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FIVE

The Code of WeChat

Chinese Students' Cell Phone Social Media Practices

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Many city governments across greater China post public service announcements that are intended to guide behavior in public places. These include such signs as fines for smoking or littering, warnings not to spit or chew betel nut. When riding public transportation, such as the subway or bus, there are reminders to offer seats to the elderly, disabled, women who are pregnant or carrying young children, and directions where to stand when boarding and alighting. Because the flow of traffic is different across the region—vehicles travel on the left in Macao and Hong Kong, but on the right in mainland China and Taiwan—at some busy intersections pedestrians are reminded which direction to look for oncoming traffic. Such signs are both a reflection and commentary on the challenges of contemporary urban living, places where millions of people are in close contact with each other. These signs reflect the disruptive processes of rapid urbanization on people's lives and behaviors. When people move from rural to urban environments, an assumption is that people must be "taught" that behaviors acceptable in one context are unacceptable in a new one. Evidence for this is seen in both government-sponsored educational campaigns across greater China, and in local folk understandings of the faults of "outsiders" as people who "lack education"; this we see in how local Macao people perceive the habits and actions of mainland Chinese tourists (see Guan and Sandel 2015).

While the examples of public service signs may be aimed at "educating" people who bring rural habits to urban areas, recent years have witnessed the rise of an urban-based habit that disrupts the flow of people—and in some places warrants a public service sign. In Chinese, these people are known by the phrase, *di tou zu* 低頭族, or literally "head lowered tribe."

This phrase describes the actions of people who lower their heads as they look at and manipulate the screens of their cell phones. In Hong Kong travelers are warned through both public announcements and printed signs not to look at their cell phones while entering or alighting from escalators. In Taiwan, at a recently opened subway station, a directional marker for how to transfer to other subway lines was painted on the floor in large, bright colors. The headline on a news report notes that it is so big and bright that even "the head lowered tribe can see it" (Lee 2014).

Social behavior in public places is changing in China's urban areas, and such change is motivated in part by the increasing use of cell phones. Such devices impact and change ways that people walk, talk, communicate, and interact with others on a daily basis in multiple ways. In this chapter we focus our attention on one aspect of these changes, the rules, or communicative codes, that university students in China have developed when using WeChat (known as *Weixin* 微信 in Chinese), one of the most popular social media platforms in China. Launched in 2011 by the Tencent Company, WeChat has quickly grown in popularity (Hou 2014); by the middle of 2014 it had more than 400 million active users (Hong 2014). While the application is similar to Facebook, as users may exchange instant messages, and post and comment on pictures, it differs in a number of ways. Our interest in studying WeChat is not only in describing how people use the application, but also discussing an emergent set of rules, or social codes that users have developed for appropriate ways to communicate.

Theoretically we draw upon work in the study of communicative codes, beginning with that of Dell Hymes (Hymes 1974), and subsequently developed as a theory of speech codes by Gerry Philipsen and colleagues (Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias 2005). Hymes claimed that distinct groups of people, whom he referred to as constituting "speech communities," shared an understanding of what counts as communication, and the rules for its use (Hymes 1974). For example, Hymes explains that the "Wishram Chinook of the Columbia River in what is now the state of Washington . . . have considered infants' vocalizations to manifest a special language. . . . [T]his language was interpretable only by men having certain guardian spirits" (31). That is, the Wishram not only possessed a unique understanding of what counts as communication—infants' vocalizations—they also had a rule for defining who and under what conditions such communication could be understood—men with certain guardian spirits.

Subsequent work by Gerry Philipsen and colleagues draws upon Hymes's insights to further our understanding. In an ethnographic study of a community called "Teamsterville" he identified a "code of honor" that was at play in everyday interactions. For example, talk was highly

gendered with distinct places for men's and women's talk, and intermediaries were depended upon for talk with outsiders and/or people with higher status (for example, a priest would speak to God on someone's behalf) (Philipsen 1992). Subsequent work demonstrates that interactants develop informal rules for appropriate behavior in social situations (Milburn 2004), and that these rules are multiple and vary across contexts (Homsey and Sandel 2012). This has been developed into a theory of speech codes with six propositions that provide a map for how to identify, analyze, and evaluate speech codes (Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias 2005). While this line of work has provided us with many insights about the nature of communication in face-to-face or "offline" communities, less work has been done to understand the communicative or speech codes of online and/or virtual communities. The present study is intended to fill a gap in our understanding about one emerging set of cultural codes for behavior among one group of participants—Chinese university students—who use WeChat, one new social platform.

The remainder of this introduction proceeds as follows. We begin by reviewing relevant studies of codes of communication in online or virtual communities, demonstrating how they may develop and how they may differ from codes found in traditional face-to-face communities. This is followed by an overview of a number of studies that describe WeChat as a technology and communicative resource. While none examine WeChat as a communicative code, these studies do help us understand how and why users may communicate via WeChat.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES

In earlier work on computer-mediated-communication, Walther (1992) claimed that relational messages can be textually conveyed online. That is, people use resources at hand—verbal and nonverbal—to communicate relational closeness or distance. For instance one verbal resource for communicating relationally can be seen in "flaming": Language that is in the form of "insults, swearing, and hostile, intense language" (56). Relational affiliation may also be conveyed nonverbally through the use of "paralanguage . . . intentional misspelling, lexical surrogates for vocal segregates . . . capitalization" (79). Later work has found that users develop new vocabularies and language to communicate messages online. For instance, in a study of IM (instant messaging) conversations Baron (2004) found users developed an assortment of abbreviations and acronyms (for example, cya = see you, brb = be right back, lol = laughing out loud) and emoticons (for example, :-) = smiley, :-P = sticking out tongue) that they blended with written language.

The above show that online communication is not necessarily inferior to face-to-face communication. Instead, the two are different, and operate under different conditions, as claimed by Baron (2004): "CMC has its own usage conditions, and therefore, each needs to be analyzed in its own right. These usage conditions may, in turn, influence the character of language produced in that medium" (398). For example, the dimensions of time and space are perceived differently in online environments. In asynchronous communication (for example, email), a person may show close affiliation by responding quickly. Or, in an interaction whereby one person is offended by an online message, the other may not know this for a period of time, absent the facial and nonverbal cues that would be available face-to-face. In addition, with the development of social media platforms, such as Facebook, messages are posted that may be read by multiple users, and may be retrievable over an extended period. This means that such users may have to consider potential reactions from a wider audience than would be the case in traditional, face-to-face communication.

Now consider what can be learned from studies of the communicative codes found in online communities. One of the earliest studies is described by Fitch (1999). In the 1990s an academic community of scholars developed a Listserv—a text based online discussion group—and began to exchange messages. Soon after its inception one person "posted a message that both flamed and inflamed the newly formed . . . community" (42). This participant related a story of a student who attended a seminar with someone she called her "friend," who was later revealed to be her husband. Others objected, saying that the term friend "excluded that he was her husband." A few hours later, another participant described terms that she used to describe close relational partners (for example, significant other, partner, lover) and then concluded with the following: "When was the last time you read an OBIT which said fuck-pillow and so on?" The phrase "fuck-pillow" sparked a lively and heated online discussion among Listserv members. Fitch claims that they were struggling to "establish a common code," or a way to frame the bounds of proper communication as they discussed both "substantive issues" regarding terms for describing relational partners, and "metatalk" about such terms (44).

In their discussion of the language of social media, Seargeant and Tagg observe that the concept of a "speech community" began with the assumption that it is comprised of mostly like-minded persons who interact in a physically embodied context on an everyday basis, much like that observed by Philipson in Teamsterville (Seargeant and Tagg 2014). Yet with the emergence of online and virtual communities, such an assumption no longer applies. In the era of globalization new factors impact the development of communities, namely: "mobility, the range of different

affiliations people have, and the dynamic nature of language use in general" (11). They explain that networked connections may be more "flexible, shifting, and interactively constructed" than offline ones (11). Time and space constraints do not matter as much as they do in physical contexts. Furthermore, social media platforms such as Facebook allow both one-to-one and one-to-many communication messages. That is, a person can choose to post a picture and comment on a friend's wall, thus keeping the conversation private. Or, the same posting can be made public for all friends to see. Thus, online communication allows users to more easily switch audiences than is possible in traditional face-to-face interaction.

WECHAT

We now turn our attention to discuss one of China's most popular social media platforms, WeChat. This is preceded by a brief narrative of the development of social media in China and the issue of censorship as it helps us better understand the culture of China's online communication.

According to Yang (2009) China "achieved full-function connectivity to the Internet in 1994" (2) and Chinese people quickly and readily embraced the Internet as a forum that could provide a wider range of self- and community-wide expression. A distinctly Chinese online culture emerged, one that demonstrated a "creative culture full of humor, play, and irreverence" (2). Unlike the offline, face-to-face world where interactants must carefully be attuned to the social order and attempt to maintain a surface level harmony (Chang 2010), in the online world people were more likely to express "[t]he most unorthodox, imaginative, and subversive ideas" and doubt and ridicule all forms of authority (2). Such communicative messages and norms could be found in the proliferation of bulletin-board systems and blogs that emerged in the early years of the Internet. Finally, recent studies (for example, Chin 2011) indicate that some people in China prefer to interact and build relationships in online communities, as they find them freer and less constrained by social and cultural expectations.

The free flow of ideas on the Chinese Internet, however, did not go unchallenged by the Chinese government. Fearing that an uncontrolled Internet would lead to greater dissent and social uprising, China's government developed technology to monitor and censor the Internet. In 2003 the system of controls known in common parlance as the "Great Firewall of China" was launched (Canaves 2011). In subsequent years, as such Western-based social media technologies as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook were developed, and used as a forum for expression and communicating messages of political dissent (for example, Iranian protests

against the results of the Presidential election in 2009), China took the position that if a company would not allow the government to monitor and censor its content, it would be blocked. And during the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 2009 and the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC in October of that same year, the government permanently blocked access to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Censorship, however, did not mean the end of China's active, creative, and authority-challenging online community. When Western-based media were shutdown, Chinese entrepreneurs and companies developed technologies that were not blocked, and were allowed to grow. For instance, the Chinese alternative to YouTube is YouKu; Sina Weibo has replaced Twitter (Talbot 2010). And since its launch in 2011, WeChat has quickly become China's version of Facebook.

The origins of WeChat can be traced to an earlier IM (Instant Messaging) technology, QQ, launched in 1999 by China's Tencent Company—the company that later developed WeChat. Like most IM applications of the time, QQ was a computer-based application for users connected to the Internet. Over time the technology was developed and then adapted for use on cell phones—as users could exchange messages using IM and/or email formats.

In 2011 Tencent Company launched WeChat. This technology was designed primarily for cell phones (Hou 2014). (WeChat is a free, downloadable app that generates most of its revenues from businesses that pay for a "public profile" used for commercial product promotion.) On a cell phone a user can select from a menu of four items: Chat, Contacts, Discover, or Me. (When a phone is set to a different language the layout is the same but the text changes; for example, in Chinese these four items appear as *Liaotian*, *Tong xun lu*, *Faxian*, or *Wo de sheding*.) When using Chat a user may send a text-based IM to other users on a contact list, much as they could do on QQ. On a smartphone, however, a WeChat user may "accent" a message by inserting one or more "emoji" icons. (Emoji is a term that refers to the ideograms used in text messages; it is Japanese in origin—similar to emoticon—and the term is used by speakers of a variety of languages across Asia, including English, Japanese, Cantonese, and Mandarin Chinese.) These range from such traditional images as smiley, winking, or sad faces, to more creative images that a user may download, and are often animated. (Most emoji are free; some can be downloaded for a small fee.) Examples of animated, downloadable emoji are shown in Figure 5.1: Garfield the Cat, Captain America, Molang the cute Bunny—from Korea, and Chinese characters such as 友—meaning "friend."

A second popular Chat function, and not available prior to WeChat, is the ability to send short (less than one minute) audio files to another



Figure 5.1. Emoji. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

person, mimicking telephone calls. One often sees WeChat users speaking into the bottom of a cell phone where the microphone is located, and then moving it to the ear in order to hear an audio message sent in reply. Finally, users may create a user-defined "group chat" for sharing messages, pictures, and contact information. Some female users call this kind of WeChat group a "guimi qun," 闺蜜群 or "girlfriends' group." (This term is gendered and identified with females; when a male joins such a group he is called a "nan guimi," or "male girlfriend group member.") Thus, WeChat allows users to develop private networks among core friends (Chen 2013). Once you create a group it can be accessed repeatedly, so that multi-party interactions are more easily facilitated.

The "Me" menu items allow users to modify personal settings, such as inserting a picture or icon, changing a user name or password, or privacy settings. For instance, a user may choose to make a "Blocked list" or "hide" Moments postings (described below) from all but select contacts.

The “Contacts” item is similar to a contact list on a cell phone or social media application. Users may add or delete users from this list.

Perhaps the most interesting and novel menu item is the “Discover” tab. In addition to options for playing games or manually adding contacts—similar to other applications—users may discover other contacts in creative ways. One is to generate and exchange a QR code (Quick Response code) on a cell phone. When a QR code is scanned into another person’s cell phone, contact information is exchanged. Or, one may “shake” a phone. When this option is selected, and the user shakes the phone, a message pops up showing the nearest person who is simultaneously shaking a phone and looking for contacts. It is then up to the users to decide if they want to make contact. (This function is more often used by males than females, and among those interested in a “hook-up” [Li 2014].)

The most popular Discover menu option is called “Moments.” When selected, users see pictures and short messages posted by others on the contact list. Similar to Facebook, Moments is temporally ordered—the most recent items appear on top—and is a constantly changing screen of user generated pictures, comments, and responses. It is also a one-to-many forum for the exchange of personal experiences, news, items of interest, and commentary on everyday life. However, as will be discussed below, Moments postings do exhibit recognizable patterns.

In sum, while it may be argued that WeChat is popular across China because it is an unblocked alternative to Facebook, this explains its appeal only in part. The features described above show that it is a versatile social media platform for both one-to-one and one-to-many communication. In places such as Hong Kong or Macau, where Facebook is not blocked, many people have both WeChat and Facebook accounts; based on our observations and interviews we find WeChat is used more frequently as it offers more functions that connect users and/or facilitate social interaction. They may prefer to use WeChat as it has more functions than Facebook. And in a few short years WeChat has become one of the most popular social media platforms in China with more than 400 million monthly active users worldwide (Hong 2014).

METHODS

We now present data from a study that examines how and why university students use WeChat. Data were collected from 2013 to 2014 by ten graduate students at the University of Macau, located in Macao, a small Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Macao has a rich cultural tradition as it was administered by Portugal for four hundred years, and

has served as an important meeting place between East (China) and West (Europe) (Hao 2011) (Guan and Sandel 2015). Since the handover of Macao from Portuguese colonial rule to China in 1999, and the opening of the casino concessions, Macao’s population and economy have experienced rapid growth. Travel between the Chinese mainland and Macao has expanded with increases in the numbers of tourists, students, and workers. However, unlike mainland China where Facebook, Google, and other popular Internet sites are blocked, in Macao these sites are not blocked. Despite the availability of these sites, WeChat is used by many students, especially those who come from other parts of China. One possible reason for this prominent use may be that through WeChat they are able to keep in contact with friends and family members (Wu 2014). Macao, therefore, is a fruitful place for studying WeChat use.

For this study data were collected in the form of personal observations and screen shots of WeChat posts, and in-depth interviews with select users about their practices and the meanings they attach to these practices. The students and professor added each other to their WeChat contact list for the purpose of this research, and permission was granted to take screen shots. To protect participants’ identities, students used screen names that differed from their real names. Finally, messages and images posted by others not in the research group (for example, the “teacher” whose messages are discussed below) were modified such that all identifying information was removed.

Our focus in this chapter is limited to the Chat and Moments functions of WeChat. These functions were used most frequently by participants in our research. Thus, we present exemplar screen shots and interpretive comments on these shots. We conducted in-depth interviews with a number of participants about how social media use in general impacts personal and social relationships, but did not include these data in this analysis. Finally, we did not study how people use WeChat’s Audio file function, Shake, or the creation of WeChat Groups.

WECHAT AS CONTEXT

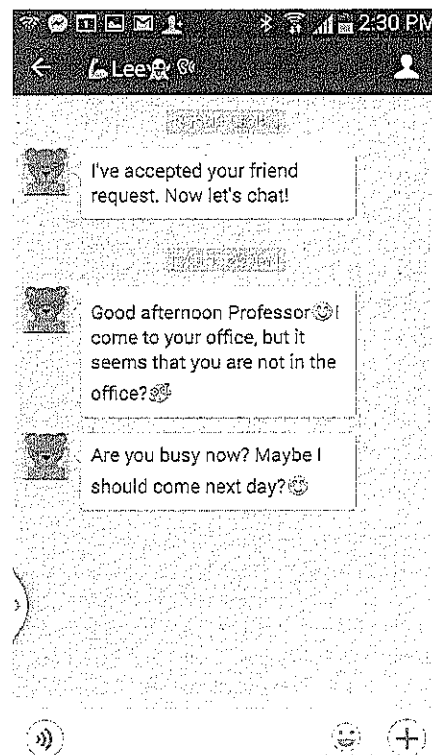
As claimed by Seargeant and Tagg (2014), communities that are linked through social media are not bound by time and space. The context for analyzing and understanding the code of WeChat is not a physical place, but the situations that arise when users communicate with others through and with WeChat. Therefore, while data were collected in one physically bounded place, Macao, and by a select group of people—students at the University of Macau—we collected data based on students’ relational

contacts maintained and facilitated through WeChat. Following Fitch's approach we looked specifically for situations when a WeChat message or posting prompted a reflection or comment on a rule of social interaction (Fitch 1999). We use WeChat screen shots to illustrate a social rule and then provide an analysis based on the interpretive comments gathered from participants. Based upon our own record of screen shots, and observations of how students use WeChat in daily life (for example, what they do when sitting in class, riding the bus), we found that the Chat and Moments functions were used most frequently. Thus, in the following we present data from these two types of communication.

ONE-TO-ONE COMMUNICATION

WeChat interactions vary based upon the number of interactants. Seargeant and Tagg (2014) suggest that "one-to-one" communication is

Figure 5.2. Chat 1. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.



a prominent way to use social media. By using the Chat function users can establish contacts with each other, and send individualized messages. This we see in the following:

The three messages presented in Figure 5.2 illustrate three interactional moves. As evidenced in the first message "I've accepted your friend request," one must first accept a request to initiate one-to-one interaction. In the second, posted eleven days later, a standard opening is offered, "Good afternoon Professor," followed by the question, "you are not in the office?" The third message offers the potential reason for the professor's absence, "Are you busy now?" and a potential solution, "Maybe I should come next day?" Notice how the text is interspersed with emoji—two smiley faces and one inquisitive face. These soften the force of the implied question: Did the professor forget the appointment? We also observe the use of indirect and politeness strategies in the language: "it seems that you are not in the office?" "Are you *busy* now?" Such language provides the tardy professor face saving reasons for being unavailable.

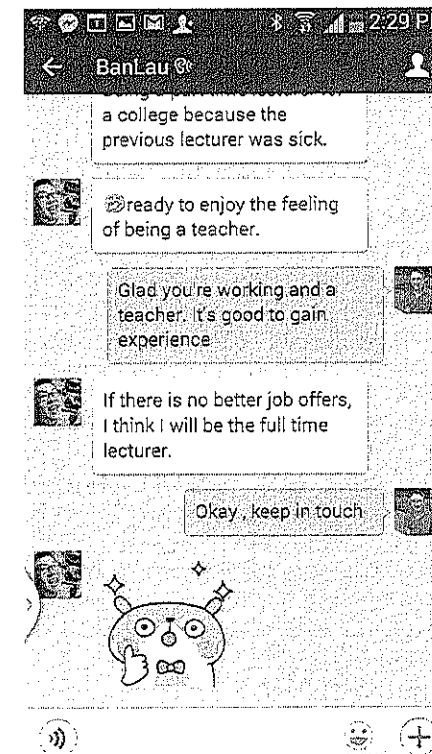


Figure 5.3. Chat 2. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

In our study, we found WeChat users frequently included emoji embedded within their text messages. As noted above, most (for example, smiley face, frowning face) are provided by the service for free; users may also download animated emoji. Consider the following example:

This message was sent by a recently graduated student, Ban, who moved to a city in China where he began a job as a teacher. The second message on this screen shot begins with a surprise/happy face emoji (mouth covered by a hand) and the text, "ready to enjoy the feeling of being a teacher." The professor responds with an affirming message, "Glad you're working and a teacher." Ban responds with the explanation that he will do this job for now as he has no other alternatives. The next turn is a closing move, "Okay, keep in touch." The final turn by Ban is not a closing text, but an animated emoji: a figure with thumbs up. Mimicking the nonverbal expression of thumbs up, the emoji virtually extends a hand-and-thumbs-up gesture across the physical space that separates the two interactants. It shows how social media allows users to use resources at hand—text and emoji—to share not only information, but a nonverbal gesture and its associated emotional impact.

MOMENTS, ONE-TO-MANY: ACCEPTABLE POSTS

We now turn our attention to a discussion of how users employ the "Moments" function of WeChat for one-to-many communication. While we did not keep an exact accounting of how much time users spend on Chat versus Moments functions, we observed that users spend nearly equal time on both. For instance, when riding the bus a person may first carry on a Chat conversation with another person. Then, between turns, or after the Chat has ended, the person will select "Moments" and then scroll through the pictures and comments of that section. In the following we first discuss the most common types of postings made to Moments; this is followed by a discussion and interpretation of screen shots that demonstrate interactional dilemmas.

When communicating one-to-many, WeChat users post pictures and text through the "Moments" function. Food shots are common, as we see in the following:

The text reads (in Chinese—first author's translation): "[I] have discovered New Mainland [name of a restaurant]. Eat eat eat without stopping!!" Below the text is a composite picture of eight dishes and one shot of a drink.

Another common theme is to post travel pictures. This user, screen name "5-4," went on a trip to Taiwan. (Taiwan is a popular destination for

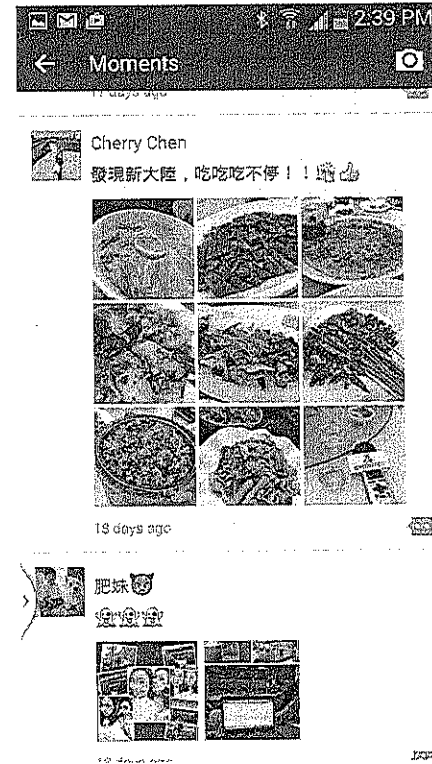


Figure 5.4. Moments One. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

mainland tourists.) The top picture is a "selfie" of the user's face covered by a scarf in order to protect herself from the wind, and accompanied by the text: "I am at Kenting with the weather . . . wind." The bottom is a photo of a temple procession, a common sight in Taiwan, but not in China. The focal figure is a character wearing the clothes of the Chinese deity, "Third prince," also known in Taiwan as "Tim-tau." 5-4 wrote: "I always wanted to see Tim-tau."

A third theme that emerges in many of the postings is to show participants doing interesting things jointly, featuring images of several people together.

Hazel posted pictures of herself and a friend who went to the city of Guangzhou (Canton). They are wearing colorful clothing, large sunglasses, and make-up. By their poses we see them physically close to each



Figure 5.5. Moments Two. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

other and smiling. We can infer a close friendship and happy mood. The text above these pictures reads:

[We are] high [excited] after showing our colorful selves, and taking advantage of a moment when the driver did not pay attention, we were successful to get into a taxi. Because we are so colorful, when walking on the streets of Guangzhou, we are excited and pleased that people asked to have our picture taken with them.

Underneath the picture is a heart, indicating “likes” by Phoebe and Cherry. Cherry wrote the comment, “I am also in Guangzhou!! Feel that it is so much fun!” Hazel replied, “So much fun. Everyone is in Guangzhou (smiley face emoticon).”

The above Moments are examples of what users most often post on WeChat: Food, travel, and exciting and fun moments. All are considered post-worthy moments and preferred topics for sharing in one-to-many

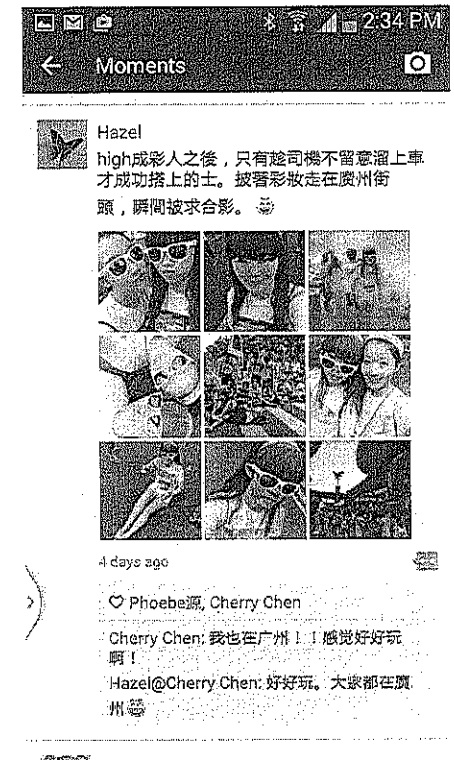


Figure 5.6. Moments Three. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

communication. They demonstrate a Chinese belief, captured by a saying in Taiwan: “If you find something good to eat, then report it widely to everyone” (Sandel 2015). It implies that if you find or experience something good, interesting, exciting, you then should share it with others. WeChat’s one-to-many Moments function serves as a communicative tool for sharing what is considered good, interesting, and exciting news with others. Our examples illustrate that food and travel count as “news items” to share with others.

ONE-TO-MANY: PROBLEMATIC POSTS

In this next section we examine WeChat posts that became problematic. From previous work in ethnomethodology by Garfinkel, we know that violations help us see what rules interactants operate by in social

situations (Garfinkel 1964). Such messages help us more clearly understand emergent rules for WeChat communication.

When talking with university students about what they found problematic with WeChat messages, one issue was how to respond to requests and/or messages from current and former teachers. Phoebe explained this in the following comment (this and following quotes were written in English and quoted verbatim):

I really felt pressure to post "like" if my teachers post something on the Moments at the beginning when I use WeChat. Actually, I did feel pressure or nervous if a teacher try to follow me when I began to use WeChat. Because I used to think WeChat is a social tool for peers rather than elders. In Chinese students' mind, there is a clear bound[ary] which limits the relationships of students and teachers. Especially, when one of my high school teacher, who hadn't kept touch with me for several years before she followed my WeChat and asked me to post "like" in her posts since she participated in a commercial promotion. If she collected 30 "likes" she would have opportunity to win some prizes, such as a juicer extractor or a gold necklace or something like that. And she even sent me messages as: "Please help teacher to gather 'likes,' the teacher then can get the prize." I felt embarrassed and had to post "like."

This student's explanation demonstrates a number of interactional dilemmas. When Phoebe's former teacher initially requested her to "follow" on WeChat, and join her contact list, Phoebe felt conflicted: She considered WeChat to be "a social tool for peers rather than elders." WeChat is both designed as and considered a space, or community, for relational peers. The app does not create a hierarchically structured community, providing designations contrasting social roles such as teacher and student. Therefore, by accepting the teacher's request to "follow" her posts, Phoebe became aware that her posts not only were being sent to her social peers, but also to her teacher. Her reaction, feeling "nervous," may have been due to the change from a hierarchal to peer status since typically a person such as a teacher should be treated with respect, different from how one would treat a peer. This may be based upon a belief that there is a "bound[ary]" which limits the relationships of students and teachers."

Another troublesome issue was the content and intent of the messages sent by her teacher. Users are encouraged to participate in this by posting commercial messages on their "Moments." If others then respond with a "like," the person who posts the message can receive a prize: "a juice extractor or a gold necklace or something like that." With the aim of "winning" a prize, this teacher sent messages to Phoebe asking her for "help." In response, Phoebe felt "embarrassed" and replied with a "like." It is unclear if the feeling of embarrassment was for the teacher or Phoebe

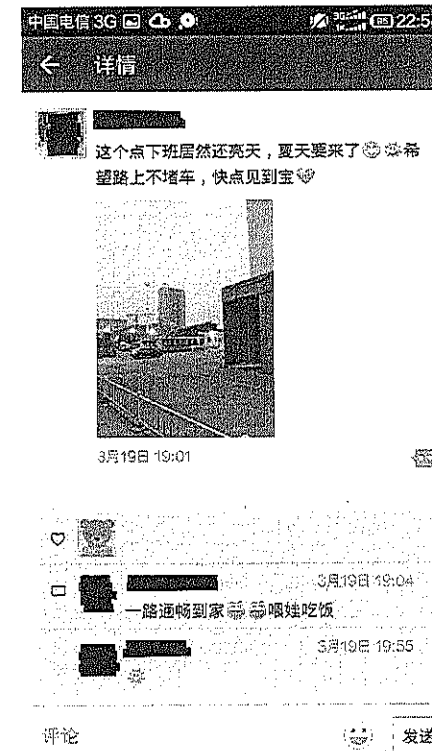


Figure 5.7. Moments Four. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

herself. Most likely it is a combination of the two; it may also be due to the realization that her responses are visible to other classmates and WeChat "friends" of the teacher, meaning that she was aware of the one-to-many nature of Moments.

Interactional dilemmas may also occur in the context of business relationships. Ms. Lee worked as a trainee for an international company in China. Lee added both her director and department manager to her contacts list, thus providing access to her Moment's messages (and in this case access to their Moment's postings). Consider the following example:

The picture was taken by the director from inside her car when leaving the company parking lot at the beginning of her journey home. The accompanying text reads: "At this time when getting off work it is still light outside. Summer is coming (smiley face, sun). [I] hope that there is not a traffic jam, and can quickly see [my] treasure [child] (heart)." Lee, whose icon is the bear, quickly responded with a "like" indicated by a heart and

her icon. Others replied with brief messages about the journey and the director's expected reunion with her child, accompanied by appropriate emoticons—two smiling faces and one sun. When later reflecting on this post, Lee commented:

As for the pressure to press "like" when it comes to my boss or teachers, I do have the same feeling as your students. As the attached WeChat screen shots show, when I was a trainee in [company], [Name] and [Name] are the director and department manager, I would always press "like" when they posted pictures, to show my respect or care or something else.

We see that the hierarchical relationship that Lee had with her superiors in the offline, business world impacted how she behaved in the online, WeChat social world. Furthermore, this was felt as a form of "pressure" in that Lee was obligated to respond with a "like" in order to communicate her "respect or care."

The above sentiments, however, were not shared by all students. One student commented:

As for the problems of hierarchy in WeChat use, I don't feel any pressure to click "like" (that means if I press like just when I like). The same opinion is held by my 2 roommates. But most of us feel a bit embarrassed to expose our personal life or feeling on MOMENTS if our boss or teachers are watching it.

This student claimed that she does not feel pressure to respond by pressing "like" when the poster is a superior, such as a boss or teacher. However, she and others are aware that when posting to Moments the communication is one-to-many, and that if a boss or teacher sees it, messages which are too personal may cause a feeling of embarrassment.

Another student similarly said that he does not feel he has to press "like" to Moments postings made by his professors. Yet he is aware that WeChat posts can be problematic and has developed his own rules for avoiding them:

I think sometimes I am afraid some strangers or acquaintance want me to add them as my friends in WeChat. For one reason, I am not free to share all kinds of information in Friend Circle, although there's a function make these people in a group and offer them a limitation on specific information. For another reason, you may ignore that each people could copy your portrait image and your name which they could pretend to be you and cheat your friends' money.

One rule is to not add strangers or people who are not relationally close, or categorized as an "acquaintance" as friends in WeChat. Another is to be careful what information he shares with people—even those who are

in his "Friend Circle." Finally, he may be aware that some people may use WeChat to defraud others by using your portrait and name, pretend to have your identity, and then try to cheat friends from their money.

CHANGING AND ADAPTING

In this last section we discuss changes in the ways people use the Moments function of WeChat. Some of the above comments allude to this. For instance, there is a growing awareness that WeChat is not always safe, and that you need to be careful when adding friends and/or replying to requests. Yet this is not the only change.

Phoebe, who above said that she initially felt troubled when her teacher asked her to post "like" to a WeChat promotion, explained that she now sees her teacher's posts differently:

But as time goes by, I realized that it is good and usual to contact your teacher with new media. And I get used to looking at my teachers' posts, and treating them normally. If the content is meaningful and interesting, I feel like to post a "like" in it. . . . Not only me, but some of my friends do that.

Now that she is more accustomed to interacting with her teacher through WeChat, she sees her teacher not in the role of hierarchically superior, but as "normal," more as she would treat a peer. If she finds her teacher's post to be interesting, she will respond with a "like," but does not feel compelled to do so. This is something that she observes her friends also doing, and demonstrated this with screen shots posted by her teacher that several students responded to with "like."

Changes to students' responses to teachers' postings, however, have continued. Phoebe then commented: "But one interesting situation is that, most of my classmates are tend to ignore teachers' posts now, since the times of contacting is less than before and we are all accustomed to teachers' posts." She illustrated this with two screen shots made by the same teacher. One received just one "like" from a student. The other, which Phoebe claimed best illustrated her point, was one that neither Phoebe nor her WeChat friends responded to. (As indicated by the teacher's comment, at least one other person—not on Phoebe's contact list and hidden from her—posted a response.). Following this unknown comment, the teacher then responded, as we see in the following:

The teacher wrote at the top: "[My] daughter spent the whole day at the swimming pool and when she came back, her prize was to go to Tangren Street and eat sweet snacks. Go!" Below this are pictures of her daughter and the snacks that she ate. However, neither Phoebe nor the classmates on her contact list responded to this with a "like" or made a comment.

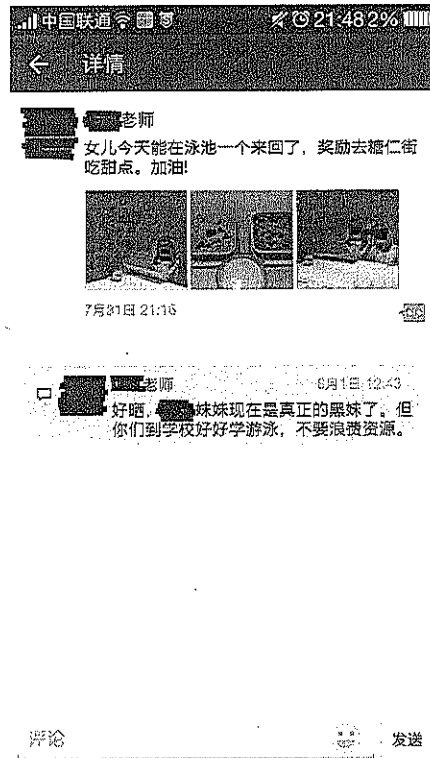


Figure 5.8. Moments Five. Screen shot published with the knowledge and agreement of the WeChat users featured.

A day later, the teacher responded to another person's posting with the comment: "So dark. [Name] little sister now is truly a dark girl. But you should go to school and learn how to swim. Do not waste this opportunity." This last comment is interesting on a number of levels. For one, she is commenting on her daughter's skin tan that has turned her "dark," and—by Chinese standards of beauty—tanned skin is unattractive and undesirable. Thus, her daughter "sacrificed" some of her beauty when learning how to swim. But in the next sentence the teacher takes on the voice of the teacher and speaks directly to her students. This is evident in the use of the indexical pronoun "you" that is pointing to the students—her presumed audience: "But *you* should go to school and learn how to swim." Her students should not let the fear of skin turning dark stop them from learning how to swim, and using the swimming pool that their school has provided.

It appears that the teacher is using WeChat to communicate hierarchically to her students, just as she would in face-to-face interaction. Perhaps the "absence" of likes is interpreted by the teacher as an expression of their displeasure, or some kind of dislike about the post. That is, the lack of likes also sends a message, and the teacher has learned to respond (and perhaps use the app as well) by re-asserting her voice as teacher, and someone who is due proper respect. Nevertheless, as Phoebe explained, many students chose to ignore this "teacherly" voice, did not reply, and this conversation came to a close.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the observation that cell phone use in China has grown rapidly, and this device impacts behavior and daily interactions. By focusing on how university students use one mobile app called WeChat, we have found that users negotiate their preferences to engage in one-to-one or one-to-many communication. Significantly two different tools enable the movement from each of these types of communication. WeChats' "Chats" function allows users to send instant text or audio file messages to one other person. The "Moments" function facilitates one-to-many communication, as a picture and accompanying text can be sent out, viewed, and responded to by many users.

What is of greater interest in this chapter, however, is to describe and interpret the rules of use or communicative codes that participants implicitly and explicitly follow when communicating with others via WeChat. These data demonstrate that when engaging in Chat, or one-to-one communication, users enhance the dramatic and emotive content of their messages with emoji. This resonates with Walther's earlier studies of computer-mediated-communication (CMC), that claim CMC is not inferior to face-to-face, as participants use resources that are at hand (for example, emoji and/or emoticons) to convey affect and emotion (Walther 1992, 2012).

The Moments function of WeChat, which enables one-to-many communication, demonstrates other rules of interaction. One emerges when observing the content of most posts: users share pictures and texts of "fun" activities, such as food, travel photos, or happy moments. This resonates with the Chinese folk concept of wanting to "share good news with others" (Sandel 2015). The second rule is based on the understanding that WeChat as a social environment is not always safe. It is understood that when an acquaintance or stranger makes a request to be added as a contact, this person is a potential danger, and may try to engage in fraud or other deceptive activities. Thus, users may be more cautious when considering who to add as a contact.

A third rule guides how students interact with hierarchical superiors, such as teachers or bosses. The Chinese social world is hierarchically structured (Chang 2010) (Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998) and when subordinates talk to superiors (e.g., child to parent), subordinates should show proper deference (Sandel 2004). Our data indicate that students feel a higher degree of "nervousness" when responding to messages and/or requests from teachers or bosses. Students may feel pressured to "like" a post made by a teacher, not because they truly like the post, but because they want to show the proper level of respect. Yet what is most interesting is to see that this interactional rule appears to be changing. With the passage of time, and as students become more accustomed to seeing a teacher's post, they begin to treat the message as a "normal" post by a classmate or friend. Thus, they may ignore the post, or feel inclined to press "like" because of the content of the message, and not the position of the sender. In this way we are seeing that—despite the efforts of some (e.g., the teacher) to assert an authoritative voice—WeChat is impacting the perception of a social hierarchy, and leading to a social world that is more egalitarian and less hierarchical.

In sum, we see that WeChat use not only reflects communicative codes from the offline world (e.g., hierarchical deference), but may also be changing it. WeChat may be a communicative platform that "flattens" the social structure. It thus exposes users to a world that is more open to dangers and cheats, but also brings superiors' everyday activities and banal moments into subordinates' worlds. We see in these posts and interpretive comments the struggle to define this new community of practice, much as we saw in Fitch's earlier observations of a Listserv (Fitch 1999). This also hearkens back to Hymes's work among the Wishram Chinook who had special rules for defining and interpreting what counts as language—infants' vocalizations. WeChat users in greater China are developing new rules to decide if a teacher's posting is worthy of a "like," or is a posting from a "normal" (social peer) and can be ignored if the content is not interesting and worthy of comment.

NOTES

1. Publisher's Note: The screen shots used as supplemental research in this text are included with the participants' knowledge and agreement that these screen shots would be used in a later publication.

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III

INTERCULTURAL INTEGRATION

Trudy Milburn

In order to help developers and designers learn more about the people using their new digital devices, researchers in this section address the question, "which cultural premises are being evoked when people interact with a specific digital medium in a particular situation?" This aligns with Murray's (2012) comment about innovative design, where she suggests that "we look beyond received opinion and familiar solutions to identify the deeper, cultural connections" (40).

Research subjects in the previous two sections have been referred to as users, actors, participants, speakers, and members, typically based on a methodological preference. In addition, each chapter includes reports about interaction based on participants' own role-specific labels, such as board member, student, trainer, driver, friend, etc. One of the ways LSR scholars attend to cultural identity is to listen for the terms used to describe people. As some authors have mentioned, each participant designation implicates a person into role obligations. These obligations include the ways one can and should relate to other participants as well as how one can and should use digital media when interacting. For instance, as the introduction pointed out, even when employing the term "users," we understand the rights, duties, and obligations of a person acting with a digital medium in a particular way.

We may ask of terms that describe digital media users: Is the "user" like the "culturally preferred model person, the individual" (Scollo 2011, 13)? To tease this apart, researchers should look closely at the way digital media are designed. Is the user assumed to be an individual or a group of people (as Peters questions in chapter 3)? If so, what impact do these

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Transcription Notation

[]	Brackets show overlapping talk
=say	Equal signs show latching (no interval) between utterances
(.)	A period inside parentheses shows a pause. Longer pauses are indicated by adding periods
but-	A dash shows sharp cutoff of speech
<u>better</u>	Underlining indicates emphasis
NEVER	Capital letters show talk that is noticeably louder than the surrounding talk
°what is°	Degree signs indicate talk that is noticeably more quiet than the surrounding talk
>fast<	"Less than" and "greater than" signs indicate talk that is noticeably faster or slower than the surrounding talk.
<slow>	
ple:ase	A colon indicates an extension of the sound or syllable that it follows. Multiple colons indicate longer extension
↑↓	Arrows pointing upwards and downwards indicated marked rising and falling shifts in intonation in the talk immediately following.
()	Unclear speech or word; Words between parentheses represent the best guess of a stretch of talk which was difficult to hear
((cough))	Double parentheses with italicized content enclose transcriber's descriptions of sounds or other features of the talk/scene
(1.5)	Numbers between parentheses indicate length of pauses in seconds and tenths of seconds