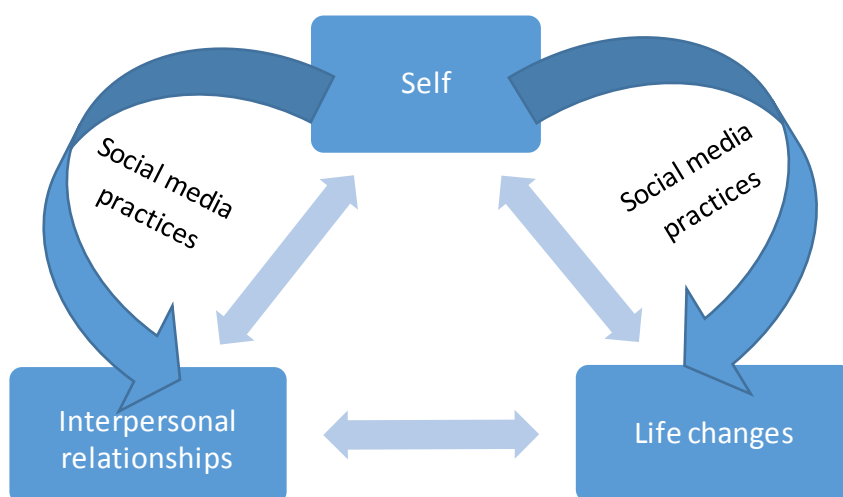
staple. Her newfound love of bread reflects her life changes and becomes a subtle way of her telling her social networks that she is enjoying the changes.

She not only posted on her WeChat but also on Facebook since she aware that her new friends (western oriented) and old friends (Chinese) were mainly separated on these two platforms. Katy worried a bit about her 'bread post' may cause some arguments in the comments however it turned more positively than she expected. Many of her friends share similar experience of changing favourite foods after moving to a new place or start living with new roommates or lovers.

A life change, like moving and living overseas can also bring cultural shocks, social context readjustment to people and as well as affect their identity development, psychological development, characteristics and interpersonal relationships. These changes most of time are not superficially visible, they may be very subtle and they may be expressed in social media timelines in quite symbolic ways like Katy's new love of bread. Identity, psychology, characteristics, interpersonal relationships, cultural and social background all affect the way people use social media.

Social media provides us with a place to observe, compare and become aware of people's changes to their lives, the before-and-after, from their posts and other online interactions. These changes are complicated and intertwined with interpersonal relationships and other factors. In the case of Katy, her posts to social media become a witness to her life changes when she announced that she loves bread now. Her posts also start a new cycle that invites her friends on social media

to comment on the posts and to repost them in order to discuss and reflect similar life experiences and how these changes have affected them. Her posts have become conversation starters for her friends. The relationship between life changes and social media practices is dynamic and cyclical. I propose a triangle model to illustrate the three-way dynamic relationship between self, interpersonal relationships and life changes with approach of people's social media practices. A three-way triangle is a common way to conceptualise dynamic communication and social relationships. The social psychologist James Shah's model (see Figure 7.4) 'articulates three separate self-regulatory relationships: how individuals perceive themselves in relation to a goal, how they perceive themselves in relation to a significant other, and how the goal and the significant other in question are perceived to relate to each other' (2006, p. 388). My model is an adaptation of Shah's (2006) model to the specific case of social media practices and life changes.



**Figure 7.3 A triangle model of self, interpersonal relationships and life changes**



A Triangular Model



FIGURE 19.1. A triangular model of self-regulatory relationships.

Figure 7.4 A triangular model of self-regulatory relationships (Shah 2006, p. 388)

## Conclusion

My conceptual framework is underpinned by polymedia, co-presence, social comparison theory and collective decision-making theory. I have sought to make a contribution to the understanding of social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes. I have extended the conceptualisation of polymedia by suggesting that polymedia is not just about using different media or channels for different purposes. It is also about reducing or increasing the number of available channels. People reduce channels by signing off their social media accounts to disconnect from their friends and families for a certain period of time to focus on working, studying or making difficult decisions.

In closing this chapter, let us return to the five different perspectives that I identified to develop my model on social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes.

Polymedia offer many affordances and scalable socialities (Miller et al. 2016) that allow individuals to switch between different social media platforms and digital formats to negotiate their ongoing, dynamic relationships within the pyramid model I proposed. The mobility of new media helps people create co-presence almost everywhere, whether they are co-located (Andrade 2014) or separated. As Hjorth (2005) addresses, locality is always in 'deferral, transition, translation, mediation and re-contextualisation'<sup>14</sup>. The combination of polymedia and co-presence allows young adults and their families make important decisions together while being able to video chat online.

The final chapter, 'Conclusion', reviews the four perspectives of the impact of life changes on young adults' social media practices discussed through Chapters 3 to 6. It also addresses the methodological and theoretical contributions of the present thesis, ending with suggestions for future research.

---

<sup>14</sup> viewed 2 March 2017, <<http://six.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-035-locating-mobility-practices-of-co-presence-and-the-persistence-of-the-postal-metaphor-in-sms-mms-mobile-phone-customization-in-melbourne/>>.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### Introduction

While mainstream research focuses on how social media affect people's lives, this study explored how people confronted with life changing events or circumstances use social media to redirect their interpersonal relationships and to get through the life changes. I have conceptualised the relationship between my participants and the affordances of social media as two-way and entangled with their everyday lives.

Being exposed to a new living environment in Australia, many young adults from other countries are faced with a range of challenges. These may include cultural barriers, language limitations, employment difficulties, and academic pressures. The life changes of moving overseas change the time and space which young adults and their families and friends used to share. Young adults' interpersonal relationships and their technological mediations shift as they experience life changes. As Miller and Sinanan argue, 'technology is a means but relationships are the end' (2014, p. 110).

To explore and theorise young adults' social media practices before and after life changes, I have integrated the theory of self-presentation (Goffman 1959) with the conceptualisation of polymedia proposed by Madianou and Miller (2013). Using a combination of these two theories, and together with another three principles which are co-presence, social comparison theory and collective decision-making theory, I have developed a model of social media, interpersonal relationships and life changes.

At different stages of life, people intentionally or unintentionally present themselves with a certain image on social media. As mentioned in earlier chapters, young adults prefer to portray themselves as hard-working and responsible individuals when they are searching for jobs, because they think that potential employers may read their posts. With the proliferation of digital media, young adults switch media affordances and social media platforms for different purposes of communication and self-presentation. Polymedia provides a communicative environment to navigate different types of interpersonal relationships online. By connecting these two theoretical frameworks, I have been able to generate insights into my participants' social media practices about the content they share and the type of polymediated communication they choose to present, in order to manage different interpersonal relationships.

To examine the elusive links between social media practices and life changes, I embarked on a nine-month study of young Chinese adults who came to Australia for further education and/or employment. I interviewed and observed 44 people to understand how they changed their social media practices whilst experiencing the life changes associated with moving to Australia. To complement the ethnographic study, I also surveyed 186 respondents to obtain demographic data on young adults' social media practices in terms of platforms, devices and frequency of use, before and after living overseas.

I spent time hanging out and engaging directly with my participants, listening to their stories as well as observing their online activity. It was not always easy to separate the online and offline field sites as I often found that my participants were physically co-located in cafes and libraries while silently communicating with each other by sharing photos and comments on their social media via smart phones. In other words, the online and offline field sites were often intermingled. I also combined the analysis of questionnaires with semi-structured interviews and observations of my participants.

### **Key findings**

Social media enables people overseas to stay in touch with parents and friends in their home countries, and to help maintain contact with 'mobile friends'. But as these young people experience changes in life, they make the use of social media to maintain these pre-existing relationships into a broader context. For example, in Chapter 6, I have discussed that some participants started doing *Daigou* after they travelled to Australia and therefore 'doing *Daigou*' is the new factor that intervenes their use of social media in maintaining the pre-existing relationships they have — their relatives and friends in China have become their potential customers. The changing contexts keep bringing in new factors and in this case, have strengthened people's pre-existing relationships.

To recapitulate my main argument, drawing from long-term ethnographic research among young adults who moved from mainland China to Australia for further

education and/or employment, I have argued that social media are crucial in assisting young adults to navigate their life transitions. However, this plays out differently from one relationship and social context (friendship, love, family, work) to another. This thesis contributes to the existing scholarship of interpersonal relationships and social media by focusing on the digitally mediated communication of young adults going through life changes. My participants were international students and as such were in transition. I was interested in how their social media practices were affected by this life change. Most of them were intending to return to live in China so I did not classify them as migrants, rather they were Chinese nationals studying abroad. While my work has potential to contribute to migration studies, my focus was not on migration and therefore migration studies was outside of the scope of my research.

To summarise the previous chapters, in Chapter 1 I provided the background and motivation for this research. I outlined the demographic characteristics of young Chinese adults living in Australia and their social media usage. I also presented an overview of existing studies in the areas of social media and interpersonal relationships. In Chapter 2, I explained my research process and methodology in detail. In Chapters 3 to 6, I drew from my ethnographic fieldwork to explore each of the four main types of relationship (friendship, love, family and work) that I identified during the course of my fieldwork as being crucial to how young Chinese adults negotiate their life changes while living in Australia. Studying is a common thread that runs throughout these chapters. I have mentioned in each chapter how

students show their hard-working image, for example, in Chapter 3, I discuss how students dating cause parents' worries and concerns and how students find work.

In Chapter 7, building on the foregoing chapters, I located my ethnographic findings in line with five principles. This research has found that people change their social media practices when they experience life changes. For instance, participants started using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms after coming to Australia. These platforms are not available in mainland China. Although my participants' choices of social media platforms did change along with their geographical relocations, the ones that they use the most to keep in touch with their friends and families back in China are still WeChat and Weibo.

When living overseas, young adults use their social network sites to demonstrate and document their ability to adapt and integrate to their new living and working environments. They also adopt social media as a toolbox to help them get through certain life changes, for instance, finding a potential partner, breaking up, or finding a job. Intriguingly, they seldom noticed that their social media practices had actually changed. Yet through the interview process, they constantly reflected on their social media behaviour, for instance, on the languages they used to post content, preferences in the accounts they tended to follow, and the differences in the content they posted and reposted before and after coming to Australia. My participants gradually realized that changes in their new living surroundings had

indeed meant that they developed new needs and thus had driven the ways in which they interacted with Internet technologies.

### **Major contributions**

This study adds to the emergent field of digital ethnography by setting up online participant observations alongside in-depth interviews. It expands what it means to be in an environment where the online and offline are entangled compared with traditional offline field sites. This research combines analysis of research questionnaires together with analysis from interviews and participant observation material. By triangulating the data collected from qualitative and quantitative research methods, I have been able to cross-check and understand more insights and details which were relevant to investigating the differences in participants' social media practices before and after travelling to Australia.

Another important contribution of this research is in Chapter 7, where I locate my ethnographic findings in line with five principles of self-presentation, polymedia, co-presence, social comparison theory and collective decision-making theory.

I also extend the understanding of three important theories. First, with regard to the theory of self-presentation (Goffman 1959), I take the concept of performance disruptions and apply it to young adults' self-presentation online after having experienced life changes. As discussed in Chapter 3, participants post different content online after they move overseas. One of the dominant reasons is that they want to share the strangeness of the place, culture and experiences with their



friends and families. Second, I explore how individuals will increase or reduce their social media increasing or reducing social media channels as a way of polymediated communication. Participants increase their social media platforms when they join a new group of friends or go looking for new technology affordances, but later on they will reduce the number of channels when they make the decision to leave a certain group of friends, or migrate together with the group of friends to join another group of friends on a different platform. Furthermore, participants may shut down their social media accounts as a means of shutting down distractions so that they can focus on their exams or jobs. Third, using the case study of *Daigou* business in Chapter 6, I apply the notion of co-presence to understand the rapport built up on social media between the *Daigou* agents and their customers.

To illustrate how young adults use social media to maintain existing relationships after moving overseas, as well as expand their social networks in the new living environment, I proposed a *pyramid model of self and significant others* (Figure 1.1, p. 19). This model theorizes how young adults are navigating interpersonal relationships for different life dimensions. When participants deal with new life changes overseas through social media, they are actually managing interpersonal relationships with polymedia affordances. The four types of interpersonal relationships are captured by four chapters in the thesis, which are Chapter 3 on friendship, Chapter 4 on love, Chapter 5 on family and Chapter 6 on work. No matter how an individual participant is coping with these relationships, a core relationship triangle exists. The core relationship between self, parents and friends affects your

understanding and experience of other types of relationships and therefore affects the way that you manage interpersonal relationships through your social media practices.

### **Future research**

The research undertaken in this thesis is based on a specific group at a specific location – young Chinese adults studying and working in Australia. Considering the ethnographic nature of the study, a small number of participants were recruited for interviews and participant observations. In total, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted and followed up with online and offline participant observations. The findings may not be statistically significant, but they can certainly be relevant to other groups of people who have similar life experiences and are regular social media users. I also undertook some online participant observation on Facebook, Sina Weibo and WeChat. With the rapid development of social media, new social networks keep appearing. This research is not focused on studying websites or platforms, rather it studies the daily practices of people using social media, especially in the context of experiencing life changes, i.e. moving overseas.

Over time, I built a rapport with my participants by engaging and interacting with them online. From the closeness I developed with my participants, more detailed material has emerged to add to the research. Also, with the combination of multiple research methods (i.e. questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and participant observations), I have been able to triangulate the data to produce reliable and

objective findings, although my findings relate to a specific population in a particular social and cultural context.

Given the limitations of time and location, I was able to conduct nine months of fieldwork, mostly based in Melbourne. It would be beneficial to expand the duration of the fieldwork, and since this research focused on the impact of life changes on young adults' social media practices, more insights and detail would have been available if the fieldwork had been conducted in two places. The first location would be where young adults live before they go overseas, and the second location would be the city in the destination country. In this way, the changes in young adults' social media practices associated with the new life changes of moving overseas would be clearly reflected and recognized in data captured before and after and after.

In this research, I focus on studying the age group between 20 to 40 years old. It would be interesting to expand the age range and study the social media practices before and after experiencing life changes of people from other age groups. People in different life stages have different life changes, for example, when people are between 20 and 40 years old, they are more likely to experience such events as breakups, marriage, the birth of their first child, etc. When people become older, unexpected life changes such as sickness, death, divorce, retrenchment may happen. It would be of great significance to study the dynamic interrelationships between life changes in different life stages and social media practices.

More than seventy-two percent of the participants in this research were well-educated graduate students. The role of education in this research has not been given much attention. Studying further how education levels affect people's adaption to life changes on social media would be another worthy line of future inquiry.

In addition to education, it would be worthwhile to look at this research from the angle of cultural studies and migration studies. People from different cultural and social backgrounds are likely to have different reactions towards expected and unexpected life changes, not to mention the way they use social media.

As the number of participants in this research project is small, further insights would be gained by recruiting more participants. This would be possible with longer hours of online participant observation. Also the employment of a gender studies approach would reveal the differences between male participants and female participants' social media activity and would provide further understanding of how male and females react to life changes in their social media. Questions of gendered identity and sexuality which fall outside of the strong heteronormativity of Chinese culture is also an area of great research potential.

My research has also raised a number of intriguing questions which could be investigated in a future longitudinal study (Postill 2012). The experience of living overseas has a significant effect on young adults. It is not just a two-year or three-year effect but rather a life-long impact. The most important concerns people's ways

of thinking and their choice of lifestyles. Some effects are reflected immediately, for example in the preference for certain types of food and fashion, while some have an impact on culture and thinking styles. These effects may not show up immediately after an international student finishes their study overseas, but may surface as these young adults reach a certain life stage and have to cope with challenging life events.

The current thesis investigates how young adults when living overseas use social media to navigate their interpersonal relations in different contexts (love, work, friends and family). An interesting extension of this framework would be to further study how these young adults readjust when they move back to China. For example, when young adults live overseas they use social media in a particular way to maintain their romantic relationships from a distance, however, after returning to China and getting together with their partners, social media may create new stress on their relationships.

Using social media to communicate with the left-behind families and friends forms the ambient background, but does this ambient background interrupt young adults living overseas to integrate with the local community? Isn't it a constant reminder of homesick?

### **Concluding remarks**

This research enhances our understanding of the dynamic relationships between life changes and young adults' social media practices. It sheds light on how young adults deal with four types of personal relationships on social media: friendships, romantic

relationships, parental relationships and work-related relationships. By participating in the fieldwork, my participants undertook self-reflection on their social media practices as well. They didn't realize that they had changed their views of social media as well as their social media practices until they were being interviewed. Even after I finished my fieldwork, my participants who had become my friends, still actively 'live' on my Moments. I am accustomed to reading their posts every day and I don't want to miss a moment of their lives. Sometimes, I feel like I am a parent remotely observing my 'children' growing up. They have now concluded their studies in Australia and have started a fresh new journey. I am so glad and so grateful that I can witness their growth on social media and it is always fun to catch up with them online. Every day they are experiencing new life changes, and some of these life changes are mirrored on their posts online. Together with the process of posting and reposting certain messages and images, young adults living overseas are trying to use social media as a self-help tool for self-encouragement, self-improvement and self-promotion in different life stages. Young adults are not just sharing what they are sharing, they also want others to understand what is behind that 'sharing'. They embed their emotions and feelings in their posts online to encourage and to empower themselves to embrace challenges.

## References

- Abidin, C 2014, '#In\$tagLam: Instagram as a repository of taste, a burgeoning marketplace, a war of Eyeballs', in M Berry & M Schleser (eds), *Mobile media making in an age of smartphones*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 119-128.
- Abidin, C 2015a, 'Communicative intimacies: influencers and perceived interconnectedness', *Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, vol. 8, viewed 26 April 2017, <<http://adanewmedia.org/2015/11/issue8-abidin/>>.
- Abidin, C 2015b, 'Micromicrocelebrity: branding babies on the internet'. *M/C Journal*, vol. 18 no. 5, viewed 26 April 2017, <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/1022>>.
- Abidin, C & Ots, M 2016, 'Influencers tell all? Unravelling Authenticity and Credibility in a Brand Scandal', in E Maria, AT Kenyon & EM Svensson (eds.), *Blurring the lines: market-driven and democracy-driven freedom of expression*, Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, pp. 153-161.
- Abidin, C & Thompson, EC 2012, 'Buymylife.com: Cyber-femininities and commercial intimacy in blogshops', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 467-477.
- Agassi, J 2017, 'Methodological individualism', *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, pp. 1-2.
- Al Ariss, A 2010, 'Modes of engagement: migration, self-initiated expatriation, and career development', *Career Development International*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 338-358.
- Al Ariss, A, Koall, I, Özbilgin, M & Suutari, V 2012, 'Careers of skilled migrants: towards a theoretical and methodological expansion', *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 92-101.
- Allan, GA 1989, *Friendship: developing a sociological perspective*, Westview Press, Michigan.
- Alvesson, M 2010, *Interpreting interviews*, Sage Publications, London.
- Ambrosini, M 2015, 'Parenting from a distance and processes of family reunification: a research on the Italian case', *Ethnicities*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 440-459.
- Amit, V (ed.) 2003, *Constructing the field: ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Anderson, B & Tracey, K 2001, 'Digital living: the impact (or otherwise) of the Internet on everyday life', *American behavioral scientist*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 456-475.
- Andrade, AD 2014, 'From physical co-location to perceived co-presence: "I feel close to you when I use my mobile"', *Pacific Asia Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1-19.
- Arkoudis, S, Watty, K, Baik, C, Yu, X, Borland, H, Chang, S, Lang, I, Lang, J & Pearce, A 2013, 'Finding common ground: enhancing interaction between domestic and

- international students in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 222-235.
- Atkinson, R, 1998, *The life story interview*, Sage Publications, London.
- Ausserhofer, J & Maireder, A 2013, 'National politics on Twitter: structures and topics of a networked public sphere', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 291-314.
- Baldassar, L 2007, 'Transnational families and the provision of moral and emotional support: the relationship between truth and distance', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 385-409.
- Baldassar, L 2008, 'Missing kin and longing to be together: emotions and the construction of co-presence in transnational relationships', *Journal of intercultural studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 247-266.
- Baldassar, L 2016, 'De-demonizing distance in mobile family lives: co-presence, care circulation and polymedia as vibrant matter', *Global Networks*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 145-163.
- Bareket-Bojmel, L, Moran, S & Shahar, G 2016, 'Strategic self-presentation on Facebook: personal motives and audience response to online behavior', *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 55, pp. 788-795.
- Baumrind, D 1991, 'The influence of parenting styles on adolescent competence and substance abuse', *Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 56-95.
- Baym, NK 2010, *Personal connections in the digital age*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Baym, NK 1996, 'Agreements and Disagreements in a Computer-Mediated Group', *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, vol. 29, pp. 315-346.
- Beaulieu, A 2010, 'Research note: from co-location to co-presence: shifts in the use of ethnography for the study of knowledge', *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 453-470.
- Bennett, L 2012, 'Music fandom online: REM fans in pursuit of the ultimate first listen', *New Media & Society*, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 748-763.
- Berger, AA 2013, *Media analysis techniques*, Sage Publications, London.
- Berger, AA 2015, *Media and communication research methods: an introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Sage Publications, London.
- Berry, M 2016, 'Out in the open: locating new vernacular practices with smartphone cameras'. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 53-64.
- Biernacki, P & Waldorf, D 1981, 'Snowball sampling: problems and techniques of chain referral sampling', *Sociological Methods & Research*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 141-163.
- Biocca, F & Harms, C 2002, 'Defining and measuring social presence: contribution to the networked minds theory and measure', *Proceedings of Presence*, pp. 7-36.
- Blyth, C & Roberts, LD 2014, Public attitudes towards penalties for sexting by minors, *Current Issues Crim, Just.*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 143-158.
- Boase J, Horrigan JB, Wellman B, & Rainie L 2006, 'The Strength of Internet Ties', Pew Internet and American Life Project Report.



- Bochner, S, McLeod, BM & Lin, A 1977, 'Friendship patterns of overseas students: a functional model'. *International Journal of Psychology*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 277-294.
- Boellstorff, T, Nardi, B, Pearce, C & Taylor, TL 2012, *Ethnography and virtual worlds: a handbook of method*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
- Boellstorff, T 2015, *Coming of age in second life: an anthropologist explores the virtually human*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
- Bohon, SA, Stamps, K & Atilas, JH 2008, 'Transportation and migrant adjustment in Georgia', *Population Research and Policy Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 273-291.
- Bonetti, F, Perry, P & Fernie, J 2017, 'The evolution of luxury fashion retailing in China', in *Luxury Fashion Retail Management*, Springer, Singapore, pp. 49-67.
- Boyd, D 2007, 'Why youth (heart) social network sites: the role of networked publics in teenage social life', *MacArthur Foundation series on digital Learning—youth, identity, and digital media volume*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 119-142.
- Boyd, D 2008, *Taken out of context: American teen sociality in networked publics*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Boyd, D 2010, 'Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications', in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (ed. Zizi Papacharissi), pp. 39-58.
- Boyd, D & Marwick, A 2011, *Social Steganography: Privacy in Networked Publics*. Viewed 12 December 2017, <<http://www.danah.org/papers/2011/Steganography-ICAVersion.pdf>>.
- Boyd, D 2014, *It's complicated: the social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Boyd, D & Ellison, N 2007, 'Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship', viewed 12 November 2017, <<https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.lib.rmit.edu.au/doi/full/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>>.
- Brandtzaeg, PB & Lüders, M 2018, 'Time Collapse in Social Media: Extending the Context Collapse', *Social Media Society* 4.1, viewed 5 July 2018, <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2056305118763349>>.
- Bregman, A & Haythornthwaite, C 2003, 'Radicals of presentation: visibility, relation, and co-presence in persistent conversation', *New Media & Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 117-140.
- Brody, J 2003, 'A linguistic anthropological perspective on language and culture in the second language', *Culture at the core: perspectives on culture in second language learning*, pp. 37-52.
- Brown, D & Grinter, RE 2012, 'Takes a transnational network to raise a child: The case of migrant parents and left-behind Jamaican teens', in *Proceedings of the 2012 ACM Conference on Ubiquitous Computing*, New York, September, pp. 123-132.
- Brym, RJ & Lenton, RL 2001, 'Love online: a report on digital dating in Canada', viewed 26 April 2017, <<http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/brym/loveonline.pdf>>.

- Buchanan, EA & Ess, C 2008, 'Internet research ethics: the field and its critical issues', in *The handbook of information and computer ethics*, John Wiley & Sons, NJ, pp. 273-292.
- Bulu, ST 2012, 'Place presence, social presence, co-presence, and satisfaction in virtual worlds', *Computers & Education*, vol. 58, no. 1, pp. 154-161.
- Buss, DM 1989, 'Sex differences in human mate preferences: evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1-14.
- Cabanes, JVA & Acedera, KAF 2012, 'Of mobile phones and mother-fathers: calls, text messages, and conjugal power relations in mother-away Filipino families'. *New Media & Society*, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 916-930.
- Cai, Y & Wang, F 2011, 'Emergence of late marriage in New Shanghai', in *Conference on Marriage in Cosmopolitan China, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong*, July.
- Cai, Y & Tian, FF 2013, 'Cultural expectations, market mismatch and individual choices: the making of "Shengnu" in China', in *Annual meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans*.
- Cameron, J 2005, 'Focusing on the focus group', in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 116-132.
- Caughey JL 1984, *Imaginary Social Worlds: A Cultural Approach*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press.
- Chambers, D 2013, 'Social media and teenage friendships', in D Chambers (ed.), *Social media and personal relationships: online intimacies and networked friendship*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, pp. 82-101.
- Chan, M, Wu, X, Hao, Y, Xi, R & Jin, T 2012, 'Microblogging, online expression, and political efficacy among young Chinese citizens: the moderating role of information and entertainment needs in the use of Weibo', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, vol. 15, no. 7, pp. 345-349.
- Chao, RK 1994, 'Beyond parental control and authoritarian parenting style: Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training', *Child Development*, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 1111-1119.
- Chelmis, C & Prasanna, VK 2013, 'An empirical analysis of microblogging behavior in the enterprise', *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 611-633.
- Chen, L 2012, 'Investigation of micro-blogging communication patterns for fashion products: a content analysis of Kiehl's corporate account on Sina Weibo in China', doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota.
- Chen, S, Zhang, H, Lin, M & Lv, S 2011, 'Comparison of microblogging service between Sina Weibo and Twitter', in *Computer Science and Network Technology (ICCSNT)*, IEEE vol. 4, December, pp. 2259-2263.
- Cheong, M & Lee, V 2010, 'Dissecting Twitter: a review on current microblogging research and lessons from related fields', *Springer*, Vienna, pp. 343-362.
- Christ, WG & Potter, WJ 1998, 'Special issue on media literacy', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 48, no. 1, whole issue.
- Christensen, TH 2009, '"Connected presence" in distributed family life', *New Media & Society*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 433-451.

- Clark, LS 2012, *The parent app: understanding parents in a digital age*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) 2014, the 33rd Report on Statistics of Chinese Internet Development, viewed March 2014, <<https://wenku.baidu.com/view/279eed1b4b35eefdc8d33388.html>>.
- Coleman, EG 2010, 'Ethnographic approaches to digital media', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 487-505.
- Conradson, D & Latham, A 2005, 'Friendship, networks and transnationality in a world city: Antipodean transmigrants in London', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 287-305.
- Costa, E 2017, Social media as practices: an ethnographic critique of 'affordances' and 'context collapse', a working paper for the EASA Media Anthropology Network's 60th e- Seminar, viewed 1 June 2017, <[http://www.media-anthropology.net/file/costa\\_socialmedia\\_as\\_practice.pdf](http://www.media-anthropology.net/file/costa_socialmedia_as_practice.pdf)>.
- Costa, E 2018, 'Affordances-in-practice: An Ethnographic Critique of Social Media Logic and Context Collapse', *New Media and Society*, viewed 12 July 2018, <<http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.rmit.edu.au/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444818756290>>.
- Couldry, N 2008, 'Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling', *New Media & Society*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 373-391.
- Couldry, N 2011, 'The Necessary Future of the Audience...and How to Research It', in *The handbook of media audiences*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, pp. 213-229.
- Couldry, N 2012, *Media, society, world: social theory and digital media practice*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Cowan, CP & Cowan, PA 2000, *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, US.
- Coyle, JR, Smith, T & Platt, G 2012, "'I'm here to help" how companies' microblog responses to consumer problems influence brand perceptions', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 27-41.
- Cresswell, T 2011, 'Mobilities I: catching up', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 550-558.
- Creswell, JW 2012, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*, Sage Publications, London.
- Creswell, JW 2003, *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, Sage Publications, London.
- Crichton, S & Kinash, S 2003, 'Virtual ethnography: interactive interviewing online as method', *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 2-16.
- Cron, WL 1984, Industrial salesperson development: a career stages perspective, *The Journal of Marketing*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 41-52.
- Croll, E & Croll, EJ 1981, *The politics of marriage in contemporary China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Da, WW 2003, 'Transnational grandparenting: child care arrangements among migrants from the People's Republic of China to Australia', *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 79-103.
- Davies, H 2014, 'Social media and personal relationships: online intimacies and networked friendship', *Information, Communication and Society*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 279-281.
- Davison, C 2012, 'Presentation of digital self in everyday life: towards a theory of digital identity', PhD thesis, RMIT University, Melbourne.
- Dayter, D 2011, 'Twitter as a means of class participation: making student reading visible', *Journal of Applied Linguistics & Professional Practice*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-21.
- Deuze, M, Blank, P & Speers, L 2012, 'A life lived in media', *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1-15.
- Dreby, J 2006, 'Honor and virtue: Mexican parenting in the transnational context', *Gender & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 32-59.
- De Choudhury, M, Counts, S & Horvitz, E 2013, 'Major life changes and behavioral markers in social media: case of childbirth', in *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work*, ACM, San Antonio, Texas, USA — 23 - 27 February 2013, viewed 25 October 2014, <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/318e/b2148da32a4de2c5912733dfe936bd66987.pdf>.February>.
- de Sousa Campos, L, Otta, E & de Oliveira Siqueira, J 2002, 'Sex differences in mate selection strategies: content analyses and responses to personal advertisements in Brazil', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 395-406.
- Denzin, NK & Lincoln, YS 2011, *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, Sage Publications, California.
- DeWalt, KM & DeWalt, BR 2010, *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers*, Rowman Altamira Press, Lanham.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B & Crabtree, BF 2006, 'The qualitative research interview', *Medical education*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 314-321.
- Dohrenwend, BS & Dohrenwend, BP 1974, *Stressful life events: their nature and effects*. John Wiley & Sons, Oxford.
- Domizi, DP 2013, 'Microblogging to foster connections and community in a weekly graduate seminar course', *TechTrends*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 43-51.
- Dunlap, JC & Lowenthal, PR 2009, 'Tweeting the night away: using Twitter to enhance social presence', *Journal of Information Systems Education*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 129-135.
- Eagly, AH & Wood, W 1999, 'The origins of sex differences in human behavior: evolved dispositions versus social roles', *American psychologist*, vol. 54, no. 6, pp. 408-423.

- Ebner, M & Reinhardt, W 2009, 'Social networking in scientific conferences—Twitter as tool for strengthen a scientific community', in *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Science*, vol. 2, pp. 1-8.
- Ellison, NB 2007, 'Social network sites: definition, history, and scholarship', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 210-230.
- Else, B 1990, 'Teaching and learning', in M Kinnell (ed), *The learning experiences of overseas students*, Open University Press, Buckingham, pp. 46-62.
- Engberg, E, Alen, M, Kukkonen-Harjula, K, Peltonen, JE, Tikkanen, HO & Pekkarinen, H 2012, 'Life events and change in leisure time physical activity', *Sports medicine*, vol. 42, no. 5, pp.433-447.
- Ess, C 2007, 'Internet research ethics', in *The Oxford handbook of Internet psychology*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 487-502.
- Festinger, L 1954, 'A theory of social comparison processes', *Human relations*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 117-140.
- Fetscherin, M & Conway, M 2011, *Brand Love: Interpersonal or Parasocial Love Relationship, Consumer-Brand Relationships:Theory and Practice*.
- Fetterman, DM 1989, *Ethnography: step by step*, Sage Publications, California.
- Fincher, LH 2016, *Leftover women: the resurgence of gender inequality in China*. Zed Books Ltd., London.
- Finkel, EJ, Eastwick, PW, Karney, BR, Reis, HT & Sprecher, S 2012, 'Online dating: a critical analysis from the perspective of psychological science', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 3-66.
- Fischer, E & Reuber, AR 2011, 'Social interaction via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior?', *Journal of business venturing*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 1-18.
- Fontana, A & Frey, JH 1994, 'Interviewing: the art of science', in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 361-376.
- Fresnoza-flot, A 2009, 'Migration status and transnational mothering: the case of Filipino migrants in France', *Global Networks*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 252-270.
- Gaetano, A 2014, "'Leftover Women": postponing Marriage and Renegotiating Womanhood in Urban China', *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 124-149.
- Gan, C & Wang, W 2015, 'Uses and gratifications of social media: a comparison of microblog and WeChat', *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 351-363.
- Gao, F, Luo, T & Zhang, K 2012, 'Tweeting for learning: a critical analysis of research on microblogging in education published in 2008–2011', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 43, no. 5, pp. 783-801.
- Gao, Q, Abel, F, Houben, GJ & Yu, Y 2012, 'A comparative study of users' microblogging behavior on Sina Weibo and Twitter', in *International Conference on User Modeling, Adaptation, and Personalization*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 88-101.

- Garcia, AC, Standlee, AI, Bechkoff, J & Cui, Y 2009, 'Ethnographic approaches to the internet and computer-mediated communication', *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp.52-84.
- Geertz, C 1988, *Works and lives: the anthropologist as author*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Gershon, I 2010a, *The breakup 2.0 : disconnecting over new media*, Cornell University Press, New York.
- Gershon, I 2010b, 'Breaking Up Is Hard To Do: Media Switching and Media Ideologies', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp. 389–405.
- Gershon, I 2010c, 'Media Ideologies: An Introduction', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp. 283–293.
- Gibbs, JL, Ellison, NB & Lai, CH 2010, 'First comes love, then comes Google: an investigation of uncertainty reduction strategies and self-disclosure in online dating', *Communication Research*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 70 –100.
- Giles, DC 2010, 'Parasocial relationships', in J Eder, F Jannidis & R Schneider (eds.), *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, Publisher de Gruyter, pp. 442-458.
- Gillen, J & Merchant, G 2013, 'Contact calls: Twitter as a dialogic social and linguistic practice', *Language sciences*, vol. 35, no.1, pp. 47-58.
- Gillham, B 2005, *Research Interviewing: the range of techniques*, Open University Press, Berkshire.
- Goffman, E 1956, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.
- Goffman, E 1959, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Anchor Books, New York.
- Goffman, E 1963, *Behavior in public places: notes on the social organization of gatherings*, The Free Press, New York.
- Golbeck, J, Grimes, JM & Rogers, A 2010, 'Twitter use by the US Congress', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, vol. 61, no. 8, pp. 1612-1621.
- Gomes, C 2015, 'Footloose transients: international students in Australia and their aspirations for transnational mobility after graduation', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 41-57.
- Gomes, C, Berry, M, Alzougool, B & Chang, S 2014, 'Home away from home: international students and their identity-based social networks in Australia', *Journal of International Students*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 2-15.
- Gomes, C, Chang, S, Jacka, L, Coulter, D, Alzougool, B & Constantinidis, D 2015, 'Myth busting stereotypes: the connections, disconnections and benefits of international student social networks', in *26th ISANA International Education Association Conference, Melbourne, viewed 3 April 2017*, <<http://2016.isanaconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Gomes.pdf>>.
- Gómez Cruz, E & Meyer, ET 2012, 'Creation and control in the photographic process: iPhones and the emerging fifth moment of photography', *Photographies*, vol. 5, no.2, pp. 203-221.

- Granovetter, MS 1973, 'The strength of weak ties', *American journal of sociology*, vol. 78, no. 6, pp. 1360-1380.
- Gray, PA 2016, 'Memory, body, and the online researcher: following Russian street demonstrations via social media', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp.500-510.
- Greengard, S 2012, 'Digitally possessed', *Communications of the ACM*, vol. 55, no. 5, pp. 14-16.
- Gregg, M & Driscoll, C 2008, 'Message me: temporality, location and everyday technologies', *Media International Australia*, vol. 128, no.1, pp. 128-136.
- Hager, P & Holland, S 2006, 'Introduction' in Hager, P & Holland, S (eds), *Graduate attributes, learning and employability* (vol. 6), Springer, Netherlands, pp.1-15.
- Hall, DT 1976, *Careers in organizations*, Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear Publishing Company.
- Hammersley, M & Atkinson, P 1995, 'Insider accounts: listening and asking questions', *Ethnography: Principles in practice*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 124-156.
- Hannerz, U 2003, 'Being there... and there... and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography', *Ethnography*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 201-216.
- Hao, L & Bonstead-Bruns, M 1998, 'Parent-child differences in educational expectations and the academic achievement of immigrant and native students', *Sociology of Education*, vol. 71, no. 3, pp.175-198.
- Haythornthwaite, C 2002, 'Strong, weak, and latent ties and the impact of new media', *The information society*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 385-401.
- Heino, RD, Ellison, NB & Gibbs, JL 2010, 'Relationshopping: investigating the market metaphor in online dating', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 427-447.
- Henderson, S & Gilding, M 2004, "'I've never clicked this much with anyone in my life": trust and hyperpersonal communication in online friendships', *New Media & Society*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 487-506.
- Hepp, A 2009, 'Differentiation: mediatization and cultural change', in *Mediatization: concept, changes, consequences*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, pp.139-158.
- Herold, DK & Marolt, P (eds) 2011, *Online society in China: Creating, celebrating, and instrumentalising the online carnival*, Routledge, London and New York, vol. 25.
- Hetz, PR, Dawson, CL & Cullen, TA 2015, 'Social media use and the fear of missing out (FoMO) while studying abroad', *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 259-272.
- Hine, C 2000, *Virtual ethnography*, Sage Publications, London.
- Hine, C 2007, 'Multi-sited ethnography as a middle range methodology for contemporary STS', *Science, Technology & Human Values*, vol. 32, no. 6, pp.652-671.

- Hine, C 2008, 'Virtual ethnography: modes, varieties, affordances', in *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 257-270.
- Hine, C 2015, *Ethnography for the internet: embedded, embodied and everyday*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York.
- Hjorth, L 2005, 'Locating Mobility: practices of co-presence and the persistence of the postal metaphor in SMS/MMS mobile phone customization in Melbourne', *Fibreculture Journal*, vol. 6, no. 6, viewed 2 March 2017, <<http://six.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-035-locating-mobility-practices-of-co-presence-and-the-persistence-of-the-postal-metaphor-in-sms-mms-mobile-phone-customization-in-melbourne/>>.
- Ho, DYF 1995, 'Selfhood and identity in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism: Constructs with the West', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 115–139.
- Ho, DYF 1998a, 'Interpersonal relationships and relationship dominance: An analysis based on methodological relationalism', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 1, pp. 1–16.
- Ho, DYF 1998b, 'Filial piety and filicide in Chinese family relationships: The legend of Shun and other stories', in UP Gielen & AL Comunian (eds.), *The family and family therapy in international perspectives*, Edizioni Lint Trieste S.R.L., Italy, pp. 134 –149.
- Ho, DYF & CHIU, CY 1998, 'Collective representations as a metaconstruct: An analysis based on methodological relationalism', *Culture and Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 349–369.
- Hoang, LA & Yeoh, BS 2012, 'Sustaining families across transnational spaces: Vietnamese migrant parents and their left-behind children', *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 307-325.
- Hogan, B 2010, 'The presentation of self in the age of social media: distinguishing performances and exhibitions online', *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, vol. 30, no. 6, pp. 377 –386.
- Holland, D & Quinn, N 1987, *Cultural models in language and thought*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Hollingshead, AB 1996, 'Information suppression and status persistence in group decision making the effects of communication media', *Human Communication Research*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 193-219.
- Horst, HA & Miller, D (eds.) 2013, *Digital anthropology*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York.
- Horst, H, Hjorth, L & Tacchi, J 2012, 'Rethinking ethnography: An introduction', *Media International Australia*, vol. 145, no. 1, pp. 86-93.
- Horton, D & Wohl, R 1956, *Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*, *Psychiatry*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 215-229
- Hu, HN, Meng, HH & Rao, R 2006, 'Relational Hypothesis in Ancient Chinese Interpersonal Communication Thought', *Anhui History*, vol. 2006, no. 3, pp. 5-10.



- Hughes, CR & Wacker, G (eds.) 2003, *China and the Internet: Politics of the digital leap forward*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Hughes, DJ, Rowe, M, Batey, M & Lee, A 2012, 'A tale of two sites: Twitter vs. Facebook and the personality predictors of social media usage', *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 561-569.
- Hutchby, I 2001, Technologies, texts and affordances, *Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 441-456.
- Hwang, KK 1999, 'Filial piety and loyalty: two types of social identification in confucianism', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 163-183.
- Hwang, KK 2001, 'Chinese Relationalism: Theoretical Construction and Methodological Considerations', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 30, pp. 155 - 178.
- Ito, M, Baumer, S, Bittanti, M, Cody, R, Stephenson, BH, Horst, HA, Lange, PG, Mahendran, D, Martínez, KZ, Pascoe, CJ & Perkel, D 2009, *Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out: kids living and learning with new media*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Ito, M & Okabe, D 2005, 'Technosocial situations: emergent structurings of mobile email use', *Personal, portable, pedestrian: mobile phones in Japanese life*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 257-273.
- Ikels, C (eds.) 2004, *Filial piety: Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jack, DC & Anderson, K 1991, *Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Jackling, B 2007, 'The lure of permanent residency and the aspirations and expectations of international students studying accounting in Australia', *People and Place*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 31-41.
- Java, A, Song, X, Finin, T & Tseng, B 2007, 'Why we twitter: understanding microblogging usage and communities', in *Proceedings of the 9th WebKDD and 1st SNA-KDD 2007 workshop on Web mining and social network analysis*, San Jose, California — August 12 August 2007, viewed 10 Oct 2016, <<http://aisl.umbc.edu/resources/369.pdf>>.
- Ji, Y 2015, 'Between tradition and modernity: "Leftover" women in Shanghai', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 77, no. 5, pp. 1057-1073.
- Hibbert, JF, Dickinson, JE & Curtin, S 2013, 'Understanding the influence of interpersonal relationships on identity and tourism travel', in *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 24:1, 30-39, DOI:10.1080/13032917.2012.762313
- Johnson, JM 2002, 'In-depth interviewing', in *Handbook of interview research: context and method*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 103-119.
- Kanter, M, Afifi, T & Robbins, S 2012, 'The impact of parents "friending" their young adult child on Facebook on perceptions of parental privacy invasions and parent-child relationship quality', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 62, no. 5, pp. 900-917.

- Kim, J & Lee, JER 2011, 'The Facebook paths to happiness: effects of the number of Facebook friends and self-presentation on subjective well-being', *CyberPsychology, behavior, and social networking*, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 359-364.
- Kozinets, RV 2015, *Netnography*, John Wiley & Sons, London.
- Kwak, H, Lee, C, Park, H & Moon, S 2010, 'What is Twitter, a social network or a news media?', in *Proceedings of the 19th international conference on World wide web*, ACM, Raleigh, North Carolina —26 - 30 April 2010, viewed 5 March, 2015, <<https://www.cs.bgu.ac.il/~snean151/wiki.files/22-WhatisTwitterASocialNetworkOrANewsMedia.pdf>>.
- Lange, DL & Paige, RM 2003, *Culture as the core: perspectives on culture in second language learning*, IAP, Greenwich.
- Larsson, AO & Moe, H 2012, 'Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign', *New Media & Society*, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 729-747.
- Lea, M & Spears, R 1991, 'Computer-mediated communication, de-individuation and group decision-making', *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 283-301.
- Lea, M & Spears, R 1995, 'Love at first byte? Building personal relationships over computer networks', Sage Publications, California.
- Leary, MR 1995, *Self-presentation: impression management and interpersonal behavior*, Brown & Benchmark Publishers, US.
- LeCompte, MD & Schensul, JJ 1999, *Designing and conducting ethnographic research*, Rowman Altamira, London.
- Ledwith, S & Seymour, D 2001, 'Home and away: preparing students for multicultural management', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 12, no. 8, pp. 1292-1312.
- Leung, L 2006, 'Stressful life events, motives for Internet use, and social support among digital kids', *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 204-214.
- Li, D, Zhang, W, Li, X, Zhen, S & Wang, Y 2010, 'Stressful life events and problematic Internet use by adolescent females and males: a mediated moderation model', *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 1199-1207.
- Li, H, Wang, J & Wang, L 2009, 'A survey on the generalized problematic Internet use in Chinese college students and its relations to stressful life events and coping style', *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 333-346.
- Liang, B & Lu, H 2010, 'Internet development, censorship, and cyber crimes in China', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 103-120.
- Liao, Q & Shi, L 2013, 'She gets a sports car from our donation: rumor transmission in a chinese microblogging community', in *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work*, ACM, San Antonio, Texas, USA — 23 - 27 February 2013, viewed 9 May 2016, <<http://ai2-s2-pdfs.s3.amazonaws.com/a4f4/c26086c218b21d38e418b07e5593a7cd56a9.pdf>>.

- Licoppe, C 2004, 'Connected'presence: the emergence of a new repertoire for managing social relationships in a changing communication technoscape', *Environment and planning D: Society and space*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 135-156.
- Lin, N, Ensel, WM, Simeone, RS & Kuo, W 1979, 'Social support, stressful life events, and illness: A model and an empirical test', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, pp. 108-119.
- Liu, J 2013, 'Microblogging Use by the Chinese Government', open accessed theses, viewed 8 February 2015, <[http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1426&context=oa\\_theses](http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1426&context=oa_theses)>.
- Livingstone, S 2004, 'Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies', *The Communication Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 3-14.
- Livingstone, S 2008, 'Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression', *New media & society*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 393-411.
- Livingstone, S 2009, 'On the mediation of everything: ICA presidential address 2008', *Journal of communication*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 1-18.
- Livingstone, S & Graaf, SVD 2010, 'Media literacy', in Wolfgang Donsbach (ed), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, First Edition, JohnWiley & Sons, USA, <[http://www.shenja.org/Shenja\\_van\\_der\\_Graaf/playlist\\_files/Media\\_Literacy\\_final08.pdf](http://www.shenja.org/Shenja_van_der_Graaf/playlist_files/Media_Literacy_final08.pdf)>.
- Lomicka, L & Lord, G 2012, 'A tale of tweets: Analyzing microblogging among language learners', *System*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 48-63.
- Lovejoy, K & Saxton, GD 2012, 'Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 337-353.
- Lu, J & Qiu, Y 2013, 'Microblogging and social change in China', *Asian Perspective*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 305-331.
- Lundby, K (ed) 2014, *Mediatization of communication*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, Berlin, vol. 21.
- Luo, S & Klohn, EC 2005, 'Assortative mating and marital quality in newlyweds: a couple-centered approach', *J Pers Soc Psychol*, vol. 88, no. 2, pp. 304-326.
- Ma, L 2013, 'The diffusion of government microblogging: evidence from Chinese municipal police bureaus', *Public Management Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 288-309.
- Madianou, M 2012, 'Migration and the accentuated ambivalence of motherhood: the role of ICTs in Filipino transnational families', *Global Networks*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 277-295.
- Madianou, M 2014, '14 Polymedia communication and mediatized migration: an ethnographic approach', in *Mediatization of communication*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, pp.323-346, viewed 2 April 2017, <<http://research.gold.ac.uk/13818/1/Madianou%20chapter%20Mediatiazation%20Handbook.pdf>>.

- Madianou, M 2016, 'Ambient co-presence: transnational family practices in polymedia environments', *Global Networks*, Wiley Online Library, viewed 12 February 2017, <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/qlob.12105/pdf>>.
- Madianou, M & Miller, D 2011, 'Mobile phone parenting: reconfiguring relationships between Filipina migrant mothers and their left-behind children', *New media & society*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 457-470.
- Madianou, M & Miller, D 2012, 'Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 169-187.
- Madianou, M & Miller, D 2013, *Migration and new media: transnational families and polymedia*, Routledge, New York.
- Marcus, GE 1995, 'Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual review of anthropology*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 95-117.
- Marwick, AE 2005, "'I'm a Lot More Interesting than a Friendster Profile": Identity Presentation, Authenticity and Power in Social Networking Services', *Internet Research*, viewed 26 March 2015, <[http://www.tiara.org/papers/marwick\\_friendster\\_authenticity\\_power.doc](http://www.tiara.org/papers/marwick_friendster_authenticity_power.doc)>.
- Marwick, AE 2011a, 'I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience', *New media & society*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 114-133.
- Marwick, AE 2011b, 'To see and be seen: celebrity practice on Twitter', *Convergence: the international journal of research into new media technologies*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 139-158.
- Massimi, M, Dimond, JP & Le Dantec, CA 2012, 'Finding a new normal: the role of technology in life disruptions', in *Proceedings of the ACM 2012 conference on computer supported cooperative work*, Seattle, Washington, USA — 11-15 February 2012, viewed 17 June 2015, <<http://www.dgp.toronto.edu/~mikem/pubs/Massimi-CSCW2012.pdf>>.
- Maxwell, JA 2012, *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*, Sage Publications, California.
- McDonald, S 2005, Studying actions in context: a qualitative shadowing method for organizational research, *Qualitative research*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 455-473.
- McDonald, T 2016, *Social Media in Rural China*, UCL Press, London.
- McKenna, KY 2008, 'MySpace or your place: relationship initiation and development in the wired and wireless world', *Handbook of relationship initiation*, Taylor & Francis, pp. 235-247.
- Miller, D 2009, *Anthropology and the individual: a material culture perspective*, Berg, Oxford and New York.
- Miller, D & Slater, D 2000, *The Internet: an ethnographic approach*, Berg, Oxford and New York.
- Miller, D 2011, *Tales from facebook*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Miller, D & Sinanan, J 2014, *Webcam*, John Wiley & Sons, Cambridge.

- Miller, D, Costa, E, Haynes, N, McDonald, T, Nicolescu, R, Sinanan, J, Spyer, J, Venkatraman, S & Wang, XY 2016, *How the World Changed Social Media*, UCL, Why We Post Web, London.
- Minichiello, V, Aroni, R, Timewell, E & Alexander, L 1995, *In-depth interviewing : principles, techniques, analysis*, Longman, Melbourne.
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2007, 'New Terms in the Country's Official Lexicon in 2006', viewed 8 March 2015, <[http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe\\_1551/200708/25472.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_1551/200708/25472.html)>.
- Mitchell, KJ, Finkelhor, D, Jones, LM & Wolak, J 2012, 'Prevalence and characteristics of youth sexting: a national study', *Pediatrics*, vol. 129, no. 1, pp. 13-20
- Murthy, D 2008, 'Digital ethnography: an examination of the use of new technologies for social research', *Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 5, pp. 837-855.
- Nadkarni, A & Hofmann, SG 2012, 'Why do people use Facebook? Personality and individual differences', *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 243-249.
- Nedelcu, M & Wyss, M 2016, 'Doing family' through ICT-mediated ordinary co-presence: transnational communication practices of Romanian migrants in Switzerland', *Global Networks*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 202-218.
- Nikitkov, A & Sainty, B 2014, 'The role of social media in influencing career success', *International Journal of Accounting & Information Management*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 273-294.
- Nobles, J 2011, 'Parenting from abroad: migration, nonresident father involvement, and children's education in Mexico', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 73, no. 4, pp. 729-746.
- Oolo, E & Siibak, A 2013, 'Performing for one's imagined audience: Social steganography and other privacy strategies of Estonian teens on networked publics', *Cyberpsychology*, vol. 7, no. 1.
- Oppenheim, AN 2000, *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- O'Reilly, K 2008, *Key concepts in ethnography*, Sage Publications, London.
- O'Reilly, K 2012, *Ethnographic methods*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Ong, EY, Ang, RP, Ho, JC, Lim, JC, Goh, DH, Lee, CS & Chua, AY 2011, 'Narcissism, extraversion and adolescents' self-presentation on Facebook', *Personality and individual differences*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 180-185.
- Pahl, R 2000, *On friendship*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Papacharissi, Z 2002, 'The presentation of self in virtual life: characteristics of personal home pages', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 643-660.
- Papacharissi, Z (ed) 2010, *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites*, Routledge, New York.
- Parreñas, RS 2001, 'Mothering from a distance: emotions, gender, and intergenerational relations in Filipino transnational families', *Feminist studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 361-390.

- Parreñas, RS 2005, *Children of global migration: transnational families and gendered woes*, Stanford University Press, California.
- Parreñas, RS 2008, 'Transnational fathering: gendered conflicts, distant disciplining and emotional gaps', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 34, no. 7, pp. 1057-1072.
- Paulhus, DL, Harms, PD, Bruce, MN & Lysy, DC 2003, 'The over-claiming technique: measuring self-enhancement independent of ability', *Journal of personality and social psychology*, vol. 84, no. 4, pp. 890-904.
- Peng, Y & Wong, OM 2013, 'Diversified transnational mothering via telecommunication: Intensive, collaborative, and passive', *Gender & Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 491-513.
- Perälä, R 2014, 'Engaging with media in a fragmented media environment', *Media practice and everyday agency in Europe*, pp. 273-283.
- Pimentel, EE 2000, 'Just how do I love thee?: Marital relations in urban China', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 32-47.
- Pink, S, Horst, H, Postill, J, Hjorth, L, Lewis, T & Tacchi, J 2015, *Digital ethnography: Principles and practice*, Sage Publications, London.
- Pink, S & Postill, J 2017, 'Student migration and domestic improvisation: transient migration through the experience of everyday laundry', *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 13-28.
- Postill, J 2006, *Media and nation building: how the Iban became Malaysian*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.
- Postill, J 2008, Localizing the internet beyond communities and networks, *New Media & Society*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 413-431.
- Postill, J 2009, 'Introduction: theorising Media and Practice', *Theorising Media and Practice*, Oxford and New York, Berghahn.
- Postill, J 2012, 'Media and social changing since 1979: Towards a diachronic ethnography of media and actual social changes', in *EASA 2012 biennial conference, Nanterre, Paris*, viewed 1 June 2017, <<https://johnpostill.com/2012/07/14/new-paper-media-and-social-changing-since-1979/>>.
- Postill, J 2017, 'Remote ethnography: studying culture from afar', in L Hjorth, H Horst, A Galloway & G Bell (eds), *The Routledge companion to digital ethnography*, Routledge, London, pp. 61-69.
- Postill, J & Pink, S 2012, 'Social media ethnography: the digital researcher in a messy web', *Media International Australia*, vol. 145, no. 1, pp. 123-134.
- Pulakos, ED & Schmitt, N 1995, 'Experience-based and situational interview questions: studies of validity', *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 289-308.
- Quan-Haase, A & Young, AL 2010, 'Uses and gratifications of social media: A comparison of Facebook and instant messaging', *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 350-361.
- Rahe, RH 1979, 'Life change events and mental illness: an overview', *Journal of Human Stress*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 2-10.

- Rahe, RH & Arthur, RJ 1978, 'Life change and illness studies: past history and future directions', *Journal of Human Stress*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 3-15.
- Rainie, L & Wellman, B 2012, *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT.
- Rakow, LF & Navarro, V 1993, 'Remote mothering and the parallel shift: women meet the cellular telephone', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 144-157.
- Ramirez, A, Fleuriet, C & Cole, M 2014, 'When online dating partners meet offline: the effect of modality switching on relational communication between online daters', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 99-114.
- Rao, A, Schmidt, SM & Murray, LH 1995, 'Upward impression management: goals, influence strategies, and consequences', *Human Relations*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 147-167.
- Reiss, D 1981, *The family's construction of reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Richardson, J 2009, 'Geographic flexibility in academia: a cautionary note', *British Journal of Management*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 160-170.
- Richardson, J & McKenna, S 2003, 'International experience and academic careers: what do academics have to say?' *Personnel Review*, vol. 32, no. 6, pp. 774-795.
- Richardson, J & Zikic, J 2007, 'The darker side of an international academic career', *Career Development International*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 164-186.
- Robinson, L 2007, 'The cyberself: the self-ing project goes online, symbolic interaction in the digital age', *New Media & Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 93-110.
- Roman, LA 2014, 'Using social media to enhance career development opportunities for health promotion professionals', *Health promotion practice*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 471-475.
- Ronfeldt, M & Grossman, P 2008, 'Becoming a professional: experimenting with possible selves in professional preparation', *Teacher Education Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 41-60.
- Rubin, RB & Mchugh, MP 1987, 'Development of parasocial interaction relationships', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 279-292.
- Ryan, RM & Deci, EL 2000, 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being', *American psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 68-78.
- Sade-Beck, L 2004, 'Internet ethnography: online and offline', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 45-51.
- Saha, N & Karpinski, AC 2016, 'The influence of social media on international students' global life satisfaction and academic performance', in K Bista & C Foster (eds), *Campus Support Services, Programs, and Policies for International Students*, IGI Global, USA, pp. 57-76.
- San Pascual, MRS 2014, 'Mobile parenting and global mobility: the case of Filipino migrant mothers', in XG Xu (ed), *Interdisciplinary mobile media and*

- communications: Social, political and economic implications*, IGI Global, USA, pp. 194-212.
- Sanjek, R & Tratner, SW 2015, *eFieldnotes: the makings of anthropology in the digital world*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania.
- Sauter, T 2014, "'What's on your mind?' Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation", *new media & society*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 823-839.
- Sawir, E, Marginson, S, Deumert, A, Nyland, C, & Ramia, G 2008, 'Loneliness and international students: an Australian study', *Journal of studies in international education*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 148-180.
- Saxton, GD & Wang, L 2014, 'The social network effect: The determinants of giving through social media', *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 5, pp. 850-868
- Schau, HJ & Gilly, MC 2003, 'We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space', *Journal of consumer research*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 385-404.
- Schedl, M 2012, '#nowplaying Madonna: a large-scale evaluation on estimating similarities between music artists and between movies from microblogs', *Information retrieval*, vol. 15, no. 3-4, pp. 183-217.
- Scheff, TJ 2011, 'Social-emotional world: mapping a continent', *Current sociology*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 347-361.
- Schmierbach, M & Oeldorf-Hirsch, A 2012, 'A little bird told me, so I didn't believe it: Twitter, credibility, and issue perceptions', *Communication Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 3, pp. 317-37.
- Schmitz, A, Zillmann, D & Blossfeld, HP 2013, 'Do women pick up lies before men? The association between gender, deception patterns, and detection modes in online dating', *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 52-73.
- Schöndienst, V, Krasnova, H, Günther, O, Riehle, D, & Schwabe, G 2011, 'Micro-blogging adoption in the enterprise: an empirical analysis', 16 - 18, February 2011, Zurich, Switzerland, viewed 22 May 2016, <<http://boris.unibe.ch/47117/1/boris5.pdf>>.
- Schwämmlein, E & Wodzicki, K 2012, 'What to Tell About Me? Self-Presentation in Online Communities', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 387-407.
- Sedikides, C 1993, 'Assessment, enhancement, and verification determinants of the self-evaluation process', *Journal of personality and social psychology*, vol. 65, no. 2, pp. 317-338.
- Seidman, G 2013, 'Self-presentation and belonging on Facebook: how personality influences social media use and motivations', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 402-407.
- Sevin, E 2013, 'Places going viral: Twitter usage patterns in destination marketing and place branding', *Journal of Place Management and development*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 227-239.
- Sian Lee, C & Hoe-Lian Goh, D 2013, "'Gone too soon": did Twitter grieve for Michael Jackson?' *Online Information Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 462-478.



- Silverman, D 2013, *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*, SAGE Publications Limited, London.
- Silverstone, R 2005, *The sociology of mediation and communication*, Sage Publications, London.
- Skinner, J 2013, *The interview: an ethnographic approach*, Berg, London.
- Smith, ME, Nguyen, DT, Lai, C, Leshed, G & Baumer, EP 2012, 'Going to college and staying connected: communication between college freshmen and their parents', in *Proceedings of the ACM 2012 conference on computer supported cooperative work*, Seattle, Washington, USA — 11 – 15 February 2012, viewed 22 March 2017, <[http://leshed.comm.cornell.edu/pubs/paper230\\_Smith.pdf](http://leshed.comm.cornell.edu/pubs/paper230_Smith.pdf) >.
- Smith, RE, Johnson, JH & Sarason, IG 1978, 'Life change, the sensation seeking motive, and psychological distress', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 348-349.
- Shah, J 2006, 'When Your Wish Is My Desire: A Triangular Model of Self-Regulatory Relationships', in KD Vohs & EJ Finkel (eds), *Self and relationships: Connecting intrapersonal and interpersonal processes*, Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 387–406.
- Solimano, A 2008, *The international mobility of talent: types, causes, and development impact*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Stever, GS & Lawson, K 2013, 'Twitter as a way for celebrities to communicate with fans: implications for the study of parasocial interaction', *North American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 339-354.
- Stewart, DW & Shamdasani, PN 2014, *Focus groups: theory and practice* (Vol. 20), Sage Publications, London.
- Stewart Titus, M 2012, "'Phone Home": remote Parenting across National Borders—Jamaican Students in North America and the Role of Mobile Communication Devices', proceedings of the New York State Communication Association, vol. 2011, no. 4, viewed 8 September 2015, <<http://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings/vol2011/iss1/4>>.
- Stocker, A, Richter, A, & Riemer, K 2012, 'A Review of Microblogging in the Enterprise', *Information Technology Methoden und innovative Anwendungen der Informatik und Informationstechnik*, vol. 54, no. 5, pp. 205-211.
- Stuttgart Spradley, JP 1979, *The ethnographic interview*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, Fort Worth, Tex.
- Stieglitz, S & Dang-Xuan, L 2012, 'Political communication and influence through microblogging – an empirical analysis of sentiment in Twitter messages and retweet behavior', in *System Science (HICSS), 2012 45th Hawaii International Conference proceedings*, pp. 3500-3509.
- Stone, DH 1993, Design a questionnaire, *Bmj*, vol. 307, pp. 1264-1266.
- Strassberg, DS, McKinnon, RK, Sustaíta, MA & Rullo, J 2013, 'Sexting by high bennettool students: an exploratory and descriptive study', *Archives of Sexual behavior*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 15-21.

- Street, B 1993, 'Culture is a verb: anthropological aspects of language and cultural process', *Language and culture*, Multilingual Matters Ltd., New York, pp. 23-43.
- Sullivan, J 2012, 'Teaching Chinese politics: microblogging and student engagement', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 347-360.
- Super, DE 1957, *The psychology of careers* (Vol. 1), New York: Harper & Row.
- Super, DE 1980, A life-span, life-space approach to career development, *Journal of vocational behavior*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 282-298.
- Taylor, AR 2008, Parenting in Filipino transnational families, *UNF Theses and Dissertations*, viewed 8 July 2016, <<http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/265>>.
- To, S 2013, 'Understanding sheng nu ("leftover women"): the phenomenon of late marriage among Chinese professional women', *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 1-20.
- Tong, S & Walther, JB 2011a, 'Just say "no thanks": Romantic rejection in computer-mediated communication', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 488-506.
- Tong, S & Walther, JB 2011b, 'Relational maintenance and CMC', *Computer-mediated communication in personal relationships*, pp. 98-118.
- Turfboer, R 1975, 'Stressful Life Events: Their Nature and Effects', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 132, no. 7, pp. 772-a-3.
- Turkle, S 2012, *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, Basic books, New York.
- Turpin, T, Iredale, R & Crinnion, P 2002, 'The Internationalization of Higher Education: implications for Australia and its EducationClients', *Minerva*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 327-340.
- Van Gennep, A 1960, *The rites of passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Veltri, GA 2013, 'Microblogging and nanotweets: nanotechnology on Twitter', *Public Understanding of Science*, vol. 22, no. 7, pp. 832-849.
- Vergeer, M & Hermans, L 2013, 'Campaigning on Twitter: microblogging and online social networking as campaign tools in the 2010 general elections in the Netherlands', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 399-419.
- Vitak, J 2012, 'The impact of context collapse and privacy on social network site disclosures', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 451-470.
- Vlčková, J 1996, 'Text typology of personal advertising', *Brno studies in English*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 89-96.
- Vohs, KD, Finkel, EJ 2006, *Self and Relationships Connecting Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Processes*, New York: Guilford.
- Wall, S 2006, 'An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 5, no. 2.
- Wang, PZ 2015, 'What's the most annoying part of WeChat Moments', *China Youth Daily*, January 22, 2015, 7th Edition.

- Wang, T, Wang, F & Shi, L 2013, 'The use of microblog-based case studies in a pharmacotherapy introduction class in China', *BMC medical education*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp.1-10 .
- Wang, X 2016, *Social Media in Industrial China*, UCL Press, London.
- Wang, Y, Norcie, G, Komanduri, S, Acquisti, A, Leon, PG & Cranor, LF 2011, 'I regretted the minute I pressed share: a qualitative study of regrets on Facebook', in *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium on Usable Privacy and Security*, ACM, ittsburgh, Pennsylvania — 20 - 22 July 2011 ,viewed 23 April 2014,  
<[http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/30777905/a10\\_Wang.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1493346490&Signature=Ggjy7GXA2MfJgZ87lz5zSvl7neQ%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DI\\_regretted\\_the\\_minute\\_I\\_pressed\\_share\\_A.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/30777905/a10_Wang.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1493346490&Signature=Ggjy7GXA2MfJgZ87lz5zSvl7neQ%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DI_regretted_the_minute_I_pressed_share_A.pdf)>.
- Waters, JL 2010, 'Becoming a father, missing a wife : Chinese transnational families and the male experience of lone parenting in Canada', *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 63-74.
- Weiss, RS 1973, 'Loneliness: the experience of emotional and social isolation', MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Weiler, A 2005, 'Information-seeking behavior in generation Y students: motivation, critical thinking, and learning theory', *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 46-53.
- Westcott, H & Vazquez Maggio, ML 2016, 'Friendship, humour and non-native language: emotions and experiences of professional migrants to Australia', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 503-518.
- Whiston, SC & Keller, BK 2004, 'The influences of the family of origin on career development a review and analysis', *The Counseling Psychologist*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 493-568.
- Whiting, A & Williams, D 2013, 'Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach', *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 362-369.
- Whitty, MT & Carr, AN 2006, *Cyberspace romance: the psychology of online relationships*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Wigand, FDL 2010a, 'Twitter takes wing in government: diffusion, roles, and management', in *Proceedings of the 11th Annual International Digital Government Research Conference on Public Administration Online: Challenges and Opportunities*, Digital Government Society of North America, Puebla, Mexico — 17 - 20 May 2010, viewed 20 March 2017.  
<<http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1809889>>.
- Wigand, FDL 2010b, 'Twitter in government: building relationships one tweet at a time', in *Information Technology: New Generations (ITNG), 2010 Seventh International Conference on*, IEEE, 12-14 April 2010, Las Vegas, NV, USA, pp. 563-567.

- Williams, SA, Terras, MM & Warwick, C 2013, 'What do people study when they study Twitter? Classifying Twitter related academic papers', *Journal of Documentation*, vol. 69, no. 3, pp. 384-410.
- Willis, GB 2004, *Cognitive interviewing: A tool for improving questionnaire design*. Sage Publications, London.
- Witmer, BG & Singer, MJ 1998, 'Measuring presence in virtual environments: a presence questionnaire', *Presence: Teleoperators and virtual environments*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 225-240.
- Wittgenstein, L 2010, *Philosophical investigations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wong, WM 2014, 'Finding "Love" in China: an Overview of Chinese Marriage Markets (BaiFaXiangQin)', *Inquiries Journal*, vol. 6, no. 12, viewed 8 July 2016, <<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/946/2/finding-love-in-china-an-overview-of-chinese-marriage-markets-baifaxiangqin>>.
- Wotzko, R 2012, 'Newspaper Twitter: applied drama and microblogging', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 569-581.
- Whyte, M 2004, 'Filial obligations in Chinese families: paradoxes of modernization', in *Filial piety: Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia*, ed. C. Ikels, 106-127. Stanford: Stanford University.
- Xia, P, Tu, K, Ribeiro, B, Jiang, H, Wang, X, Chen, C, Liu, B & Towsley, D 2014, 'Who is dating whom: characterizing user behaviors of a large online dating site', viewed 7 July 2016, <<https://arxiv.org/pdf/1401.5710.pdf>>.
- Xia, YR, Xie, X, Zhou, Z, Defrain, J, Defrain, J & Combs, R 2004, 'Chinese adolescents' decision-making, parent-adolescent communication and relationships', *Marriage & family review*, vol. 36, no. 1-2, pp. 119-145.
- Xiang, B & Shen, W 2009, 'International student migration and social stratification in China', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 513-22.
- Xiaohe, X & Whyte, MK 1990, 'Love matches and arranged marriages: a Chinese replication', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, pp. 709-722.
- Yang, C, Harkreader, R & Gu, G 2013, 'Empirical evaluation and new design for fighting evolving twitter spammers', *IEEE Transactions on Information Forensics and Security*, vol. 8, no. 8, pp. 1280-1293.
- Yang, M 2007, 'What attracts mainland Chinese students to Australian higher education', *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1-12.
- Yao, Xue 2014, 'The influence of people's pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy on human relations from the perspective of the *Zhongyong*', *China's collective economy*, vol. 2014, no. 24, pp. 150-160.
- Ye, J 2006, 'Seeking love online: A cross-cultural examination of personal advertisements on American and Chinese dating websites', *Global Media Journal*, viewed 3 April 2017, <<http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open->

- access/seeking-love-online-a-crosscultural-examination-of-personal-advertisements-on-american-and-chinese-dating-websites.php?aid=35142>.
- Young, RA, Marshall, S, Domene, JF, Arato-Bolivar, J, Hayoun, R, Marshall, E, Zaidman-Zait, A & Valach, L 2006, 'Relationships, communication, and career in the parent-adolescent projects of families with and without challenges', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 1-23.
- Yum, JO 1988, 'The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in east Asia', *Communication Monographs*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 374-388, DOI: 10.1080/03637758809376178.
- Yum, JO 2007, 'Confucianism and communication: *jen, li, and ubuntu*', *China Media Research*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 15-22.
- Zanna, MP & Pack, SJ 1975, 'On the self-fulfilling nature of apparent sex differences in behavior', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 6, pp. 583-591.
- Zentgraf, KM & Chinchilla, NS 2012, 'Transnational family separation: a framework for analysis', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 345-366.
- Zhang, J, Qu, Y, Cody, J & Wu, Y 2010, 'A case study of micro-blogging in the enterprise: use, value, and related issues', in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Atlanta, Georgia, USA — 10 - 15 April 2010, viewed 8 March 2017, <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5bd6/847bab3b8d19650198f4cccd374580e2581d.pdf>>.
- Zhao, K, Zhao, X & Deng, J 2015, 'Online Price Dispersion Revisited: how Do Transaction Prices Differ from Listing Prices?' *Journal of Management Information Systems*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 261-290.
- Zhao, X, Salehi, N, Naranjit, S, Alwaalan, S, Voidsa, S & Cosley, D 2013, 'The many faces of Facebook: experiencing social media as performance, exhibition, and personal archive', in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Paris, France — 27 April 2013, viewed 8 June 2015, <<http://www.cs.cornell.edu/~danco/research/papers/zhao-many-faces-chi2013.pdf>>.
- Zheng, J 2013, 'Xiangqin Wave: a Close Look at Modern Chinese Dating Culture', *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 2, no. 9, pp. 319-325.
- Zhou, YR 2012, 'Changing behaviours and continuing silence: sex in the post-immigration lives of mainland Chinese immigrants in Canada', *Culture, health & sexuality*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 87-100.
- Ziguras, C & Law, SF 2006, 'Recruiting international students as skilled migrants: the global "skills race" as viewed from Australia and Malaysia', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 59-76.
- Zweig, D, Changgui, C & Rosen, S 2004, 'Globalization and transnational human capital: overseas and returnee scholars to China', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 179, pp. 735-757.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Key interview questions (English)

1. Why do you use social media? How do you benefit from it? What are you looking for from any social media?
2. Do you think you are influenced by using social media in any aspect? And do you think your social media behaviour has influenced any one around you, like your parents or your friends? Can you give any examples?
3. On your social media, what kind of accounts/groups do you follow?
4. What kind of content do you usually post/repost on your social media usually before and after coming to Australia? Positive energy, cute pets' photos, funny jokes, news, social problems, education related, personal relationship, cuisine, fashion, your personal thoughts towards your life...
5. After you came to Australia did you start using any new social media platforms/websites? If yes, what are they?
6. After you came to Australia did you start to follow some new accounts or friends on your social media? What kind of accounts are they? Such as Melbourne city life?
7. After you came to Australia, have there been any changes in your daily life, i.e. food, clothes, living environment, transportation, entertainment or culture shock? And do you feel you are influenced by that?
8. If I say 'life changes', what comes up in your mind? Looking back at the recent five years, what do you think is your biggest or most impressive life change?

9. Do you think your life changes have affected the way you use/interact with social media? For example, the frequency you check your social media, the content you post or repost...

10. After you came to Australia, when you post anything on your social media, which language do you prefer to use? Chinese, English or both? Do you use different languages on different social media platform? For example, you use English on Facebook whereas Chinese on WeChat Moments.

11. How do you keep in touch with your parents? Do you call them or video chat with them? What kinds of social media do your parents use? Do you teach your parents how to use social media? Do you follow your parents on WeChat and Weibo? Do you block your parents for certain posts or do you put them in a separate group from your friends?

12. If you and your parents are mutual friended on your social media, every time you want to post or repost anything, do you have to think about your parents and be careful of the content you are posting online?

13. Do you post selfies or photos with your friends when going out in Australia? E.g. New food, new restaurants, new scenery...

14. If your friends post something negative on their social media, would you ignore it or would you comment or even phone them up to check what is going on with them?

15. When you first came to Australia, did you increase your use of social media because you had no friends here?

16. When you read some statements/comments/opinions on Facebook, or when you watch some video clips on YouTube, will you tell your internal friends/families about it, since they don't have access to it? Would you repost it on your social media?

17. Do you think you have separate characteristics online and offline? For example, if you are a very traditional person, but you always put crazy and weirdo stuff on your social media?

18. Do you think social media has helped you or encouraged you with your study and work? For example collecting useful material for your subjects on Weibo, practicing English on Facebook, or keeping in touch with your potential customers on WeChat.

19. Do you show dating photos online? Do you mutually follow each other? How do you interact with each other? For example, 'like', 'comment' or 'repost'.

20. Are all your social media accounts' names the same? Do you make up different usernames for different platforms? What kind of names are they? Do they have special meanings?



## Appendix 2 Key interview questions (Chinese)

1. 你为什么使用社交媒体？你从中有哪些获益？你期待从社交媒体中获得什么？
2. 你认为使用社交媒体给你带来了哪些方面的影响？你的社交媒体使用行为或者习惯有没有影响到你身边的人如父母、朋友？你能给我举个例子么？
3. 你社交媒体上都关注哪些账号？加入了哪些小组？
4. 请分别告诉我在你来澳洲之前和之后你在社交媒体账号上主要会发表什么样的内容？比如，“正能量的”“搞笑段子”“社会热点”“情感问题”“对自己生活的思考”等等。
5. 你来到澳洲以后你开始使用了哪些新的社交媒体平台或网站？
6. 你来澳洲之后在微博上有新加哪些账号为关注？比如关于墨尔本城市生活的账号等等。
7. 你来澳洲之后你的日常生活有哪些变化？比如衣食住行方面？你有感受到了哪些文化冲击？你会受到这些生活变化影响么？
8. 如果我说“生活变化”你会想到什么？回顾过去的五年，有哪些是你认为印象最深或者最重要的生活变化？
9. 你认为“生活变化”有影响到你使用社交媒体的方式么？比如更加频繁地使用社交媒体、天天会在网上发状态等等。
10. 你来澳洲以后，你在社交媒体上发消息是会选择哪一种语言？中文、英文，还是中英文一起发？你会在不同社交媒体平台上使用不同的语言么？比如在脸谱上用英文，在微信朋友圈上用中文？
11. 你和父母如何保持联系？你经常给他们打电话或者和他们视频聊天么？你父母使用哪些社交媒体？你有帮助教他们如何使用吗？你和你父母在微博上

有互相关注吗？在微信上是好友么？朋友圈互相可见么？你有把父母屏蔽掉或者额外分组么？

12. 如果你和你的父母在社交媒体上互为好友，每次当你想要发状态的时候会因顾虑你父母也能看到你的状态而对更加小心的编辑你的状态内容么？或者不去发表一些可能会令父母担心或不满的内容？

13. 你在澳洲出游的时候会发自拍或者朋友合影到你的社交媒体账号上吗？比如“新的食物”“新的餐馆”“新的景色”.....

14. 如果你的朋友在他们的社交媒体账号上发了一些比较负面的、消极的信息，你是会忽略呢还是会评论（安慰）甚至给他们打电话看看他们是否还好？

15. 你刚来到澳大利亚的时候，有没有因为在这边没有朋友而更加频繁地使用社交媒体？

16. 当你读在脸谱上看到一些言论或者在 YouTube 上看到某些视频，你会因为你国内的朋友或家人无法访问这两个网站而特意和他们分享么？或者在你的社交媒体账号上转载？

17. 你认为你在网上展示的自己的性格和平时生活中自己的性格一样么？比如你是一个很传统的人但是你却发很多比较疯狂或者夸张的文字或者图片在你的社交媒体账号上？

18. 你认为社交媒体有没有在你的学习和工作上给予帮助？比如在微博上搜集到学习资料、在脸谱上练习英语会话、在微信上联系潜在客户？

19. 你会把约会的照片放到网上么？你和你的恋人在社交媒体上会互相关注么？彼此互动多么？比如每天都会互相点赞、评论或者互相转发？

20. 你所有社交媒体账号都是同一个用户名么？还是不同平台不同的用户名？都叫什么名字呢？有哪些特殊含义？

### Appendix 3 Questionnaire sample (English)

#### Questionnaire

Gender (Male/Female)

Age (years):

1. How long have you been in Australia? Circle one of the following.

0<1year	1<2years	2<5years	5<10years	10 or more years
---------	----------	----------	-----------	------------------

2. How many hours a week do you work in Australia approximately? Circle one of the following.

Full-time 40 hours or more	Part-time 0<40 hours	Not working 0 hour
-------------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

3. What degree are you currently undertaking in Australia? Circle one of the following.

Bachelor	Master's	PhD	Other (please state)
----------	----------	-----	----------------------

4. What is your major in Australia?

---

5. What is your enrolment status in Australia? Circle one of the following.

Full-time	Part-time	Not enrolled
-----------	-----------	--------------

6. (a) Before coming to Australia, what did you do in China? Circle one of the following.

Work	Study	Both	Other (please state)
------	-------	------	----------------------

(b) What level of education have you attained in China? Circle one of the following.

High School	Bachelor	Honours	Master's	PhD	Other (please state)
-------------	----------	---------	----------	-----	----------------------

(c) What was your major in China if applicable?

---

7. (a) Which of the following social media do you use? Circle one or more of the following.

Facebook	Twitter	Renren	Sina Weibo	WeChat	Other (please state)
----------	---------	--------	------------	--------	----------------------

(b) How many years in both China and Australia have you been using social media as listed above? Circle one of the following.

0<1year	1<2years	2<3years	3<4years	4 or more years
---------	----------	----------	----------	-----------------

8. How many times and on what devices did/do you check and interact (browse, post, repost, like, comment and mention @ somebody) on your social media **per day** on average? Circle one or more of the following.

(a) Before coming to Australia,

<u>Computer</u>	<u>Tablet</u>	<u>Smart Phone</u>
a.0<5 times per day	a.0<5 times per day	a.0<5 times per day
b.5<10 times per day	b.5<10 times per day	b.5<10 times per day
c.10 or more times per day	c.10 or more times per day	c.10 or more times per day

(b) Since coming to Australia,

<u>Computer</u>	<u>Tablet</u>	<u>Smart Phone</u>
a.0<5 times per day	a.0<5 times per day	a.0<5 times per day
b.5<10 times per day	b.5<10 times per day	b.5<10 times per day
c.10 or more times per day	c.10 or more times per day	c.10 or more times per day

9. How many times did/do you update your original post (原创) on your social media **per week** on average? Circle one of the following.

(a) Before coming to Australia,

0<5 times per week	5<10 times per week	10 or more times per week
--------------------	---------------------	---------------------------

(b) Since coming to Australia,

0<5 times per week	5<10 times per week	10 or more times per week
--------------------	---------------------	---------------------------

10. What percentage of your social media practices on average per week did/do you devote to the following? (Please add up to 100%)

(a) Before coming to Australia,

Original post	Repost	Like	Comment	Mention (@)

(b) Since coming to Australia,

Original post	Repost	Like	Comment	Mention (@)

*Would you like to be interviewed by me? If yes, please leave me your email address!*

*Thank you very much! 😊* \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4 Questionnaire sample (Chinese)

### 调查问卷

性别 (男/女)                      年龄： 岁

1. 你来澳大利亚几年了？请从以下选项选择。

0<1 年	1<2 年	2<5 年	5<10 年	10 年以上
-------	-------	-------	--------	--------

2. 你在澳大利亚每周大约工作多少小时？请从以下选项选择。

全职 40 小时以上	兼职 0<40 小时	不工作 0 小时
---------------	---------------	-------------

3. 你在澳大利亚正攻读以下哪个学位？

本科	硕士	博士	其他
----	----	----	----

4. 你在澳大利亚所学的专业是什么？

---

5. 你在澳大利亚的学生注册信息是什么？请从以下选项选择。

全日制学生	兼职学生	没有入学
-------	------	------

6. (a) 来到澳大利亚之前你在国内是工作还是学习？请从以下选项选择。

工作	学习	半工半读	其他
----	----	------	----

(b) 你在中国获得了以下哪项学位。

高中	本科	荣誉学士学位 (Honours)	硕士	博士	其他
----	----	---------------------	----	----	----

(c) 你在中国所学的专业是什么?

---

7. (a) 请从以下选项中选出你所使用的社交媒体平台.

脸谱	推特	人人 (校内)	新浪微博	微信	其他
----	----	---------	------	----	----

(b) 你在中国和澳大利亚一共用了多久社交媒体? 请从以下选项选择。

0<1 年	1<2 年	2<3 年	3<4 年	4 年以上
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

8. 你平均每天通过以下几种设备在社交媒体上浏览或者互动 (浏览, 发状态, 转发, 点赞, 评论或者提到@某人) 多少次? 请从以下选项选择。

(a) 来澳洲以前,

电脑	平板	智能手机
a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上	a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上	a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上

(b) 来澳洲以后,

电脑	平板	智能手机
a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上	a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上	a. 每天 0<5 次 b. 每天 5<10 次 c. 每天 10 次以上

9. 平均每周你会发几次状态 (更新消息)? 请从以下选项选择。

(a) 来澳洲以前,



每周少于 5 次	每周 5 到 10 次	每周多于 10 次
----------	-------------	-----------

(b) 来澳洲以后,

每周少于 5 次	每周 5 到 10 次	每周多于 10 次
----------	-------------	-----------

10. 按照总计 100%的比例来计算, 平均每周你的社交媒体行为会按照怎样的比例分配到以下各项?

(a) 来澳洲以前,

原创	转发	点赞	评论	提到 (@)
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

(b) 来澳洲以后,

原创	转发	点赞	评论	提到 (@)
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

如果您愿意接受我的采访, 请留下您的联系方式! 谢谢! ☺

\_\_\_\_\_