Chinese Society: Social Media, Language, and Communications

Name

Institutional Affiliation

Chinese Society: Social Media, Language, and Communications

Cultures in Asia are as diverse as the multiplicity in ethnic numbers of migrants and the local populace. Asian cultures were famously compared with a 'lotus flower' that unfolds perfectly clean leaves to get out of dirty and muddy water. In the same fashion, this phenomenon of the lotus flower is translated to capture Asia's host of strong cultures. Of great importance to this essay, the East Asian culture, also referred to as the Confucian culture, is prevalent in societies that used 'chopsticks'; mainly the Chinese communities, Vietnam, the Koreas, and Japan (Carpini, et al., 2004). This paper explores the impact of social media on language and communication in China. The paper further discusses the fluid nature of Chinese society, the emergence of English and social media in China, and how they have affected the way the Chinese communicate.

In China there is a great amount of cultural integration. As one of the most ancient human civilizations, there is such great uniqueness of the Chinese culture that transcends well beyond the 'bound feet' and 'blue gowns' historical times and the modern times that include ever-improving technological sophistication. Yin Yang is one useful approach that can assist in shedding light on fundamentally understanding the Chinese culture. Yin Yang philosophy embraces change and paradox as a fluid nature of Chinese culture – that things are not simply black or white. In line with the Yin Yang symbol, Yin and Yang complement each other, exist in each other, depend on each other and complete each other. Yin Yang thought is fascinated by change as a central universal principle (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Social media in China began at around the same time as in the United States. Currently, the most used platforms are not the pioneer ones. Weibos was first launched in 2008 as practically a Twitter clone. Other social media services like Tao Tai, Fanfou, and Jiwal came up

at around this period but they were short-lived. Fanfou, like Twitter and Facebook, were blocked by Beijing after the infamous Urumqi riots. This shut down of the then widely used platforms created a vacuum and after government regulators in 2009 approved microblogging, the now-famous services were successfully launched. Seino Weibo is popular in 1st and 2nd tier cities while it is viewed as foreign among 3rd tier and 4th tier areas. As a result, its uses tend to be urban and white-collar thus attracting foreign users and celebrities. Teino Weibo on its part is perceived fairly in 3rd and 4th tier cities and so much by an urban elite base. Another platform, RenRen, is more popular among students (Dai, 2002).

This continued used of social media among common groups of people has had an impact on language evolution in China. The Chinese language is without a doubt the most ancient written language and is not less than 6000 years old. How has the advent of social media impacted this ancient language? The invention of social media has led to the cropping up of a new form of pseudo-language which employs short forms, new sayings, and not to forget emojis. The effect this has had is that these commonly used words now have different meanings unlike they had before social media use. Social media increased use has also had a damaging effect on interpersonal face-to-face communication skills. The majority of Chinese people speak Chinese but when it comes to social media it is a different case. Platforms such as Weibos and RenRen have created their distinct form of language.

Words such as 'Bio', 'Chat', and 'Avatar' now have social media meanings. Bio was a biomedical related terminology; chat was mostly about informal conversations while Avatar was deity-related. In this new social media dispensation, avatar represents a graphical representation of an internet user, chat may refer to virtual meetings and bio is an online user's profile. Apart from 'hijacking' the use of words, social media has also led to the development of new words that

represents this new online landscape. 'Selfie' and 'Hashtag' are newly formulated vocabulary. With these platforms providing a limited number of characters to be possibly sent at a given time, users have adapted to this limitation by shortening language in their communication. This leads to the rise of a new slang popular among social media users (Yin, 2013).

The use of emoticons and emojis, has arisen as another evolution of language use in social media. While emoticons are no so new, dating back to the 1800s, their use has become more widespread in social media platforms. Emojis are a rather new form of emoticons that are part of everyday internet use. This evolution of language caused by these social media eras is criticized as leading to increased illiteracy levels among the younger generation. With China's emphasis on nationalism and national pride, an increased illiterate populace is an embarrassment to this Chinese greatness (Fang, 2017).

The emergence of social media and English has affected the way people communicate in China in a number of ways; firstly, it has led to bilingualism or multilingualism. Bilingualism is a phenomenon of understanding and speaking two or more languages. It can be in two categories either individual or social bilingualism. Because of the emergence of English, most Chinese individuals use English together with their local dialects while conversing. Bilingualism has been on the rise and this has led to introduction of bilingualism education by the Chinese government. Since its introduction there has been opposition by a few individuals about possible negative effects it may cause. However, their voices have been drowned with a growing number of pro Chinese- English Bilingualism education (Fang, 2017).

The rise of the use of social media has influenced how the Chinese government interacts with its citizens. Scholars in the western democracies have extensively discussed social media's social and political role in facilitating citizen engagement. One group of scholars have argued

that the internet has the ability to encourage citizens to be involved in the civic and political process. The reason behind this logical thought is due to a number of factors such as technological advantages. Social media has reduced the cost of engagement and has minimized restrictions among citizens for participation in socioeconomic issues affecting the country (Delli Carpini, et al., 2004). According to the informed citizenry thesis, social media effectively promotes exchange and flow of opinions and information (Schneider & Foot, 2005). Other scholars have argued that Social media facilitates the growth and development of social networks (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007).

The emergence of English has had an increased influence on the identity of the younger Chinese population (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Most teenagers and young Chinese that learn the English language are likely to adopt the American culture. Young people, who know English, identify less with their local culture, and more with the English culture. For example, they will most likely wear American – style clothing, watch American television programs such as Wrestling and American idol, they will listen to American music and meet up at Starbucks. In fact, the younger an individual, the faster they are likely to be influenced by the American culture; behavior, and thinking. The more English they learn and speak, the more they talk and think like Americans. This behavior is easily noticeable by Chinese individuals who have little exposure to American culture. Most young Chinese view speaking English as a good thing and that is why most young people in China are learning English. This is so serious such that those who don't speak English envy those with fluent and good English. Despite the fact that in some countries speaking English is viewed as anti-nationalistic, in China it is the opposite because for young people it is viewed as an upgrade from the constrictions of the local Chinese culture into a

global and international perspective. In addition, knowing English gives young people an enhanced sense of status and independence (Carpini et al., 2004).

The emergence of social media has also impacted the Chinese philosophies. One of the major effects is the obscuring of social hierarchy, which is well defined by Confucius. The teaching of Confucian emphasized the respect of authority between student and teacher, junior and elder, employee and boss, child and parent, ruled and ruler (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, the rise of social media has watered down such teachings. In the age of internet and social media, individuals can research most information on their own, and facts are easily accessible more than ever before. This has led to individual empowerment and development of a new mindset before, respect was given however, in this digital era it is earned. This has led to most modern societies to become more cynical as compared to past times as most seek authenticity and transparency. In this day and age, it is harder to hide secrets. New hierarchies have been created by social media and masses voice has become more powerful thus shaking the foundational structure of the Chinese philosophical culture.

References

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739–768.

Dahlberg, L. (2007). Rethinking the fragmentation of cyberpublic: From consensus to contestation. *New Media & Society*, 9(5), 827–847.

Dai, X., 2002. Towards a digital economy with Chinese characteristics? *New media and society,* 4(2), 141-162.

Delli Carpini, M. X., Cook, F. L., & Jacobs, L. R. (2004). Public deliberation, discursive participation, and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 7, 315-344.

Fang, T. (2017). Understanding Chinese culture and communication: the Yin Yang approach. *Ideas and Ideals*, 1(1), 148-166.

Schneider, S. M., & Foot, K. (2005). *Web sphere analysis: An approach to studying online action.* In C. Hine (Ed.), Virtual methods: Issues in social science research on the internet (pp. 157–170). Oxford: Berg.

Yin, H., 2013. Chinese-language Cyberspace, homeland media and ethnic media: A contested space for being Chinese. *New media and society*, 17(4)