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The discursive construction of identity through interaction on social media in a Chinese NGO

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This article investigates the discursive construction of social identity in a Chinese NGO involved in ongoing online discussions on WeChat, China's fastest growing social networking site. While there is extensive literature on various aspects of online interaction, the analysis of identity construction through online discussions and the extent to which such discussions affect the collective identity of a group, especially an NGO, constitute a gap in the existing literature. Through the analysis of ongoing interactions in a group on WeChat over a period of eight months, and within the framework of social constructionist organization theory, this article adds to the existing academic discussion by revealing the way in which key members of a Chinese NGO are engaged in a process of group identity construction.

Keywords: construction; identity; social networking site; WeChat; NGO

Social media have become ubiquitous in Chinese cities and very common in rural areas, changing practices of information consumption and the communication habits of users. A considerable amount of energy has been devoted to understanding these new practices for marketing purposes, but we know little about how Chinese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use social media as part of their day-to-day operations. This article concentrates on the discursive construction of social identity in a Chinese NGO by analyzing ongoing discussions on WeChat, a phenomenon that has crucial implications for the members of such organizations in terms of the creation and maintenance of their cultural frameworks. For this purpose, we draw from literature on civic participation, social protest, social identity, and social media to support the argument that a WeChat group is a hybrid space that requires a widening of our understanding when it comes to identity construction.

From social protest to social media

From the 2000s onwards, many political scholars have studied the effects of the Internet on civic and political participation (e.g., Bennett, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Levine, 2011; Manning & Edwards, 2013; Rheingold, 2008; Russell, Fiedhouse, Purdam, & Virinder, 2002; van Deth, Abendschön, & Vollmar, 2011; Wattenberg, 2008). A particular focus of such studies has been the role of social networking sites (SNS) in the social life of modern-day youth (e.g., Boyd, 2007; Buckingham, 2008). In more recent years, the emphasis has gradually

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shifted to the effects of SNS such as Facebook (Boyd, 2007; Ekström & Östman, 2013; Jenkins, 2011; Kahne, Middaugh, Lee, & Feezell, 2011; Zhao, 2010).

Political participation is especially important to scholars of networks (Castells, 1996) and social protest. These scholars are interested in “how new norms guiding participation will emerge from the profusion of self-actualizing, digitally mediated DIY politics” (Bennett, 2012, p. 30) and how this might affect the collective identity of network movements. Melucci (1988, 1995, 1996) constitutes a reference for most scholars of collective identity (Monterde, Calleja-López, Aguilera, Barandiaran, & Postill, 2015, p. 931). He characterizes it as:

an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and is concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place. (Melucci, 1995, p. 44)

Gergen, an identity scholar, wrote in 1991 that technology enables individuals to “have multiple voices and selves” (cited by Weinstein, 2014, p. 212). Early research focusing on online chat rooms emphasized that deception and identity play constituted parts of this multiplicity (Weinstein, 2014, p. 212), which could make it difficult to construct a collective identity through online technologies. Later research on online communities, e.g., on Facebook, underscored the importance of “anchored relationships” between online and offline friends and the implicit identity claims made by Facebook users (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). The debate on the multiplicity of identities and how it fits into the formation of a collective identity still rages on. For example, a recent analysis of the 15M network movement argues that “it displays a specific form of systemic collective identity [which the authors] call ‘multitudinous identity’” (Monterde et al., 2015, p. 930).

Coretti and Pica provide another recent example of research concentrating on the identity of a social movement in which social media play a vital role. They explore “the process of collective identity building ... of Popolo Viola, an Italian Facebook-based political protest group” (Coretti & Pica, 2015, p. 951). They refer to Melucci, who reminds us that collective identity develops on symbolic, cognitive, and emotional levels “around shared interpretations of the world, common values, and mutual solidarity” through both vertical (top-down and bottom-up) and horizontal (between “followers”) communication, thus emphasizing the importance of interaction between individuals (p. 953). However, they point to the fact that there is no agreed definition of the concept of collective identity in the social protest literature. “Some definitions place collective identity in the individual sphere, describing it as ‘an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution’” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). They rightly point out that this definition disregards its construction within a social environment and the subjectivity of a collective actor (Coretti & Pica, 2015, p. 952). We also refer to this contradiction in our introduction to the concept of identity (see below).

Some Chinese scholars have examined social media users’ motivation, trust, attitudes, and word-of-mouth communication in a WeChat context (Lien & Cao, 2014) and differences in motivation between early and late adopters of SNS (Chang & Zhu, 2011). Their work concentrates on users’ motivations and attitudes concerning the adoption of SNS, which has high marketing value for the corporations involved, thus following in the footsteps of other scholars of similar Facebook-focused research in countries such as the US and Korea (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011).

Other recent papers concentrate on the opportunities and challenges faced by NGOs in China from the advent of social media (Shi, 2014). Like their Western counterparts

(Bach & Starck, 2004, p. 105), Chinese scholars recognize that the lower transaction costs of using the Internet and social media offer opportunities to NGOs. However, we are not aware of research on how social media usage by NGOs contributes to constructing a collective identity.

To summarize, our literature review reveals that there is no agreed definition of “collective identity” in the literature on protest and network movements, and neither is there assent regarding the importance of the individual sphere vs the collective actor in shaping a collective identity. Our aim is therefore to reconcile some of these tensions in our discussion and to show how interactions via social media contribute to building a collective identity in the non-contentious context of a Chinese NGO.

Identity

In psychology, identity is generally conceived of as belonging to the individual. Bergsma and van Peterson (2000), in their *Psychologie*, define identity as “the perception of personal unity, the conviction to remain unchanged and essentially the same.” (p. 197). This definition frames the construction of identity around the person – as if it emerges from the individual.

This perception of identity seems to contain a contradiction. If identity is what you believe yourself to be, then this vision can only be conceived by eliminating what you are not. In other words, identity not only says something about what you believe yourself to be but, simultaneously, what you believe you are not. As a consequence, to construct an identity, you need to identify what it is that sets you apart from significant others (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Cross & Vick, 2001). Finally, identity construction is always restricted to a specific social group.

This approach still leaves one aspect of identity construction unaccounted for: an identity is only valid under the condition that at least a considerable number of significant others agree in their perception of the same individual.

Let us operationalize this with an example: if I am a member of a certain social group and I believe myself to be the leader of that group, then that perception must be based on a certain way of making sense of the group and my position in it regarding the other group members. Those other group members must also make sense of me as the group’s leader. In fact, by confirming my identity as the group’s leader, they would simultaneously construct an identity of followers (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010; Smircich & Morgan, 1986). This would require ongoing interaction between me and the other members.

To conclude, the process of identity construction within a specific social group should comprise three aspects: how I perceive myself in view of certain significant others; how the others perceive me; and the interaction between the two perceptions.

Identity as a story

Human actors have a number of strategies to cope with the paradox created by the existence of these three aspects. The most prominent one, which is also the focus of this article, is discursive action. Members of the same social group constantly construct their identity in ongoing social interaction. One result of this interaction is that they create a shared story about the group and what it means to be a member.

The story is one of the methods used by humans to lay down events and facts in such a way that they make sense. Stories are therefore also a means to remember facts. Moreover,

a story is not only an account of events and facts but also a sequence of events connected by a plot (Czarniawska, 1998; Van Eeten, van Twist, & Kalders, 1996). Such plots, consisting of dominant ideas/recurring themes, are indicative of the justification of actions and events of the members of the group – also referred to as the authors of the narrative – and, as such, are a justification of its existence.

Modern electronic means of communication have significantly broadened man's ability to interact with peers. It has specifically enabled us to emulate face-to-face interaction under circumstances of geographical separation. The latest development is a combination of improved high-speed mobile data communication and software that enable people to chat as if they were sitting together.

Chinese social media and identity

Launched and developed by Tencent Holdings Ltd in January 2011, WeChat has become a quasi-ubiquitous mobile application in China. According to its owner, an average of 570 million active users (Tencent, 2015) log in every day. The application provides numerous functions such as text and voice messaging. It allows the creation of groups with several hundred members, an example being the one we examine in this study (hereafter referred to as the Group), which had over 260 members in early December 2015. In these groups, members share messages, photos, videos, and links to other types of content. Holders of public accounts can publish stories similar to news reports or blogs. WeChat also offers payment functionality and the option of issuing “red envelopes” (*hongbao*) – an electronic take on the “Chinese practice of giving money in red envelopes on the Lunar New Year” (Black, Levine, Oh, & Wei, 2006), a traditional custom extending to occasions such as marriages and birthdays. The *hongbao* service has proven particularly popular during celebrations such as the Lunar New Year but has also become a way of sharing “good luck” with other users on multiple occasions.

The social construction of identity

This study uses social integration (SI) theory to examine the process of identity construction within the Guangzhou chapter of the Chinese NGO, Free Lunch (FL), through their communication via the Chinese social network WeChat.

SI theory was developed by a group of researchers at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. It is based on Weick's (1979, 1995) organization theory and has been enriched with concepts from postmodern philosophy, in particular, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and concepts derived from psycholinguistics (Peverelli, 2000; Peverelli & Verduyn, 2012). In this theory, social groups are regarded as social–cognitive groups, i.e., groups of people (i.e., social) bound by a shared view of reality (i.e., cognitive). The latter does not refer to the entire reality but only to that part of reality related to the main theme on which the group is constructed. For example, a football team is constructed in the world of football and will therefore make sense of the (its) world from a football perspective. Belonging to a social group is referred to as “inclusion”. Actors (or members) are included in a large, theoretically indefinite number of groups. This is referred to as “multiple inclusion”. Two or more social groups are regarded as connected if there is at least one common actor in both groups.

The SI model has incorporated Paul Watzlawick's theory on communication (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). Watzlawick et al. point out that human communication usually contains information about the content under discussion and the relationship

between the participating actors. “Content meaning” refers to the dictionary meaning of the language used, while relational meaning is often embedded in the choice of words, the intonation (in oral communication), or choice of topics.

Content information is usually coded digitally, while relational meaning is often coded analogously. This builds on de Saussure’s linguistic model of separating the meaning from the sign. Communication between people who have no social relationship (or have just entered into one) starts as almost 100% in the digital domain, gradually containing increasing amounts of analogous information as their relation develops.

The SI model offers a convincing framework to analyze the online discussions of the Group. These discussions are stories containing cues about how they construct their group identity: for example, adherence to or violation of rules; recurrent rituals such as mutual support; compliments and congratulations; special jargon; use of symbols like emoticons; and recurrent topics not directly related to the core themes of the NGO but essential to the social coherence of the group.

Phatic and instrumental communication

A related but different approach to analyzing modes of communication is the “phatic” vs “instrumental” model. “Phatic communication is ‘purposeless’ ... as it aims at establishing a social presence rather than at transmitting meaningful information ...”, while “instrumental communication is ‘purpose-oriented’ ... However, it can be argued that even phatic communication can have a scope and effects” (Coretti & Pica, 2015, p. 955). Phatic communication is often analogous communication linked to the relationship between the communicating actors (Watzlawick et al., 1967). In our analysis of our subject matter, we found that both models have a high explanatory power in allowing us to understand the discursive practices in the WeChat conversations. This article makes a first attempt at consolidating the two models.

Research questions

We hereby formulate our two research questions:

RQ1: How do interactions between members of a WeChat group construct a collective identity and affect members’ functioning in this specific social group?

RQ2: How does the process of discursive construction of identity proceed?

Methodology

This exploratory research analyzes, over a period of eight months (from October 2014 to May 2015), 13,897 posts on a Chinese online social network. We opted not to start with a predetermined set of categories (tags). Instead, we studied the posts from beginning to end. In the process, we identified the main themes, classified them into categories, and then drew comparisons between these categories in order to understand their commonalities and differences. We proceeded in what we call an “artisanal” manner, not using software packages, such as MAXQDA or Atlas, but instead by reading and re-reading each line of these conversations while focusing on their instrumental, digital, phatic, and analogous aspects.

The conversations were divided into episodes about a specific theme. An episode usually began with a discursive request (DR), e.g., a question from one team member

inviting others to participate in a certain event. Other team members would then react to that request and to each other's reactions as the episode evolved.

The findings of this first analytical phase indicate the core issues around which discussions revolved in the Group, how these helped members make sense of the Group, and their role in it. The findings also provide cues about the relationships between members from an organizing perspective, e.g., which members are regarded as experts or leaders in certain issues, etc. Following the findings section, our discussion concentrates on the construction of group identity and the influence thereon of members' other inclusions. We changed the initials of each FL Group member mentioned in this article to ensure their anonymity.

We also conducted interviews in November 2015 with eight of the Group's members. These eight members, plus another one we have been in contact with since the summer of 2015 through WeChat and emails, created a separate, smaller WeChat group to discuss important issues emerging from the Group. We learned about this smaller group through our earliest informant, one of its members. We opted for semi-structured interviews because the loose structure of open-ended questions presents the advantage of defining the explored area while allowing the interviewer or interviewee to pursue an idea in greater detail (Britten, 1995, p. 251). Semi-structured interviews rely on the assumption that language and the order of questions can be adapted to different interviewees, but questions remain similar, thus offering the possibility to compare results (Denzin, 1978, pp. 115–116). The eight interviews do not correspond to a point of saturation but to the membership of that smaller group. The ninth member was not in Guangzhou at the time of the original interviews. While these interviews have yielded additional information regarding the key members' own sense of identity and their inclusions outside the Group, we only use them sparingly as secondary sources in this article, with the primary focus remaining the discursive analysis of the Group's discussions. We think that the existence of this smaller group deserves further investigation. However, by focusing on it in this article, we would stray from our main purpose.

Case introduction: Free Lunch (FL)

FL (*mianfei wucan*) is one of a dozen initiatives launched or co-launched by Deng Fei, previously an investigative journalist for *Phoenix Weekly*, now a full-time social activist. The aim of the initiative is to provide free lunches to rural children who cannot go back home to fetch a lunch and who do not receive one in school. Very often their parents have migrated to cities, leaving their grandparents or relatives to care for these "left-behind" children (*liushou ertong*). The consequences may be malnutrition, little energy to attend afternoon classes (Luo et al., 2012), and diminished chances of pursuing higher education.

From its launch in April 2011 to the end of September 2015, FL had received public donations of more than RMB 159 million, covering 392 schools in 23 provinces with 135,561 children having benefitted from the initiative/action (Free Lunch, n.d.). In November 2015, FL counted 26 full-time staff, about 800 core volunteers, and thousands of other irregular volunteers (Interview 24 November 2015).

FL volunteers and staff either identify schools or are contacted by school staff. If a school is included in the scheme, a sponsored kitchen is installed and a local team is trained to run the kitchen. A participating school must provide free lunches to all children attending that school, and all staff need to share the same dishes. FL volunteers – usually working in pairs – visit the school on a regular basis to ensure that accounting procedures and food quality match contractual requirements. Each school has the duty to publish the way it

spends money on a daily basis through a *weibo* account specially set up for that purpose. A number of schools left the scheme because they did not respect some of the conditions.

While Sina's *weibo* was instrumental in launching FL and other public interest (*gongyi*) actions such as Love Save Pneumoconiosis (*da ai qing chen*) and Micro-blogging against Human Trafficking (*weibo daguai*), its importance diminished with the anti-rumor campaign beginning in the summer of 2013 and amid growing competition from Tencent's WeChat. This latter platform has become essential to the functioning of FL, especially for communication and coordination between staff and volunteers.

One of the co-authors has been a member of the Group since shortly after its creation in April 2014. By the end of 2015, it counted 266 members, all FL volunteers, most of them in Guangzhou. University students constitute the largest single cluster, while other members comprise graphic designers, entrepreneurs, and musicians. The Group, one of the earliest FL WeChat groups in China, is considered a model by other FL local chapters. Key members of this group continue to share their experiences, methods, and principles with other volunteers during training sessions (personal observations and communications).

We obtained approval for this project through a two-step process. We first submitted the idea of writing an academic paper about the group's conversations to our earliest informant. He discussed the issue with the small group mentioned above, which is how we learned about the existence of the smaller group. Following their approval, we announced the project to the Group, generating a few approvals and no opposition. The co-author regularly communicates with several members of the Group. He has befriended one and has maintained amicable relationships with a few others. Only once in the course of the timespan selected for this project did he participate in a Group conversation – he answered a language-related question. However, since 2014, he has regularly participated in the Group's offline activities as an observer.

Findings: typology of communication

We present an overview of the corpus categories and sub-categories in Table 1, followed by a description. The first column on the left lists the main categories. The second column lists the sub-categories, and the third gives a short description of each sub-category. We present a more detailed table in Appendix 1 with one or several examples for every sub-category and its corresponding lemma in the corpus.

Community sharing

Table 1 covers four categories: community sharing related to FL; community sharing not related to FL; asking for help; and private inclusions. These four categories could be reduced to three, with community sharing – whether or not it is related to FL – by far the most important one. We decided to separate aspects of community sharing related to FL from those that are not related because different sub-categories emerge in both cases – with one exception.

Membership

The aspect of membership is most apparent when new members enter the Group, an event occurring 78 times in the corpus. While every new entrant to the Group is not greeted in the same way when he/she joins the Group, the etiquette of entry follows a recognizable pattern: the newcomer presents her-/himself, and then one or several members welcome

Table 1. Corpus categories and sub-categories.

Category	Sub-category	Content
Community sharing related to FL	Membership	Welcoming new members
		Introduce non-members to FL
	Celebration	Of those who drive an effort
		Of an event
		Of a media report
		Of (an)other member(s)
	Facts and stories	FL events
		FL schools
		School visits
		FL donations
		Story request
	Management and strategy	Organizational aspects
		Partnership aspects
		Selection of events
	Having fun	Conversations with shifting topics
		Food and eating
		‘Red envelopes’
Community sharing not related to FL	Charity-related information	Actions related to Deng Fei
		Matters of a charitable nature not related to Deng Fei
	Educational and professional information	Public seminars
		Employment or internship opportunities
	Promotional information	Personal promotion
		Commercial promotion
	Having fun	Jokes
		Videos
		Conversations with shifting topics
		Food and eating
		Talking football
		‘Red envelopes’
Asking for help	Related to FL or charity	Support charity activities
		Support through online voting
	Unrelated to FL	Cases of people with serious diseases
		Cases of accidental events
		Cases of daily life- or work-related support
		Support through online voting
		How to fix something
		Looking for an organization
		On being single/in a relationship/married
		Varied
Private inclusions	Relationship	On being single/in a relationship/married
	Others	Varied

and congratulate her/him, with emoticons punctuating the whole ritual. In some cases, a humorous conversation follows the arrival of the new member, immediately displaying the playful and relaxed atmosphere of the Group. Another common ritual is that members happily share the fact that they have successfully convinced peers, relatives, or friends to become FL volunteers. This provides an opportunity to show one's commitment to FL and is a good example of "positive energy" (*zheng nengliang*), a common expression in Chinese referring to a type of optimistic attitude and outlook.

Celebration

Celebration represents a frequent occurrence in the Group and covers several aspects:

- (1) celebration of those who drive an effort (e.g., members visiting schools);
- (2) celebration of an event (FL's third anniversary is a case in point);
- (3) celebration of a media report about FL (possibly including a GZ FL member);
- (4) celebration of other members.

The latter aspect is best illustrated by regular profiles of local volunteers edited by a dedicated broadcast team (*chuanbo zu*) and published within the Group, e.g., to celebrate a member's birthday.

Facts and stories

These comprise FL events such as auctions, promotional activities, or meetings in which members discuss specific issues; information about schools included in the FL scheme in Guangdong; visits to those schools by Guangzhou volunteers; donations; and requests for materials in the production of an FL story. One key member is responsible for writing and/or editing and sharing feature stories within the Group. As our analysis shows, she takes this role very seriously and, in collaboration with her editing team, produces an average of between one and two stories every week, including the member profiles mentioned above.

Management and strategy

This is a smaller sub-category. It encompasses serious discussions about organizational and partnership aspects as well as criteria determining how to select events in which the FL Guangzhou team could participate. This includes the creation of a procedure for inexperienced members to organize an auction and a long conversation around the merits of participating in an event organized by another organization, a rare example of a clash of opinions.

Other sub-categories

The four sub-categories relating to membership, celebration, facts and stories, and management and strategy are all related to FL. We also identified three other community-sharing sub-categories that are not related to FL.

Charity-related information

This sub-category covers information about other actions launched or co-launched by Deng Fei or by other individuals and organizations

Educational and professional information

This sub-category covers messages about education-oriented public seminars, as well as employment or internship opportunities. The latter is not connected to charity.

Promotional information

This sub-category is divided into personal and commercial promotion. In some cases, the former, which could arguably also be classified as private inclusion (see our last category below), tests the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in the Group. This is especially true in one case that reached its conclusion after the period covered by our corpus. The case in question represented an excellent example of a discussion about identity-constitutive values. Commercial promotion denotes marketing campaigns aimed at inciting consumers to use a service or product.

Having fun

We complete the review of the main category, community sharing, with a sub-category that includes many conversations – all displaying the attributes of phatic communication – in relation to food, eating together, talking about football, and sharing jokes and videos. All these non-instrumental conversations serve a purpose and bind the members of the Group together, as illustrated by episodes of “red envelopes” (*hongbao*) sent to other members of the Group. These red envelopes help to “activate interaction and participation in social networks and create a common concern and topic”. They constitute “a clever integration of Chinese tradition into a digital product” that is conducive to social interaction and entertains users (Lien & Cao, 2014, p. 109). There are 138 mentions of the word *hongbao* in the corpus. Every red envelope distributed to other members produces excitement and witty exchanges, with one specific episode stretching almost an hour and 201 posts. It ends with one member sending a crying emoticon: “I just took a shower and missed dozens of red envelopes.” Members try to open these envelopes as fast as they can and then share the results with the Group. Those issuing red envelopes often receive elaborated “thank you, boss” emoticons sent by other members as a form of acknowledgement.

Asking for help

The next category is linked to the idea of help and support, but not just as a form of information sharing: members asking for help do so in a very direct way, displaying a sense of urgency. They mention particular cases of people with a serious disease in need of help; present less dramatic cases of daily life- or work-related situations requiring prompt support; ask for advice about how to fix something; or urge support for a cause through online voting, etc. These requests, whether related to FL or not, are similar in nature, all soliciting immediate help for specific cases.

Private inclusions

While fewer in number, episodes of private inclusions offer occasional glimpses into issues relating to relationships. One case – also one of the liveliest discussions we witnessed in the whole corpus – stretches over eight hours and 600 posts. Keywords such as “single”, “unmarried”, and “blind date” punctuated the discussion, which sometimes went into a

grey territory, mixing humor with what sounded like real quests for a partner or spouse. Female members called each other “sisters”, a common practice in China. Overall, we identified only a handful of other private inclusions.

Selected episodes of FL members

In this section, we analyze and discuss the episodes of two FL members. Their initials have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Example 1: FZZ

Role

FZZ appears as someone preoccupied with writing texts about FL, in particular for the purpose of distributing them via WeChat broadcasts. Virtually all non-private conversations were related to her preparation of broadcasts or requesting others to write about FL events in which they participated. In terms of categories of conversations, the bulk of FZZ’s statements fell into “organizational aspects” under the sub-category “Management and strategy”, itself part of “Community sharing related to FL” (see Table 1). The vast majority of the remaining statements fell under “Support charity activities” under the sub-category “Related to FL or charity” and the main category “Asking for help.”

FZZ literally phrases her own role in statements like:

Wherever there is news, FZZ is there.

Wherever there is news, I am there.

This role is discursively constructed by the frequent use of the WeChat user ID @xinwen-gaojianguiqiuFZZ, literally translated as “@news copy kneel and request FZZ” – a humorous confirmation of her self-perceived role. This frequent use of her user ID by other members – 95 times in the corpus – virtually voids it of digital information but strongly confirms the nature of the relationship between FZZ and the other Group members.

FZZ does not produce the messages from scratch; she receives them from others. Her favorite DR (discursive request) is one asking for texts or photos. She acknowledges this role a number of times, using phrases like:

I do not produce articles; I am merely a mover (*banyungong*) of photos and articles.

I am a subeditor and mover of articles.

FZZ also constructs her role in the organization using phrases like:

I am playing a side role and do not use up social resources.

FZZ suggests that she only plays a minor role – but is actually the driving force behind numerous stories published in the Group about individual members and FL events – a form of humility common in Chinese culture. Such messages are again void of digital meaning but are strong confirmations of her relationship with the other Group members. For FZZ, Group membership is obviously a major social identity.

Typical episodes by FZZ

The following paragraphs summarize typical episodes initiated by FZZ.

WeChat broadcasts. The most typical format of an episode by FZZ begins with a DR for materials and ends in an emotional message, either expressed with emoticons or emotional phrases like “Very good!” to thank people who have promised to send material.

Between the beginning and end can come a variety of shorter or longer episodes, e.g., about the nature of the materials needed, whether or not FZZ is participating herself, etc. If she does not receive an immediate positive response, she repeats the DR. This does not happen often. There is usually a positive reply within minutes or even seconds. This by itself is a discursive confirmation of FZZ’s prominent role in FL. When she repeats the DR without one of her standard, happy emoticons, she sends a strong analogous signal of discontent.

A variation of this type is one that ends in a WeChat broadcast typically using the materials contributed by others.

Group membership. Episodes about FL membership occur much less frequently. From these conversations, FZZ does not appear to be very actively involved in the organizational aspects of membership. Most of the episodes in this category are of an emotional nature. She praises the team spirit of the members, stating how wonderful it is to be a member of such a group. Only two episodes involve persuading people to join FL.

We noted references to different groups:

- *Qun* (meaning “herd”) refers to WeChat groups that users can form by themselves.
- Guangzhou Team (*guangzhou tuandui*) refers to the local FL team, praised several times by FZZ for its accomplishments.
- FL (*mianfei wucan*, or abbreviated: *mianwu*) is the official name of the NGO. FZZ uses the term in a relatively formal way in reference to various activities.
- Teams (*zu*) refer to several temporary, permanent, or semi-permanent teams. Membership of a *zu*, more formal than a *qun*, is subject to a formal ballot of the group. The following team designations appear in episodes relating to FZZ.
 - Broadcast team (*chuanbo zu*): an FL sub-group. As a prominent member, FZZ is actively involved in attracting new members to this sub-group.
 - Preparation team (*choubei zu*): a short-term group preparing for a specific event. By asking whether someone is a member, FZZ indicates that she does not possess that information.
 - Magazine team (*jikan zu*): one of two sub-groups of the broadcast team that produces a digitally distributed magazine every quarter. The second sub-group is called WeChat and is in charge of regular communications. FZZ is affiliated with both.
- Station (*yizhan*): literally, a station where messengers used to rest and change horses in imperial China, a *yizhan* designates a group of FL volunteer students in a university. There were three of them across China at the end of December 2015: in Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Hangzhou. Their members promote FL and its objectives to other students, calling for their participation and support and sensitizing them to the issue of child nutrition in rural schools. FZZ is a leading member of the Jiangsu station based in Nanjing.

Nanjing vs Guangzhou

FZZ studies in Nanjing but appears to perceive the city as not very friendly. She often complains about the weather (too hot, too cold, etc.) and describes herself as a “Child of

Guangdong drifting about in Nanjing.” Another member repeats the same phrase, which is a strong discursive confirmation.

Guangzhou is FZZ’s home region, and her affection reflects the traditional Chinese emotional link with it (Peverelli & Song, 2012, pp. 125–136). She regularly refers to good memories of doing things together with friends in Guangzhou. She praises Guangzhou efficiency (in organizing things), often uses Cantonese expressions, and employs names of places that local people know; for example, *xiaomiyao* (meaning “slender waist”) when referring to the Guangzhou TV Tower.

These are all discursive confirmations of her emotional relationship with the Group. The Group is rooted in Guangzhou, while FZZ is “exiled” in Nanjing. The use of these emotional words and phrases induces similar emotions among the receivers of these communications. In that sense, they are of a truly analogous nature.

Analysis of a longer episode

Appendix 2 provides an example of a longer episode illustrating how FZZ discursively legitimates her own role in her interactions with other members, including some less familiar with her role and how her role is legitimated by others. In this episode, she also discursively negotiates rules regarding the exchange of information for WeChat broadcasts that are different from those for which she is responsible.

Example 2: FXXJ

In line with the research practice of naturalistic enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we do not present the next FL member’s behavior on WeChat as entirely new but, in comparison with our findings, relevant to FZZ. FXXJ’s behavior on WeChat is strikingly different from that of FZZ.

Role

The first impression of a bird’s eye view of FXXJ’s posts in the total corpus is one of permanent presence: he is literally almost omnipresent with only short absences. He may contribute to a particular episode with no more than a short confirmation or an emoticon, but he seems to be constantly monitoring the Group. This indicates an extremely strong inclusion in this group. FXXJ hardly ever initiates an episode, at least not in the conversations that we tracked up to the time of writing this analysis. In cyber terminology, FXXJ never “owns” a conversation.

Compared with FZZ, his conversations are more digital than analogous: a larger part is related to content rather than interpersonal relations. FXXJ expresses emotions mainly with emoticons.

Typical contributions

FXXJ is involved in a significant number of episodes. His typical contribution begins with a reaction to a remark by another member. This can be volunteering information that another member seeks, sometimes leading to a short conversation in which FXXJ contributes more detailed information. Once others thank him for his help – a discursive confirmation that his contribution is useful – he discursively confirms his appreciation with an emoticon.

The overall impression is that FXXJ derives pride from being part of the daily routine of FL. His designated role within the Guangzhou FL team is to visit schools covered by FL's activities in Guangdong – visits that he actively documents through text, photos, and videos when they occur. However, the pride he derives from the Group does not primarily stem from this role. The other members value his participation, as the exceptionally effusive wishes he receives for his birthday attest (see Appendix 1 under Category 1, Celebration of another member), and he does value this appreciation.

Discussion

In this last section, we return to our research questions, building on the observations and analysis made in the course of this article. We start with the discursive construction of identity and members' functioning in the Group.

Collective identity construction and members' functioning

The Group's WeChat conversations are a continuous process of collective identity construction. The conversations as a whole construct a cognitive space in which the members reconstruct the Group itself and their role in it by retelling their story on a daily basis. The instrumental–digital content of the conversations constructs the cognitive element of the social–cognitive Group while the phatic–analogous content constitutes the social glue that binds the Group's members together.

Our analysis shows that the Group has a distinct collective identity that revolves around topics related to FL and charity, as well as around issues raised by members seeking support from their peers. While the former serves a primarily instrumental–digital purpose and the latter a chiefly phatic–analogous one, the boundary between these two dimensions often seems blurred. To echo Karl Weick and his reference to the tightly related individual and social dimensions of sense-making, we could argue that it is doubtful that the two are even separable (Weick, 1995, p. 6). This distinct collective identity does not make members' individual identities less discernible, as we have seen with FZZ and FXXJ, who both possess different functions within the Group. These functions might be assigned to a member, as in the case of FZZ, or might emerge in the course of the conversation, as with FXXJ. In both cases, such functions strongly support the collective identity of the Group and contribute to a sense of unified purpose. The functions serve clear roles: information and storytelling for FZZ; constant participation that creates a sense of accompaniment and solidarity in the case of FXXJ; and moral authority in the case of another senior member.

All the discussions listed under the sub-category "Having fun" provide typical examples of phatic–analogous communication that are conducive to creating an environment of mutual attention and support between members. FZZ's frequent requests for stories (edited by the broadcast team) on volunteers' profiles and FL events might seem primarily instrumental–digital. However, they contain and generate repeated compliments and praise for active members who contribute to FL. All these factors contribute to focusing members' attention on charity-related issues and to creating an environment of "positive energy". Individual members who are active in conversations support the Group's objectives. The rarity of cases in which discussions contain disagreement constitutes a reminder of how "harmonious" the Group actually is.

The small nine-member WeChat group we referred to above provides part of the explanation regarding the stability of the Group's purpose and identity. This smaller group does not force the Group's members into a mold, but instead provides them with a platform to

discuss important issues and suggest options to the Group. This works against the risk of fragmentation, as alluded to by scholars of social protest and protest networks (Monterde et al., 2015, pp. 932–933), even if such organizational movements are arguably more complex than the local chapter of an NGO. A member might occasionally stop contributing to the Group for a few days, but all key members contribute virtually continuously to the conversation. Although we have not recorded information about other WeChat activities of the key members, the sheer amount of time and energy they devote to the Group makes it clear that their membership is one of their key social identities. Most key members confirmed this during the interviews.

The process of discursive construction

How does the discursive construction of identity proceed? First, we observed a trialogic form of interaction in the Group: “A trialogic form of interaction promotes a collective identity-building process which is based more on strong ties, rather than affiliative ties ... which are characterized by a merely dialogic nature of interaction and top-down interactional dynamics” (Coretti & Pica, 2015, p. 955). We noted very few instances of top-down conversations, a phenomenon confirmed during the interviews. Several interviewees used the word “democracy” to denote members’ equal rights to participate in discussions and to express their opinions. There is, nonetheless, a paradox when it comes to this notion of democratic exchange within the Group: most members, especially new ones, are not aware of the existence of a separate small WeChat group used by nine key members. The discussions of these nine key members have an impact on the Group: once they have reached an agreement, they submit their ideas to the Group in the form of a DR referring to a specific ongoing discussion. We suggested the word supervision (*jiandu*) to define the role of these members and their small group during the interviews. Almost all of them agreed with this qualification. Interestingly, for our purpose, the members of the small group also use discursive techniques to submit their ideas and “supervise” the Group’s discussions.

A second interesting point is the manner in which conversations constitute instruments aimed at constructing smaller social cognitive groups. We can revert to FZZ’s contributions (analyzed above) to observe such a process. When FZZ learns of an impending FL event, she broadcasts a message asking other key members to contribute reports, preferably with photos, about the event so that she can broadcast them within the FL organization. In most cases, she receives positive replies within a few minutes. In terms of the SI model, this points to a construction rule (Peeverelli & Verduyn, 2012, p. 42). These sections of the conversations may strike uninitiated readers as rather mechanical and similar to set phrases learned by heart. For the participants, these are familiar confirmations of their Group and their roles in the activities of the Group. The same phenomenon occurs during school visits, announcements of FL events, welcoming of new members, reception of red envelopes (*hongbao*), and similar events, all of which generate what looks, from an external perspective, like established, almost mechanical reactions.

This brings us to the third point: ontological security, a concept proposed by Giddens (1991) as the need “for modern individuals to gain trust” in societies where “traditional communities that used to provide security, consistency, and a sense of belonging have been dismantled” (Lee, 2013, p. 280). We see very few disagreements occurring during discussions. We think that this is due in large part to the maintenance of mutual trust in the Group. The number of requests for help – a phenomenon not anticipated by the Group’s founders (personal communications) – is a sign of trust in the Group and demonstrates confidence in its ability to provide help. This help might be instrumental–digital or phatic–analogous,

a distinction often blurred in the Group's discussions, which provides us with the final element of reflection for this discussion.

The Group as a hybrid space

While we have addressed our two research questions, a third point is worth mentioning: the Group as a "hybrid space" and the importance of this characteristic for the identity of Guangzhou's FL chapter. Writing about mobile technologies, de Souza e Silva (2006) sees them as creating hybrid spaces that blur the borders between physical and digital spaces, bring social networks into physical spaces, and reconfigure urban spaces as hybrid spaces. While the third point is outside our scope of research, our analysis of the corpus and offline observations confirm the first two points. To the Group's members, WeChat is not an online media separated from offline realities: it is embedded in their daily lives to the point that a separation between online and offline becomes futile.

The same is true regarding the boundaries between instrumental–digital and phatic–analogous communication. Early studies in the field of computer mediated communication (CMC) found a relative paucity of phatic information in online interpersonal and group communication. Further research quickly disproved these earlier statements, demonstrating that CMC was often used for emotionally charged communications (Brake, 2012, p. 1059). Members of the Group share a wealth of information through pictures, videos, audio messages, and emoticons, which other users can react to in similar ways. A conversation about the search for a life partner lasted eight hours and generated a high level of excitement and participation.

The boundaries between strong and weak ties are similarly blurred. Writing about Twitter, Barnes (2008) observes that with its growing incorporation into society, Twitter "tends to emerge an ambient social space where the boundaries between the easily expandable and instrumental relations of weak ties and the emotionally close and caring relations of strong ties are blurred" (p. 281). This certainly applies to members of the Group with no or few links to more experienced members. The Group immediately invites them into a community displaying similar values.

This hybridity, or "in-betweenness", opens opportunities for an NGO like FL, which are yet to be explored. While such an investigation goes beyond the scope of this paper, we think it is worthy of further research.

Conclusion

This study has provided an example of how online social media can function as a space for interaction and discussion for a charity/NGO in China. We have analyzed the nature and content of its communication and shown that while its main part is instrumental–digital in nature, it also entails a strong phatic–analogous dimension. Members of the WeChat group investigated here constantly mix these registers: the same member can engage in phatic–analogous communication in one conversation and switch to instrumental–digital in another. Such switches regularly take place in one episode and sometimes even in a single WeChat message. We have shown how the discussions conducted in the Group shape a collective identity through the recurrence of specific topics, set phrases and templates, and the acceptance of rules.

These initial findings have interesting implications. First, on the theoretical side, past studies using SI theory have discussed the emergence of social–cognitive groups in ongoing social interaction without looking at the differences between the social construction of cognitive and social elements. This study has addressed this gap by analyzing the online

conversations of the Group using the models of phatic–instrumental and analogous–digital communication. We have shown that instrumental or digital communication continuously constructs and re-constructs the cognitive element of a social–cognitive group while phatic or analogous communication is constructive of the social element. A second theoretical implication concerns the hybridity of a WeChat group. This hybridity blurs the boundaries between physical and digital spaces, instrumental–digital and phatic–analogous communication, and even between weak and strong ties. Scholars have already observed these trends in separate areas. We think that the Group brings all these communication practices together.

On the empirical side, there are implications for NGOs and charities in China – and probably also for other organizations – regarding the use of a social media application such as WeChat. Our analysis demonstrates that it focuses attention on recurrent topics, engages members in conversations, and generates a climate of trust, thus strengthening group identity. While this requires devoted members such as “broadcasters” and “supervisors”, it has the potential to facilitate the organizational work and development of NGOs.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

This article only focused on a local chapter of one NGO, which makes it difficult to generalize to NGOs in China. Future studies should analyze other organizations and groups of activists in order to establish whether there are common patterns. Another limitation is that we did not clarify whether the technological features of a WeChat group created constraints that affected the communication content and style in such a group.

Therefore, future research should conduct a more detailed study of the sense-making processes expressed by the online conversations of the Group. This should also pay more attention to the way in which the social construction of the cognitive and social elements of social–cognitive groups are interrelated. It would also need to look into the boundaries between identity, story, and narrative and include similar online communications of members of other Chinese NGOs – possibly in different regions. Finally, an aspect noted in this article, which is worthy of investigation, lies in the changing identities of members between different groups.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix 1 Categories and sub-categories identified in the Group’s corpus

Category 1 – Community sharing related to FL

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
MEMBERSHIP	Welcoming of new members	3960-66	New member introduces herself and is welcome
		8108-15	Same as above (3960-66)
		14217-28	Introduction followed by humorous conversation
	Introduce non-members to FL	833	Visit FL schools with non-members
		7646-57	Convince someone to become a FL volunteer
CELEBRATION	Of those who drive an effort	790-823	Congratulations of members following school visits
		2775-91	Congratulating a member for her public speech
		10499-520	Congratulating a member for a donation event
		13413-32	Congratulating a member who drives for school visits
		Regular stories about FL members issued by the ‘broadcast team’	
	Of an event	2888-97	International volunteer day
		2998-3016	Third anniversary of FL
	Of a media report	6102-28	FL media report on a local channel
		10135-54	Print media article about FL team
	Of (an)other member(s)	11554-62	Members praise students of Guangdong’s student station
		13179-85	Praise for speed of publishing a story
		13952-14149	Effusive wishes of happy birthday to FXXJ, reflecting his special position in the Group and how other members appreciate him

(Continued)

Category 1 (Continued)

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
FACTS and STORIES	FL events	2661-63	Student station event in Dongguan
		2896-89	Several activities (FL presentation, auction...)
		3878	Auction announcement
		5018-46	Post-Thank You Party report
		9098-100	Reading activity to promote FL
		12353-57	Announcing FL facts and running/hiking activities
		Regular stories about FL events issued by the 'broadcast team'	
	FL schools	957-82	A new school joins FL in Guangdong
		2368-74	A bank supports a FL school
		12451-531	School visits wrap-up session
		12639-726	Same as above, with a story evoking the birth of the local FL team
	School visits	3892-3938	Trip to school and visit
		9632-765	School visit: lunch time, a library is needed...
		11010-101	Volunteers sought for school visits
		11485-840	School visits (see below: 11991-12120...)
		11991-12120, 12196-240, 12247-65, 12334-52, 12375-429	School visits including day-long 'live' sharing, news report prepared on mobile phone on the way back, emotional statements, facts about how far children live from schools...
	FL donations	2542-87	Sharing results of a donation activity
		13901-11	Announcement about corporate donations
		Daily updates about donations received through social media platforms	
	Story request	2856-63	Asking for photos to promote an event
		3516-53	Members asked to share their FL stories by FZZ
MANAGEMENT and STRATEGY	Organizational aspects	2300-30	Procedure for charity auctions and using outdoor events for promotional purposes
		2846-47	New function to share information about FL events
	Partnership aspects	2471-78/86-89	Potential partnership with a local dept. and a company
		5356-81	How to select partners and manage FL in complex environment

(Continued)

Category 1 (Continued)

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
		7401-03	Potential partnership with a men's clothing company
	Selection of events	532-770	Members argue about participating to an event organized by another organization; different ideas/principles are stated in a rare case of clash of opinions. an influential member states his principles (676)
		2300-38	Advantages of organizing/participating in outdoor events
HAVING FUN	Conversations with shifting topics, members poking fun at each other	9807-910	How to find FL HQ in Hangzhou, being young, eating
		10030-109	Sharing FL event photos, being together, beauties and handsome guys, eating, Karaoke
		10225-315	Going to FL 4 th anniversary party in Hangzhou, beauties, train trip, food, arrival in Hangzhou
		11554-660	School visits, donation, street dance activity, eating
	Food and eating	9129-265	Invitation to eat together and mutual jokes
	'Red envelopes'*	7983-8013	Case of red envelopes related to a big Chinese brand

*hongbao

Category 2 – Community sharing not related to FL

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
CHARITY-RELATED INFORMATION	Actions related to Deng Fei	6834-6874	<i>nütong baohu</i> : action to prevent sexual harassment of girls
		3430-47	<i>rang houniao fei</i> : action to protect migratory birds
		3719-27	<i>e-nong jihua</i> : promotion of agricultural products
		8755-58	<i>hui fei de hezi</i> : pre-constructed houses for schools
	Matters of a charitable nature not related to Deng Fei	3207-14	Newspaper offering plate tickets to left-behind children
		11401-62	Ministry of Civil Affairs survey about student and voluntarism
		8703-09	Announcement about a <i>gongyi</i> salon

(Continued)

Category 2 (Continued)

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
		8965-78	Where to donate clothes in GZ
		9450-502	Volunteers to be recruited for a farming activity
		11238-318	Training opportunity for leaders of social organizations
		11884-946	Hospital offering free operation to children with heart diseases: immediately identified as fake info + ensuing discussion about how to recognize fake information
EDUCATIONAL and PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION	Public seminars	3146-47	Seminar on 'social governance in a transitional period'
		12163-64	Seminar on public speaking and efficient communication
		13379-80	Seminar at Sun Zhongshan University
	Employment or internship opportunities	2836-37	Two positions in a media group
		8130-53	Position in a pharmaceutical group followed by discussion on the appropriateness of such an announcement
		8626-73	Internship in a wine company
		10498	Internship in a trading company
PROMOTIONAL INFORMATION	Personal promotion	946-47, 3021-22...	Member promotes his company*
		13058-62	Member promotes his concert
		13511-30	Personal painting exhibition
	Commercial promotion	10990-11004	China Unicom promotion
		13279-89	China Mobile promotion
HAVING FUN	Jokes	10189-192	A joke (not understood by a young member)
	Videos	12532-540	About how old people are cheated through calls for help
	Funny conversations of mixed topics	8338-401	About phone credit, food, women and men
		9380-405	Stuck on the road, food, working overtime
		13433-504	Charity announcement, weather, summer vacation

(Continued)

Category 2 (Continued)

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
	Food and eating	8267-307 14390-405	What/where members like to eat Remembering eating good food together
	Talking football	9335-52 13269-76	Asking for a match ticket and discussion about football Celebrating a goal of the local team
	'Red envelopes'	6469-669	Several red envelopes are issued and shared, resulting in a lot of fun

*A recurring event which epilogue occurs outside of the corpus in November 2015

Category 3 – Asking for help

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
RELATED TO FL OR CHARITY	Support related to charity activities	8116-21	Legal question: how a village collective can establish a foundation
		9766-67	Question about FL's volunteer management
		12445-48	Looking for members with charity auction experience
	Support through online voting	8124-28	Help a company to obtain a charity award
		10171-72	Vote for a photographer involved in FL
UNRELATED TO FL	People with serious diseases	919-44	Case of a child with leukemia
		3841-50	Case of a child with aplastic anemia
		6129-45	Looking for a child lost in GZ
		9627-28	Case of a diseased child
	Accidental events	10016-23	Child found alone in a Southern city
		11181-235	Several members involved in a car accident
	Asking for daily life- or work- related support	5281-306	Translation in Portuguese and Italian
		5307-27	Travel tips
		3388	Where to buy electronic goods in bulk
		9335-52	How to get a football match ticket
		12855-13003	Looking for a French-speaking student to teach a child
	Support through online voting	7210-61	Vote for an individual to win an online contest
		13074-120	Vote for an hospital to win an online contest

(Continued)

Category 3 (Continued)

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
	How to fix something	3487-92 13398-412	IT issue How to reduce 'stomach fire' and bad breath
	Asking for an organization	8164-74/77-80 8559-68/72-74	Company looks for an opportunity to support students Instructors needed for training camp on social work

Category 4 – Private inclusions

Sub-category	Content	Examples	Description
RELATIONSHIP	On being single/ in a relationship / married	992-1593	Lively & long discussion on finding girl/boyfriend or spouse
		6245-68	One member announces the marriage of another
		6386-88	A female member share a song for single before sleeping
OTHERS	Varied	5990-6060	A member asks for money to buy a flat due to her revenues being too low, followed by critical comments and a discussion about the impropriety of this demand
		6271-336	A new member enters the Group and quickly reveals she is the daughter of a core and active member

Appendix 2 Analysis of longer conversation (FZZ)

Long episodes involving FZZ: 8/12/2014 – 19:48 – 20:39 pm

- The episode is initiated by a reaction of FZZ to a conversation between other FL members about photos of an event that attracts her attention. This is FZZ's most frequently employed MO. Probably to ensure that her entrance does not go unnoticed, she ends the line with a literary expression 'to mark my resolution' (*yi ming xin zhi*).
- LQH reacts with emoticons expressing awe, which in turn triggers ZY to react with laughing emoticons and a phrase of praise. FZZ immediately confirms the emotion with laughing emoticons.

This section of the episode discursively reconfirms FZZ's core role in FL in general and her participation in this particular conversation. Note that the fact that none of the participants questions the legitimacy of FZZ's request is also a discursive confirmation of her role. LQH exits the episode.

- FZZ then sends a DR to ZY to share the information.
- ZY asks FZZ to confirm the address to which the information should be sent. XC enters the conversation, revealing that he is not familiar with FZZ's long address

(@xinwengaojianguiquFZZ, literally: '@news copy kneel and request FZZ').

- FZZ first confirms the address to ZY and then confirms to XC that the long address is indeed linked to her.

The new DR initiates an episode embedded in a larger episode. FZZ is engaged in two conversations; with ZY about the address for the photos (the theme of the larger episode) and with XC about the address itself (the embedded episode).

- XC sends a DR for more information about the roles of FZZ and ZY in FL, because he also needs information for WeChat broadcasts of his own. He sends an example of his type of WeChat broadcasts to be used as template.
- FZZ explains the various WeChat calls of FL and promises to send XC the requested information at least three days in advance as requested by XC.
- A few minutes later, she softens this a little, indicating that events cannot always be known that long in advance.

XC accepts the softening and FZZ ends this section and the entire episode with the confirmation of the (softened) promise.