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The Internet Connectivity:  
1.5 Generation Chinese Migrants and Social Capital

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

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2017
Abstract

The thesis examines the communication practices of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants across a variety of internet platforms. It takes the perspective of media studies to investigate the social capital acquisition and maintenance of young Chinese migrants after their migrating to New Zealand from China.

The research data is derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews and user-generated online texts. The interview approach is employed to gain young Chinese migrants’ perceptions of their lived experience which shapes their internet-based media preferences and use habits. The textual analysis of user-generated contents provides complementary evidence regarding young migrants’ communicative activities on social network sites and microblogging, illustrating the maintenance of social capital in different forms.

Research findings show that the Chinese migrant youth employ all available means to connect with strong-tie contacts, whereas they only participate in the group-wide internet platform (e.g. Facebook, Renren) for weak tie maintenance. Findings also suggest that within different media contexts, young Chinese migrants consciously share their personal information and participate in reciprocal interactions so as to maintain the social networks of different tie strength in home and host country. This research argues that the internet connectivity has profoundly transformed the way that Chinese migrant youth dominate their personal social networks across the geographical and ethnic boundaries. These young migrants gain more control over the attainment of social capital – network development and resources acquisition – with the facility of the internet. The acquired social capital is
crucial to addressing migrant youth’s sociocultural adaptation and their transition from adolescence to adulthood at the same time.

This thesis contributes to both studies of Chinese migrant youth and social capital research by providing insight into the impacts of the internet. Empirically, homeland online communication media has been identified as an essential component making up Chinese migrant youth’s media landscape. In the theoretical aspect, revising the existing literature on migrant use of specific types of internet platforms, this study helps deepen our understanding of how migrant youth simultaneously acquire social capital in the home and host country.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Emeritus Manying Ip, Associate Professor Luke Goode and Professor Paul Clark, for their support, guidance and encouragement along my PhD journey. I thank my principle supervisor Professor Emeritus Manying Ip for helping me set the research direction, teaching me how to critically review literature, reading my thesis drafts and giving me valuable feedback promptly. My co-supervisor Associate Professor Luke Goode has provided me with insightful comments which are crucial to shaping the methodological framework of my thesis. Professor Paul Clark has been exceedingly supportive to me at the final stage of my thesis completion. I feel sincerely grateful to both of them for their input to my PhD project.

I would like to thank the China Scholarship Council and the University of Auckland for offering me with the co-funded doctoral scholarship, which enables me to complete my PhD thesis. Sincere thanks to my PhD fellows, Ting Luo from Asian Studies and Xiaojie Cao from Media, Film and Television. They both have spent valuable time discussing with me about my fieldwork and data analysis. Their critical comments and suggestions are sincerely appreciated. Special thanks also go to all the Chinese migrant participants for being extremely supportive to me during my fieldwork in Auckland and Wellington. Their stories have inspired me to keep researching and writing the thesis to the end.

In particular, I wish to offer my special thanks to my close friends, Hang Yin from Asian Studies, Jingjing Zhang from Sociology, Zhen Liang from Philosophy, Wei Yang from Business School and Estella Lee from Chinese Conservation Education Trust, who have provided me with emotional support and practical help during my research journey in New
Zealand. Last, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents, Weiying Zhong and Jiming Liu, who have been supporting me to pursue my PhD overseas. Without their unconditional love, it would not be possible for me to complete the thesis.
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List of Publication and Presentations Generated from This PhD Research

During the course of my PhD research, the thesis findings were presented at both international and national conferences. All the submissions were peer-reviewed before acceptance.

Peer-reviewed Conference Proceedings


Conference Papers


Chapter One: Introduction

In 2000, at the age of 13, my childhood friend Helen left our hometown – a small city in northeastern China – and emigrated with her parents to Toronto, Canada. At the time, it seemed that the friendship would come to an end as a result of her moving to the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Fortunately, Helen and I learnt how to send emails about two weeks before her departure. We started writing emails to each other to share the school life of both sides till I created my Facebook account in 2007. Helen became my first Facebook friend and we began to use the site to interact from then on. The connection between Helen and me has not been interrupted, even by my move to New Zealand in 2011. The internet-based communication tools have kept us connected independent of the places we reside. Engaging in the Facebook interactions that Helen had with her peers in Canada enabled me to get to know the social circle she formed in her host country. It has also raised my interest in Chinese migrant youth’s media choices and how the internet use influenced their social life in the host country as well as their connections with the homeland.

In the context of New Zealand, the number of ethnic Chinese migrants increased to 171,411, making Chinese remain as the largest Asian ethnic group according to the 2013 census (Stats, 2014). The young Chinese migrant cohort (20 to 29 years) accounted for ten percent of the total Chinese population (Friesen, 2015). As millennials, these young migrants were skilful at using communication technologies and had access to various internet platforms. As an ethnic Chinese, it was interesting to observe the way in which Chinese migrant youth used the internet to manage their social connections in the home and host country. In the city campus of University of Auckland, it was not a surprise to see Chinese young adults
interacting with friends through the globally popular social network site i.e. Facebook in the computer lab. When walking in downtown Auckland, it was common to see a young Chinese exchanging voice messages with friends via WeChat, a Chinese mobile social media application. The Chinese youth in New Zealand were free to choose either international or China-based social media to connect and interact with their diverse contacts in everyday life.

In the past two decades, the advanced transportation and communication technologies have progressively affected how migrants maintained the relationships with families, friends and acquaintances. Increasing air travels to the home country promoted migrants to interact with homeland contacts in person, which helped strengthen the bond between each other (Chen and Wellman, 2009; Ip, 2011). Aside from transportation technologies, scholars perceived the internet as a powerful communication bridge linking the homeland and host country for diasporic communities (Kissau and Hunger, 2010). Compared to the air fare, the internet significantly reduced the costs for migrants to stay connected with homeland associates over time. It transcended the geographical boundaries, enabling migrants to socialise with distant contacts in various forms, such as synchronous video calls and asynchronous social media interactions. The transnational communication has gradually become an integral part of the migrant life. In recent years, the China-based social media, such as WeChat, has not only dominated its domestic market but also reached a large number of global audiences including the diasporic Chinese community. The Chinese migrants might keep using homeland social media after their arrival in the host country. Why the Chinese migrants still relied on the homeland social media post-migration and how they perceived the role of homeland social media in their relationship management and resource acquisition were under-explored. Moreover, little research has touched on
how Chinese migrants’ transnational media use practices interacted with the habits developed locally and its consequences to their relationships with local contacts in the host country. This research set out to investigate young New Zealand Chinese migrants’ perceptions of various social media platforms and their media use practices, which helped us to understand the interactions between migrant use of social media and their relationship development after migration.

1.1 Research Background and Context

Migrants’ social lives were no longer constrained by locality given the remarkable facility of transportation and communication technologies. Young people who immigrated with families in their adolescence grew up with two different cultures and formed long-lasting connections with different people as well as the places of origin and settlement. With the prevalence of social media and mobile internet, the transnational activities of migrants have become increasingly prominent in the online realm. The migrant youth formed their internet use habits in the sociocultural environments where they lived. Their migration experiences and internet-mediated communication experiences interacted with each other, which might profoundly affect migrant youth’s social capital acquisition transnationally and locally. Five interconnected elements i.e. migrant, youth, Chinese, the internet and social capital are central to this research. The links between these key elements are elaborated below.

The focus of this research was 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand. Migration researchers differentiated them from the first- and second-generation migrants by the age of arrival in the country of destination (Bartley, 2010). The first-generation migrants referred to those who moved away from the home country over eighteen years old. The second-generation migrants were either born in or immigrated to the host country before
thirteen years old. In comparison to the above two groups, the targeted 1.5 generation migrants arrived in the country of settlement between thirteen and seventeen years old. The three groups of migrants experienced the socialisation process differently due to the distinctions in age of migration. Take the education experience of migrants as an example. The adult migrants, i.e. first-generation migrants only received tertiary education in the host country whereas the majority of the youth migrants i.e. second-generation migrants started from primary school education. The school environment was critical for the youth to make friends and develop peer networks. Adult migrants have built up their peer networks during the time of attending school in the home country. It was the time when they went to the host university that adult migrants had the chance to create connections with local peers in the host society. Receiving almost all school education in the host country allowed the second-generation migrants to start forming connections with local classmates and schoolmates from an early age. The very limited amount of time spent in the home country made it hard or even impossible for the second-generation migrants to foster friendship ties before migration. The social connections that second-generation migrants left behind in the homeland mainly comprised of their relatives from both sides of their parents.

In comparison, the 1.5 generation migrants were those who arrived in the host country in their adolescence, therefore experiencing socialisation in both the home and host country. In this research, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants were born and grew up in mainland China, which allowed them to be fluent in Chinese, to be familiar with the Chinese culture and to foster friendships in the homeland. The pre-migration friendship ties were much likely to play a crucial role in connecting the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to the home country. In addition, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants spent the rest of their adolescence and early adulthood in New Zealand. They completed secondary school education and
tertiary education in the host country. The school education enhanced their English language skills and enriched their knowledge of New Zealand culture. More importantly, it provided a social space where the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants were able to meet and regularly interact with new friends in the host society. In a word, the migration experiences enabled 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to develop peer networks transnationally and locally, thus creating the bond with both the home and host country.

The social capital of young people has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Researchers have applied social capital theories developed in sociology and political studies to investigate the dynamics and implications of the social relationship and social interaction of the youth population (Holland, 2009; Morrow, 2001). In family and school settings, James Coleman and his followers primarily researched the interpersonal relationships between parents, teachers and students, emphasising the importance of these intertwined social relationships to young people’s academic outcomes. For example, some prior research has focused on the role of parents in providing social capital to their children and its educational implications (Coleman, 1988; Bassani, 2007; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). The research findings indicated that the parental participation in school activities effectively strengthened parents’ relationships with their children and school teachers. The enhanced parent-teacher relationship and parent-children relationship further improved young people’s relationship with their teachers, which consequently helped advance young people’s academic performance. Research that adopted Coleman’s theory mostly took an adult-centred approach to analyse and assess the social capital of children and young people. The research focus was placed on the parents i.e. a major source of social capital to young people. The role of parents in providing social capital to their children and how parents engaged with the family and school settings were central to the research which followed.
the guidance of Coleman’s work. Young people’s accounts on their relationship with parents and how they mobilised the relationship to acquire social capital were not explicitly addressed. In other words, young people’s agency in obtaining and generating social capital was less emphasised. In addition, peer relationships could be another important source from which young people were able to request and accumulate social capital. It might influence young people’s academic performance in a different way compared to that of the parental participation. In this research, peer relationship is essential to the young Chinese migrants especially when they are unlikely to obtain sufficient amount of social capital from their parents who also lack of social networks and resources in the host country. The investigation of young Chinese migrants’ peer relationship helps to increase our knowledge of how they generate social capital outside the family setting. It is of great need to explore the agency of young Chinese migrants in acquiring and accumulating social capital rather than simply treating them as passive receivers of social capital.

Some other studies employed Robert D. Putnam’s classification of bonding and bridging social capital to look into young people’s identity formation. The bonding social capital referred to the exclusive, inward-looking, intra-group social capital whereas the bridging social capital was the type of inclusive, outward-looking and inter-group social capital. Different from Coleman, the political scientist Robert D. Putnam focused on how the two forms of social capital respectively influenced community development and social cohesion (Putnam, 1993). In his research on American communities, Putnam pointed out that strongly connected residents of a community offered higher level of trust and reciprocity within the community and tended to actively engage in community affairs, which helped develop a close and strong community. The bonding social capital played a positive role in building a community to which members strongly attached. The bridging
social capital was demonstrated to have greater significance than bonding social capital in strengthening the social cohesion of residents across communities in America (Putnam, 1993; Morrow, 2001). In Putnam’s approach, social capital was seen as a common good of a given community, hence individual differences within the community were downplayed and the impacts of social capital on the individual level have not been adequately addressed. Moreover, physical location was crucial in defining a community and examining community members’ social interactions as well as their engagement in community activities. The bonding and bridging social capital categorisation were developed based on the traditional location-defined community. Notably, locality was no longer a constraint to engaging with distant contacts and to joining in virtual communities with the assistance of the internet. In this regard, Putnam’s classification of social capital might not be well-suited to reflect the transnational social networks to which young Chinese migrants belonged and from which they obtained resources. The transnational social ties may still play a significant role in providing needed resources to young Chinese migrants as the communication between each other continues online. A proper examination needs to be undertaken on the internet-sustained transnational social networks, which contributes to a comprehensive understanding of young Chinese migrants’ disperse social networks across distance.

Despite of being overlooked, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social capital was particularly helpful to understanding individuals’ network development and resources acquisition. Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social capital primarily emphasised social networks and sociability (Bourdieu, 1985; Portes, 1998). One the one hand, he pointed out the virtue of membership in a particular social network, which enabled an individual to access the resources of other network members. On the other hand, he indicated the importance of sociability i.e. the way in which an individual maintained and mobilised
social relationships to acquire needed resources. Prior research in youth studies has compared the theoretical frameworks of both Putnam and Bourdieu for the purpose of understanding the relationship between young people’s social capital and their wellbeing (Morrow, 2001). Morrow (2001) chose to apply Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to study youth wellbeing for two main reasons. Firstly, young people should not be treated as passive receivers who merely inherited social capital from parents and kinships. Instead, they were active social agents who formed and managed their social relationships in their own way. Utilising Bourdieu’s social capital concept to explore young people’s perceptions of their relationships with families, friends and neighbours helped to understand why they requested and acquired resources from specific social networks in specific occasions. Secondly, the sociability concept enabled researchers to look into how young people took actions to maintain their social connections over time and utilise them to obtain and accumulate social capital. Young people’s subjective views and their social interactions with the social surroundings enriched researchers’ knowledge of the health-related support young people needed. It was strongly believed that bringing the youth-oriented perspective to policy planning on public health helped improve the accessibility of resources and support to young people, thus making a positive impact on the youth wellbeing. Similarly, the youth-oriented perspective is crucial to advancing our understanding of young Chinese migrants’ social capital development. The two components in Bourdieu’s theory are well suited to examine how the membership of various social networks benefits young Chinese migrants in obtaining different types of resources and how they sustain social connections in order to mobilise social relationships for obtaining resources. Attending to young Chinese migrants’ voice allows policy makers of the host country to develop suitable solutions to improve the social environment with which young Chinese migrants engage. By doing so, it may help to strengthen these migrant youth’s sense of belonging to local
communities, enabling them to access sufficient support for a better adaptation to the host society.

As mentioned earlier, the fast-growing internet and digital communication technologies encouraged migrants to engage in transnational social activities. Within the context of the internet, the transnational media landscape in which migrants situated consisted of homeland media, ethnic media and global media. Prior to the popularity of social media, a large amount of research concentrated on the migrant use of ethnic media and its impacts on migrants’ identity formation, their adaptation to the host country as well as their relationship with the homeland. For instance, Mitra (2001) studied the relationship between the use of diasporic Indian online forums and Indian migrants’ identity on the internet. By analysing Indian migrants’ online expressions, Mitra indicated that diasporic Indian online forums created a public space, allowing Indian migrants to speak out their opinions on issues of their concern and to talk about common interests shared by other Indian forum users. Engaging in ethnic forum activities enabled the formation of an online diasporic Indian community to which Indian migrant users developed a growing sense of belonging regardless of geographical proximity. In North America, research touching on Chinese language media suggested that the local Chinese websites served as a major information channel to the Chinese community, especially the new arrivals (Chan etc, 2012). The Chinese migrants frequented local Chinese websites for practical information on topics such as housing, jobs, schooling and childcare, which helped them to settle down in the host country. The focus of early studies was primarily placed on Chinese adult migrants whose English proficiency was limited. The language barrier was an influential factor that affected Chinese adult migrants’ preference to ethnic media. As to 1.5 generation Chinese migrants, they were fluent in both Chinese and English, thus having less difficulties in
understanding the contents produced by both ethnic Chinese media and local English language media in New Zealand. In this situation, there is a need to look into the motivations that drive the bilingual 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to use ethnic media and the distinctive way in which they use ethnic media.

With the global prevalence of social network sites, researchers started to explore how new technical features afforded migrants to engage with their social contacts and its implications to migrants’ social relationship development. The social network site Facebook was a major site for research investigation because of its global popularity among users across countries. In studies of young people’s Facebook use, researchers found that features like public display of users’ connections helped young people to identify offline contacts with mutual friends (Donath and boyd, 2004). The visibility of a friend’s social connections on the site also made Facebook a supplementary channel for young people to connect with pre-existing contacts. Aside from the display of friend lists, the broadcasting feature allowed young people to share personal information across their social networks, thus creating communication contexts for interactions with all targeted audiences. In addition, the Facebook-enabled asynchronous forms of communication, such as commenting and liking, did not require communicators to be simultaneously online, which encouraged young people to interact with their Facebook contacts when it was convenient.

Media researchers have already paid great attention to other ethnic migrants’ Facebook use to explore their transnational activities on the internet. For instance, Filipino migrants in India were found to share their achievements gained in the host country on Facebook, which gave their homeland friends the opportunity to learn about their migrant life (Lorenzana, 2016). The sharing of personal life through photos with illustrations served to create
communication contexts for the distant communicators. It also helped initiate conversations between Filipino migrants and their transnational contacts in the homeland. Lorenzana (2016) pointed out that the initial sharing and subsequent interactions on Facebook facilitated the migrants to gain recognition from homeland contacts, thus affirming the sustaining connections between each other. Consequently, engaging in Facebook interactions contributed to Filipino migrants’ transnational relationship maintenance. In the context of United States, Li and fellow researchers (2015) analysed the Hispanic migrants’ use of English-language social media and the Spanish counterpart as well as their impacts on migrants’ cultural orientation development post-migration. The research results suggested that the use of host-country social media, such as Facebook use, facilitated Hispanic migrants to form connections and socialise with both native Americans and co-ethnics. On the one hand, despite that it was a host-country English social network site, Facebook did not hinder Hispanic migrants from communicating with co-ethnic contacts on the site. Conversely, it played a positive role in stimulating Hispanic migrants to share and exchange information with co-ethnic friends. The constant information exchange with friends who shared similar cultural background strengthened these migrants’ identification towards Hispanic culture. On the other hand, Facebook provided a channel for Hispanic migrants to network with native American contacts. Connecting through Facebook enabled the migrants to gain an interpersonal source of information about the American society. The information i.e. personal life experiences that native American associates shared on Facebook assisted Hispanic migrants to understand American culture, which made a positive impact on their adaptation to the host society.

The above two research demonstrated that Facebook use influenced non-Chinese migrants’ social network development across distance and ethnicity, which further affected their
identity formation and adaption outcomes. In comparison, few studies have investigated overseas Chinese netizens’ Facebook use and its impacts on their social network formation transnationally and locally. In this research, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants who grew up with the emergence of the internet in mainland China have formed their media preferences and use habits through the use of homeland online media. Migrating to New Zealand expanded their media landscape with various English-language social media available to access. How these young Chinese migrants use the leading social network site Facebook in New Zealand and how the Facebook use affects their ethnic and homeland social media use requires a close examination. It helps to improve the understanding of young New Zealand Chinese migrants’ social relationship management through the lens of their social media use.

Within the New Zealand context, local Chinese media has long been serving the Chinese community for news about the home and host country. The source of news contents included both major China-based news portals and influential local news publishers (Ip, 2004). The ethnic Chinese media picked up headlines in politics, entertainment and other areas for the migrant audiences. Meanwhile, it translated local English-language news into Chinese to inform migrants of what was going on in the host society. In the age of social media, ethnic Chinese media started to employ China-based social media platforms as additional channels to distribute news to those migrants who favoured homeland social media for acquiring news. Regardless of the different distributing channels, the ethnic media played an important role in connecting Chinese migrants with their homeland country, which could affect migrants’ sense of belonging to China. In addition to the ethnic media, Chinese migrants were able to catch up with China news by accessing homeland news portals and social media platforms themselves. By doing so, it allowed them to
acquire a wide range of news information according to their own needs and interests (Hang, 2014). More importantly, the homeland social media provided a social space for Chinese migrants to share what they read about and thought of the home and host country with their dispersed contacts connected by the same platform. However, it is still unclear that to what extent young Chinese migrants rely on homeland media after migration, in what occasions they prefer local Chinese media to homeland counterparts and how they make the most use of Chinese-language media to maintain their connections to the homeland, to familiarise themselves with the sociocultural environment of the host country and to strengthen the bond with co-ethnic contacts.

When conducting pilot interviews, young Chinese migrants from mainland China showed significant differences in the perception and actual usage of the internet compared to their co-ethnic peers originally from Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Southeast Asian countries. The latter group of Chinese migrant youth primarily invested their time in engaging with international platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. They used Facebook to connect to and interact with a range of contacts resided in different physical locations. As to the migrant youth from mainland China, they shared different views towards the role that Facebook played in managing their social relationships. Specifically, some mainland participants did not regard Facebook as the primary media choice for navigating their personal networks. They did not frequent the site as often as their co-ethnic peers, which made them unfamiliar with the social norms on Facebook. It might consequently affect these young Chinese migrants’ subjective experience of using Facebook for networking and social interactions. Situated in the media landscape consisted of Chinese-language media and the global counterparts, young mainland Chinese migrants’ perceived role of the media platforms they frequent and their communication practices on each platform need a
close examination. It contributes to a comprehensive understanding of young mainland Chinese migrants’ transnational and local experiences in social networking and resource acquisition.

This doctoral thesis aims to investigate the internet use practices of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand. It explores how the internet use affects these Chinese migrants’ social capital building i.e. social network development and resource acquisition. Specifically, this research examines the reasons underlying young Chinese migrants’ preferences for the China-based, New Zealand-based and global internet platforms. It further investigates how young Chinese migrants’ combined use of multiple platforms affects their social network development transnationally and locally. In addition, this research looks into the way in which young Chinese migrants utilise specific types of online media (i.e. instant messaging, social network sites and online forums) and its influences on their social ties and resource acquisition. By doing so, this thesis adds empirical knowledge of the internet use patterns of Chinese migrant youth in New Zealand. It also contributes to a better understanding of the role that social capital plays in forming Chinese migrant youth’s sense of belonging to the home and host country within the context of the internet.

1.2 Research Cohort: 1.5 Generation Chinese migrants

The research subjects are young Chinese immigrants who were born in mainland China and immigrated to New Zealand in their adolescence. In this study, the age at migration of the Chinese youth is between thirteen to seventeen. This age range is slightly narrower than that of previous studies which define six years old as the minimum age (Bartley and Spoonley 2008). My decision of extending the minimum age to thirteen is driven by the purpose of examining migrant youth’s homeland network maintenance. The migrant youth
aged thirteen and over have completed at least their primary school education and part of middle school education in the country of origin. While taking classes, the school environment provides opportunities for migrant youth to meet peers and foster friendships, which enacts the generation of homeland peer group identity (Morrow, 2001). The more pre-migration school experiences they have, the more friends with whom migrant youth are likely to connect in the home country. In comparison, the migrant youth who left the home country before thirteen years old have limited opportunities to make friends with peers at school – a major social space for the youth to encounter new people outside the family setting. Therefore, this research decides to focus on the mainland young Chinese migrants who have cultivated sizable social ties in both the home and host country. By doing so, it helps to gain important insights into Chinese migrant youth’s ties with the homeland and the consequences of maintaining transnational social relationships to the navigation of their overall personal networks as well as their local social network development in New Zealand in particular. In addition, the chosen research participants are young adult migrants between eighteen and twenty-nine years old when taking part in the interviews. The 1.5 generation adolescent migrants are not included in this particular research. On the one hand, young adult migrants have relatively more cross-cultural life experiences accumulated in various social settings such as schools and work places. On the other hand, they are experienced in using a range of different types of internet platforms including Chinese-language online platforms and the global counterparts.

The 1.5 generation Chinese migrants have grown up with the advent of the internet and digital communication technologies. In the context of China, a variety of internet platforms have emerged since the late 1990s, such as the instant messaging QQ, the social network site Renren and the microblogging Weibo. They each shared great similarities with well-
known international platforms i.e. MSN, Facebook and Twitter respectively. The young Chinese migrants started to use different new internet platforms available to them to connect to and interact with their offline friends since they were about nine years old. Engaging in online social activities has gradually become an integral part of their daily routine over time. Despite of migrating to New Zealand, the Chinese migrant youth were still able to access the China-based internet platforms. With little doubt, young Chinese migrants would keep accessing to the homeland internet platforms after migration as a result of path dependence or no suitable alternatives for the time being. The homeland media use would account for a large proportion of young Chinese migrants’ overall media usage at least in the early stage of their migration. Hence, it deserves more attention to look into young Chinese migrants’ homeland online media use practices in the study of their networking experiences and social capital development.

1.3 The Target Internet Platforms

Young Chinese migrants use both Chinese-language internet platforms and worldwide popular English-language internet platforms to connect and communicate with their social networks. The selected types of internet platforms range from instant messaging (IM), mobile instant messaging (MIM), social network site (SNS), microblogging to online forum. The instant messaging platforms which Chinese migrant youth frequent the most include China-based QQ and its international counterpart MSN. The Chinese technology company Tencent launched its instant messaging platform QQ in 1999. According to Tencent, QQ has 861 million monthly active users till the first quarter of 2017 and is the most widely adopted instant messaging platform in mainland China (Tencent, 2017). QQ affords its users to engage with both instant conversations and asynchronous communications. It also
encourages users to create chat groups based on their personal interests and geographical location. Users are able to communicate in plain texts and exchange photos and files with each other via QQ. In addition, technical features like video and voice calls are also available to the QQ users, which contain a range of multiple cues to facilitate online communications. The visual and audio cues embedded in the QQ-based video and voice communications are especially beneficial to the geographical distant communicators, such as migrants. In this study, young Chinese migrants started using QQ when attending primary school in China. It allowed these youth to connect with specific individual classmates and to participate in group conversations after school. At the time of the interviews, young Chinese migrants rated QQ as the most important IM platform before the advent of WeChat. Therefore, this research aims to look into young Chinese migrants’ QQ use practices, which helps advance our understanding of the role that China-based IM plays in their social relationship development post-migration.

In addition to QQ, Chinese migrant youth began to use MSN after migrating to New Zealand. MSN is another instant messaging platform which was developed by Microsoft in 1999 and serves global users to primarily engage with real-time communications. It was rebranded as Windows Live Messenger in 2005 and used to attract 330 million users at its peak in 2009 (BBC, 2014). With the fast growing of other competitive IM (e.g. Skype and QQ), the number of MSN users has declined dramatically. The service was ceased in all parts of the world except for China in April 2013 and was totally shut down in October 2014 (The Atlantic, 2014). Its technical features are fundamentally similar to that of QQ. For example, MSN supports instant conversations between two communicators when both are simultaneously online. The forms of communication that MSN affords range from text messaging, voice conversations to image and document sharing between communication
partners. Despite of similarities, specific features which are crucial to meeting users’ communication needs have been added to MSN very late. For instance, MSN only started supporting users to create groups and have group chats in 2008. By the time of migration around mid-2000s, young Chinese migrants in this research spent more time on QQ over MSN partly because that they perceived of the latter not a group communication-friendly platform. The reasons why these young migrants kept using MSN despite of unsatisfied demands are worth exploring. It helps further understand the interaction of their MSN and QQ use and its consequences on their social relationships near and far.

With the increasing accessibility of mobile internet, another Tencent product i.e. WeChat\(^1\) has gained great popularity among Chinese netizens worldwide. WeChat was initially designed as a mobile instant messaging platform in 2011 and is gradually becoming an indispensable mobile social media application in mainland China with integrating various new social and technical features. WeChat had a total of 938 million monthly active users by the first quarter of 2017 (Tencent, 2017). It allowed users to add new contacts by multiple methods including importing mobile contacts, scanning QR codes and searching people nearby. The growth of WeChat user base was largely dependent on its tie with QQ at the beginning. Specifically, it encouraged users to import their QQ contacts to WeChat and allowed them to synchronise unread QQ messages to WeChat. The close tie with QQ significantly boosted the installation of WeChat on their mobile phones among existing QQ users. Similar to IM, WeChat affords users to communicate in various forms, such as text messages, voice messages\(^2\), video and voice calls, as well as photo and short video\(^3\) sharing. In addition to the messaging features, it launched the Moments which was similar to the

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\(^1\) WeChat is used in the global market whereas Weixin (微信) is commonly known in the mainland China.

\(^2\) The time limit of each voice message that WeChat allows its users to send out is sixty seconds.

\(^3\) WeChat users are able to record and share a short video up to fifteen seconds.
Newsfeed of the social network site Facebook in May 2012 (Tencent Holdings Limited, 2013). Within WeChat, users are not only able to have private conversations with an individual or specific group of contacts but also share their thoughts and feelings across networks of contacts on Moments. WeChat allows users to post in forms of texts, photos, short videos and weblinks to their Moments and make their posts accessible to specific audiences according to their own privacy needs. It offers various options for users to customise the audience setting for each post, ranging from the public, their WeChat connections to selected contacts. WeChat supports two types of interactions between users i.e. liking and commenting the contents that users post to their Moments. With regard to Moments posts, only mutual friends of the user are able to see the reactions from each other and reply the comments that are visible to them. Otherwise, both types of responses to the Moments posts are exclusive to the user only.

Another feature “Official Accounts” was introduced to WeChat users in August 2012 (Tencent Holdings Limited, 2014). On the one hand, enterprises, organisations and individuals create and distribute original contents to WeChat users who subscribe their Official Accounts. The Official Account owners can generate contents in the forms of text and image. They are also allowed to insert audio and video clips to make the contents interesting to subscribers and potential readers. On the other hand, WeChat users are able to either share contents from subscribed Official Accounts with their connections through private messages or broadcast the contents on Moments to a range of customised audiences. The interactions between Official Account owners and readers are not totally transparent to the public. Specifically, WeChat offers the opportunity to Official Account owners to select comments from readers and make them visible to all audiences. In this research, young Chinese migrants have different preferences to the devices for accessing QQ and
WeChat. The majority of them keep the habit of having QQ communication on desktop computers. With the ubiquitous mobile connectivity, these migrant youth are theoretically always available to communicate via WeChat. By looking into young Chinese migrants’ experiences of using QQ and WeChat respectively, it enables us to comprehend how the two major China-based instant messaging platforms affect their networking experiences differently in the process of migration.

The third China-based internet platform that young Chinese migrants frequent for social and networking purposes is a microblogging platform called Weibo. It was launched by the Chinese firm Sina in August 2009⁴ and was reported to have 361 million monthly active users in the second quarter of 2017⁵. The users aged between eighteen and thirty accounts for 68.8 percent of the overall Weibo users in 2016 (Weibo Data Centre, 2017, 7). In this study, the twenty-four young Chinese migrants who use Weibo all belong to this age group. At the time of data collection for this research, Weibo allowed users to express themselves in up to 140 characters with or without attaching images. Government agencies, organisations and media outlets create their official Weibo accounts to engage with the huge population of Weibo users, distributing information, organising events and interacting with their followers on the platform. Individual users are encouraged to share their mundane lives and personal opinions of hot topics occur online and offline. The relationship between users on Weibo is asymmetrical. On the one hand, Weibo users are able to follow accounts of organisations and other individuals, acquiring desired information and responding to interesting contents by liking or commenting. On the other hand, Weibo particularly

benefits weak tie formation when users find whose who share similar interests. These Weibo users can follow each other to build personal connections and further interact with each other on the site facilitated with rich social and communication cues.

In her research of Weibo, Han (2016) illustrated how Weibo “has substantially altered the ways in which Chinese people respond to ongoing public events”. For example, in addition to the news stories published through traditional media channels such as newspapers and televisions, journalists are able to post series of updates on the news and closely relevant topics, which helps initiate conversations and debates between netizens from different socioeconomic backgrounds. To young Chinese migrants, the information provided by organisations, key opinion leaders and ordinary users on Weibo becomes crucial to understanding the ever-changing Chinese society. It is worth investigating how using Weibo directly impacts young Chinese migrants’ connections to the home country and their sense of belonging towards China. Apart from this, Weibo provides an opportunity for young Chinese migrants to rebuild their connections with homeland schools which were cut off as a result of their migration. These migrant youth are keen on following alumni associations of their home schools on Weibo, keeping informed of school-related news, seeking opportunities to connect to old schoolmates and making friends with those who share similar education background. By studying young Chinese migrants’ perceptions and use practices of Weibo, it helps us understand how this particular Chinese social media influences their homeland tie maintenance and the consequences on their local social relationship formation in the host country.

The other two internet platforms which young Chinese migrants spend their time engaging with are Facebook and its Chinese counterpart Renren. Both of the two platforms are typical
social network sites, thus sharing great similarities in their technical features. For example, they both require real-name registration and ask site users to fill in their education and work histories. The personal information that users share on Facebook and Renren is particularly crucial to connecting with people they have already known offline. In their study of American colleague students’ Facebook use, Ellison and her colleagues (2007) found that these young adults mainly used Facebook to search for their close friends and former schoolmates at different locations, seeking to bring their pre-existing offline contacts onto Facebook. At the time of conducting this research, the friend list of Facebook and Renren users are displayed to the public on the two sites. Meanwhile, both sites offer a recommend list to site users based on their mutual friends, locations, education and work histories etc. The two lists increase the opportunities for users to expand their networks by forming connections with friends of friends on the two social network sites. As to interactions, Facebook and Renren support users to have both private conversations and public interactions with individual contacts and groups of associates. Specifically, users are able to chat with other individuals privately through the built-in instant messaging on both sites. They can update statuses in forms of plain texts, multiple photos, video clips and weblinks, broadcasting personal thoughts and feelings to customised groups of audiences or the public. Interactions between users can be taking place instantaneously or asynchronously. Both types of interactions are vital to young Chinese migrants as time difference exists between them and their dispersed networks across the globe.

In the New Zealand context, the number of social network site users under thirty years old has been steadily growing since 2007 (WIPNZ, 2007). In the year of 2011, Facebook users accounted for 96 percent of all social network site users in New Zealand. Young Chinese migrants have started engaging in Facebook communications at the time when it became
the primary social network site in New Zealand. The majority of their Facebook contacts reside in New Zealand with a small number of others move to America or Britain for higher education. Despite of its great influence in New Zealand, Facebook has no advantage in helping these young migrants to interact with friends and former classmates in China. Facebook launched its Chinese language version in June 2008, seeking to expand its user base among Chinese language speakers (Kiss 2008). In spite of such efforts, Facebook has been banned in mainland China since July 2009. From then on, mainland Chinese netizens had to use virtual private networks (VPNs) to circumvent the Great Fire Wall so as to access Facebook. The official ban forced Facebook to quit the Chinese market without a timeline for return. It lost the opportunity to facilitate Chinese netizens to meet new people or communities of diverse interests on the site. To young Chinese migrants, Facebook was not a good option for them to sustain their connections left in mainland China.

Meanwhile, Renren as Facebook’s Chinese counterpart has gained great popularity among young Chinese netizens. The site has reached 1000 overseas universities in February 2008, attracting 119,952 registered users outside mainland China (Tencent Corp, 2008). As to young Chinese migrants, they are able to use Renren to look for former schoolmates in China and co-ethnic schoolmates in New Zealand after providing their education histories in both countries to the site. The updates of both sides on Renren create communication contexts for young Chinese migrants and their homeland contacts to continue interacting with each other. Given the various media choices they have, there is a need to examine how young Chinese migrants perceive the role of Facebook in fostering their local social networks in New Zealand. It is also worth exploring the impacts that their Facebook use and Renren use exert on each other with respect to social relationship development and resource acquisition in potential.
1.4 Research aims and objectives

This research aims to explore the internet use practices of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand, and to deepen the understanding of their social capital building from the internet use perspective. The study takes the internet use as the analytical lens to examine the way in which young Chinese migrants organise their social relationships and acquire needed resources in the home and host country. The specific objectives for achieving this aim are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, this study examines how young Chinese migrants use selected internet platforms to maintain and develop their social networks transnationally and locally. Existing studies have extensively researched the impacts of local ethnic and Western media platforms on migrant netizens’ social network formation. The findings are especially crucial to understanding migrant youth’s local social network development in the host country. However, little is known about Chinese migrant youth’s internet use habits formed pre-migration and how they might affect these young people’s social life on and offline post-migration. I posit that the young migrants’ pre-existing internet use habits are of great significance to studying their transnational social network maintenance. A crucial fact that cannot be ignored is that major Western social media platforms are not accessible to mainland China netizens including the homeland contacts of young Chinese migrants. The China-based internet platforms have been facilitating Chinese migrant youth in sustaining their homeland ties regardless of physical location. Specific objectives in this part of the research are:

- To explore the media preferences of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in relation to their transnational and local network building
• To investigate Chinese migrant youth’s perceptions of the role that specific platforms play in maintaining their social relationship

Secondly, this study investigates the ways in which 1.5 generation Chinese migrants use the internet to acquire resources from their dispersed networks and how the resources and support meet their needs at different stages of migration. Engaging in the transnational social space opens up opportunities for Chinese migrant youth to reach social contacts across the globe. Various forms of online communication enhance young migrants’ capacity to access different types of resources and support from networked contacts. These resources and support are essential to the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Chinese migrant youth to the host society. The objectives relating to young Chinese migrants’ resource acquisition are:

• To identify the technical features of specific platforms which afford migrant youth to acquire resources in different types and how they use each of the features to satisfy their various needs

Then the research moves on to explore Chinese migrant youth’s online social activities and how they enact the social capital development among these migrant youth. The availability of various internet platforms allows young Chinese migrants to express emotions, disclose personal information and interact with others in different ways and different forms according to their immediate needs. In addition to the offline context, online self-disclosures provide the migrant youth with an alternative or supplementary path to communicate themselves with associates across networks. The self-disclosing and subsequent interactive activities are very likely to help young migrants to build or enhance
their trust in their communication partners, which is conductive to strengthening the bond between each other. Moreover, direct interactions such as ‘Like’ on Facebook, is highly associated with the development of reciprocity between young migrants and their communication partners. Building trusting and reciprocal social relationships is essential to young Chinese migrants in accumulating social capital. Specific objectives in this section are listed below:

- To explore the ways in which online self-disclosures influence the trust formation and maintenance among young Chinese migrants
- To investigate how different types of online social interactions make an impact on the reciprocity development between migrant youth and their social contacts

This research addresses the interactions of young Chinese migrants’ online communication practices and their social capital building. It will also provide some useful insights into the ways in which the internet and communication technologies liberate young migrants’ sociability from a bounded locality, enabling them to actively acquire needed resources across distance. In addition, the research findings will increase our knowledge of how online social activities, as an integral part of young migrants’ social life, contribute to their social capital acquisition at different phases of their migration process.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

This research sets out to study 1.5 generation Chinese immigrants to New Zealand, with a specific focus on their internet use practices. The research findings will broaden our knowledge of these young migrants’ online social behaviours and the consequences on their social capital development in particular. Moreover, this study is particularly valuable in
acknowledging Chinese migrant youth’s accounts of their media preferences and communication practices, which are evolving concomitantly with their migration experiences. It will also help to understand the rise of migrant youth’s agency in networking and resource acquisition, which is strengthened by their extensive use of the internet and various communication technologies.

The thesis consists of seven chapters. After the Introduction chapter, the remainder of the thesis is organised as follows. Chapter Two begins by reviewing existing theoretical and empirical research in social capital and new media studies relating to migrant youth. The review is essential to developing the operational definitions of social capital and 1.5 generation migrants for this study. It also enables me to establish a theoretical framework for clarifying the relationship between social capital, internet use and Chinese migrant youth.

This research employs a qualitative approach to study young Chinese migrants’ online communication practices and the implications for their social capital development. Chapter Three describes the specific methods adopted throughout the thesis and their underlying methodological bases. The two methods are semi-structured in-depth interviews and textual analysis of online user-generated contents. The purpose of using semi-structured in-depth interviews is to explore young Chinese migrants’ immediate experiences of living in mainland China and New Zealand, with specific focus on their social relationships across distance and ethnicity. This method also allows me to find out participants’ perceptions of their media preferences and practices. The textual analysis of participants’ online accounts provides the supplementary evidence for understanding their
social interactions with their dispersed social networks. The validity of the qualitative data collected is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The following three chapters present the empirical findings of this research. The focus of Chapter Four is young Chinese migrants’ media preferences, which are developed along with their migration journey. Participants’ first-person accounts give us important insights into the transitional life experiences of young Chinese migrants in two dimensions, namely cultural transition and transition into adulthood. It helps to understand how these migrant youth’s distinctive life experiences shape their media choices in regards to navigating personal networks within the online context. Specifically, young Chinese migrants’ subjective accounts present us with their pre-existed internet use experiences which constitute a crucial part of their life in China. The data above contributes to understanding how and why China-based internet platforms profoundly influence young Chinese migrants’ ties with homeland and co-ethnic contacts. This chapter further illustrates the impacts of Chinese migrant youth’s media preferences on the size and tie strength of their social networks by looking into their use of different types of platforms.

In Chapter Five, the thesis moves on to discuss the resources and support that Chinese migrant youth acquire from their network contacts through internet communication. Using the interview data, this chapter reveals young Chinese migrants’ needs for different types of resources at different times. The resources acquired are found to be crucial to their psychological and sociocultural adaptation to the host society. For instance, obtaining emotional support from homeland peers meets these youth migrants’ psychological demands at the initial stage of their migration. More importantly, Chapter Five elucidates how these young migrant netizens consciously utilise the technical features of specific
internet platforms for resource acquisition. When seeking emotional support, for example, the research participants prefer instant messaging and mobile social media application to have private real-time conversations with an intimate friend or a group of close friends from China. The rationale for discussing the ways in which participants use specific properties of a given platform is to reinforce the argument that the internet significantly liberates Chinese migrant youth’s sociability from the local area. In particular, the internet use strengthens these young migrant netizens’ communication capacity, allowing them to reach desired resources from their personal networks in both China and New Zealand.

**Chapter Six** offers an analysis of Chinese migrant youth’s online self-disclosures and interactive communications. The investigation sheds light on the ways in which they share personal information and emotions with families, friends and colleagues across platforms. By probing their online social activities, I argue that Chinese migrant youth’s online expressions in varying depth and breadth exert an impact on their relationships with strongly or weakly tied contacts, resulting in different outcomes for their social capital building. Furthermore, this chapter examines how these young migrants’ interactive behaviours (e.g. commenting and liking) create or enhance reciprocity with their network contacts, which increases their potential to access needed resources. Chapter Six also illustrates the relationship between migrant youth’s online and offline social interactions. The findings indicate that only a balanced on and offline social life contributes to the social capital development of these migrant youth.

Finally, **Chapter Seven** synthesises the research findings from the results presented in previous three empirical chapters and discusses their theoretical implications. The internet creates a deterritorialised social space which enables the Chinese migrant youth to socialise
with network contacts transnationally and locally, facilitating their social capital building regardless of location. The use of China-based internet platforms strengthens young Chinese migrants’ connections with their homeland and local co-ethnic networks, whereas the Western platforms serve to maintain the migrant youth’s sense of connection with other ethnic groups in the host society. Engaging in multiple forms of communication on various internet platforms enhances Chinese migrant youth’s capability and autonomy in accessing actual and potential resources, thus addressing their needs at different times. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the empirical and theoretical contributions of this research and highlights some areas worthy of exploration in future research on migrant youth and internet use.

Next Chapter Two presents the review of existing literature on social capital and the internet use among migrants and young adults. The operational definitions of social capital and 1.5 generation Chinese migrants as well as the theoretical framework of the research are then developed based on the review.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The previous chapter presents the research background of the thesis topic. It shows the ways in which the media practices and social relationships of migrants have been studied in media research and their limitations. In addition, it gives an overview of the distinctive attributes of both the young Chinese migrants and the relevant internet platforms in this particular research. Last, the introductory chapter elaborates the aim and specific objectives of this thesis. This study investigates the internet use practices of young Chinese migrants in New Zealand and its impacts on their social capital development in the transnational and local contexts.

In this chapter, I review the literature on social capital and the internet use with the specific focus on migrants. The review aims to situate the theories of social capital and internet communication in the context of migrant youth. Engaging with the existing literature, this chapter discusses the triangulation relationships of the three dynamics, i.e. social capital, migrant youth and internet communications respectively. First, I revisit both theoretical and empirical research on social capital, seeking to determine a conceptual framework suitable for studying the social capital of young migrants in a given cultural context. Second, I review the previous studies on the internet communication in relation to migrants and migrant youth in particular. It contributes to the understanding of the internet use practices and online communication strategies of migrant youth, especially the Chinese migrant youth. The last part of the review addresses the interaction of social capital, the internet and digital communication technologies. It informs the ways in which social capital can be studied in the context of the internet.
2.1 Social Capital and Migrant youth

I first review the current literature on social capital with attention to its definition, components, forms and its application in different fields. Specifically, the work of both the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American political scientist Robert D. Putnam are fundamental to determining the conceptual framework of social capital for this research. These two strands of social capital theories have been applied in a number of empirical research across socio-cultural contexts. The literature which engage with China and the Chinese context will be discussed in specific.

2.1.1 Definitions and Forms of Social Capital

From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu (1986) formulated the social capital concept by differentiating it from the other two forms of capital, i.e. economic capital and cultural capital. In *Forms of Capital*, he defined social capital as

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986).

In his definition, Bourdieu stressed the virtue of social connections and memberships in specific groups, which are the core to accumulating social capital. In order to derive the desired resources from others, one must form certain social relations with the resource possessors. The relations can be either direct or indirect. The indirect type of social relations is also known as Guanxi relation in the Chinese context, which will be illustrated later in this chapter. Bourdieu’s emphasis on social networks was perceived as instrumental to
conceptualising social capital in a sociological discussion relating to this topic (Portes, 1998). Portes shared similar views with Bourdieu that the social connections were much more important and influential than the resources in the social capital concept. People needed to form social relationships with the resource holders at first, and then the social relationships led to the access to the resources owned by the relationship partners.

Furthermore, Portes (1998) indicated that the social network was not “a natural given” but required the individuals to join in groups and engage with group members. In other words, it was the social interactions that enacted the social relationship between the resource provider and its receiver. This was also clear in Bourdieu’s (1986) illustration of sociability that “the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed”.

The ability to obtain resources was constructed and enhanced through the interactions with members of the social network. Bourdieu’s accounts of social networks, resources and sociability were informative and crucial to this thesis. It inspired me to integrate social interactions as the third dimension into the social capital framework of this research.

Exploring young Chinese migrants’ day-to-day online social interactions helped us to understand the process in which they participated in their dispersed social networks and the consequences on the relational maintenance.

Notably, Bourdieu developed the social capital concept around the individuals, focusing on the causes and effects of social capital production and its benefits to an individual person. In comparison, the political scientist Robert D. Putnam extended the social capital concept from an individual asset to a feature of communities (Portes, 1998; Roberts, 2004). Situating in the American context, Putnam researched social capital by looking at American
people’s memberships in communities and organisations, and their engagement in community affairs. In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam defined social capital that,

“Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’.” (Putnam, 2000)

The reciprocity and trust were two crucial components in Putnam’s definition of social capital. Particularly, he placed the focus on the generalised reciprocity and the social trust that existed on the community and societal level. The norm of generalised reciprocity referred to that an individual did a favour to someone else “without expecting anything immediately in return” (Putnam, 2000). The social trust was the type of trust that occurred between strangers in the larger society. In Putnam’s view, the more trust that individuals had in the anonymous others, the more they were likely to engage in the communities and the society. The generalised reciprocity promoted cooperation between organisations, which was crucial to the making of an efficient society. Social capital was perceived as a “public good”, which encouraged civic engagement in the American society (Robert, 2004; Holland, 2009). Furthermore, Putnam categorised social capital into bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital referred to the exclusive, inward-looking connections among homogenous groups whereas bridging social capital stood for outward-looking networks between heterogenous groups (Putnam, 2000).

### 2.1.2 Blurred Boundary between Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Locality was crucial in Putnam’s approach of conceptualising social capital. The community in Putnam’s social capital concept was place-specific and defined by geographical boundaries (Morrow, 2001). It needed to be reconsidered in relation to
migrants. First, in the case of migrants, “community” could be defined by places and border-crossing social spaces (Kivisto, 2003). The place-specific and trans-border communities co-existed in the migration context. Mand (2006) proved this argument in her research on the social capital of South Asian migrant families. She argued that the migrants created “new forms of social relatedness to people and places” in their experiences of maintaining and developing social networks in the home and host country simultaneously. The way in which migrants accumulated social capital could not be confined by locality. The transnational social networks also served a source of social capital to the migrants. In addition, the social capital which migrants obtained in multiple locations also had an impact on each other. In the research of the transnational family relationships of Caribbean young migrants in Britain, Tracey Reynolds (2006) found that the transnational family networks served as the major source for these youth to remember and keep their cultural practices, to re-affirm their ethnic ties to the Caribbean. The familial networks and through which the resources circulated together strengthened these young migrants’ sense of attachment towards their co-ethnic network. The enhanced co-ethnic relationship was concerned to impede migrants’ interactions across ethnic groups, slowing down their integration to the host society (Cheong et al, 2007). The exploration of migrants’ social capital accumulation should not be confined by locality. The transnational social context where migrants situated needed to be taken into account.

In addition, the boundary between bonding and bridging social capital defined in the place-specific context was blurred as the transnational networks also comprised of migrants’ bonding social networks from their perspective. The blurred boundary between the two forms of social capital was also evident in the online realm. The heterogeneous outward-looking weak-tie network was associated with bridging social capital in the form of
informational resources whereas the homogeneous inward-looking strong-tie social network was associated with bonding social capital in the form of emotional support (Putnam, 2000; Granovetter, 1973). However, a recent SNS study found that from the perceptions of users, the distinctions between bridging and bonding social capital were not as salient as previously assumed. Specifically, SNS users perceived that they obtained informational resources from close ties on the site, which was against the assumption that non-close weak ties were the predominant informational resources providers. In other words, individuals regarded their strong-ties network as a source from which they could acquire both informational resources and emotional support within the SNS context. This finding challenged the application of terminology of bridging and bonding social capital in user-centred studies of social relationship and ascribed social resources on social network sites.

In another study of Turkish immigrants in Canada, Akkaymak (2016) emphasised that the Turkish immigrants’ ethnic networks were not a homogeneous bonding social network because of the class difference within the Turkish community. The cultural capital possessed by the professional Turkish immigrants differentiated them from the non-professional Turkish immigrants. The cultural capital determined the nature of professional Turkish immigrants’ social networks, i.e. accessing the social networks with shared class habitus. In other words, professional Turkish immigrants have not built up strong ties with co-ethnic non-professional Turkish immigrants in Canada because of the differences in class and cultural capital. In this sense, Putnam’s classification of social capital – bonding and bridging social capital – failed to illustrate the nature of Turkish immigrants’ social networks. Bourdieu’s approach provided insights into the migrants’ social network development with attention to the effects of cultural capital.
2.1.3 Youth and Social Capital

The way in which young people acquire social capital and its social implications have always been the interest of youth studies and social capital research. Morrow (2001) questioned the applicability of Putnam’s social capital concept to young people in her study of the wellbeing and health of the youth in the UK context. Putnam utilised social capital to analyse and illustrate American adults’ civic engagement in the society. Young people’s agency in producing social capital could be overlooked by applying the approach used to analyse the adult cohort. In the family setting for example, the traditional “top-down” view depicted young people as beneficiaries of social capital in education and the transition to work (Morrow, 1999). The parents and extended family networks were the major source of social capital and the youth were consequently perceived as passive social actors with their agency underestimated. More importantly, young people’s engagement in organisations such as the school setting and their perceptions of the social surroundings were crucial to understanding their social capital development process.

Different from Putnam, the sociability element of Bourdieu’s social capital adequately addressed the issue of young people’s agency in acquiring and utilising social capital. Researchers who employ Bourdieu’s concept have given empirical evidence which presents the capacity of young people to maintain and utilise their social networks to meet their own needs (Holland, 2007; Tolonen, 2007). Holland (2007) and Tolonen (2007) employed the qualitative interview method to examine young participants’ potential as producers of their own social capital in different settings including families, schools and ethnic communities in the context of UK and Finland respectively. Their findings showed that the young participants from the two research sites relied on the social connections they formed outside their family. With recognising the importance of those social networks, the
young people made their efforts for the network maintenance, allowing them to acquire resources and support which led to better academic achievements and transitions into adulthood.

Similarly, the agency issue needed to be reconsidered in the context of migrant youth. First, migrant youth’s ability to forge local connections could be levelled up as a result of their proficiency in the dominant language of the host country. Second, migrant parents’ role of traditional social capital providers was challenged when their bicultural competence\(^6\) was weaker compared to their children. For instance, Allen Bartley and Paul Spoonley (2008) explored the migration experiences and unique characteristics of East Asian migrant youth in New Zealand. The researchers drew on empirical data collected from group and solo interviews to uncover a multi-dimensional in-between experience of the migrant youth participants. Confronting the transition from adolescence to adulthood, migrant youth’s relation with families was renegotiated post-migration. The young migrants were found to be capable to act as language and cultural brokers for their parents, facilitating migrant adults to interact with locals, to understand the host culture and to adapt to the new surroundings. That is to say that, migrant youth can no longer be seen as passive recipients of social capital but providers of support or practical help to their associates.

### 2.2 Migrant Youth and Internet Use

As discussed in the previous section, the social networks of migrants are spatially dispersed. Migrants rely on the internet and digital communication technologies to maintain connections with pre-existing contacts in their home country and new contacts in their host

\(^6\) The ‘bicultural competence’ here refers to the knowledge of, the attitudes towards homeland and host country cultures, the culturally appropriate behaviours and a sense of belonging ground in both cultures (Kim et al, 2003).
country. The internet has extended the reach of social networks and also opened up the potential for migrants to access needed resources regardless of location. My first interest lies in the tiers of migrant youth’s media use and its implications for formation and maintenance of their social networks. The second focus is on the ways migrant youth utilise the technological features of specific communication media and the consequences for their resource acquisition. Accordingly, this section presents a review of literature on a range of communication media and the technological properties associated with social capital and its contributing factors. Media multiplexity theory and social shaping of technology theory are incorporated into the analytical framework of this thesis, to help address the above two concerns. Specifically, media multiplexity theory informs my investigation into how young Chinese migrants’ media use indicates their strong-tie and weak-tie social networks respectively. The research then takes a social shaping perspective to examine how the social affordances of specific media and the way that Chinese migrant youth utilise these affordances impact their maintenance of relationships and the types of resources they obtain. These two theories guide my exploration of the interplay between technological connectivity and social connectivity among young migrants in the internet era.

2.2.1 Media Multiplexity and Social Network

Ever evolving communication technologies have provided young Chinese migrants with various options for staying connected with family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances in China, New Zealand or other countries. The communication media adopted range through e-mail, instant messaging, online forums, social networking sites to microblogging. Young migrants may employ all available means to communicate with specific individuals. In some circumstances, they may only participate in one single platform to sustain a social relationship with a group of contacts. The social relationships between migrant youth and their communication partners differ in terms of the strength of the social ties.
the boundary between the strong-tie relationships and weak-tie relationships is not absolutely fixed. Migrant youth’s perceptions of the tie-strengths of their social networks in their homeland and host countries may change through their migration process. In relation to the strength of social ties, this research is particularly interested in how young Chinese migrants in New Zealand prioritise their media preferences and how they navigate their dispersed social networks across various platforms.

Previous studies have examined the way in which migrants utilise specific media and the implications for their local or transnational social connectivity. Some empirical studies were conducted before the advent or prevalence of social network sites, social messaging applications (mobile instant messaging) and microblogging. Their research interests centred on the role of online forums (or Bulletin Board Systems, i.e. BBS) and e-mail in shaping migrants’ social relationships. For instance, Parker and Song’s (2006) research focus was online forums created by second generation Chinese migrants in Britain. Because the British Chinese population was widely dispersed throughout Britain opportunities for face-to-face networking with their fellow co-ethnics were limited (Parker and Song 2006). Given these geographical constraints, the second generation Chinese migrants in Britain actively engaged in a discussion forum which allowed them to meet and interact with a large number of co-ethnic fellows with similar cultural and migration backgrounds. By joining in the forum, sharing personal experiences on the forum and attending offline meetings with other forum users, the migrant youth further developed weak-ties with some co-ethnic acquaintances.

In the past decade, researchers have started to investigate migrants’ social networks by analysing their engagement in social network sites. Bustamante (2010) examined Brazilian
international migrants’ use of the social network site Orkut\(^7\) and its role in helping migrants establish and reinforce co-ethnic ties in their host societies. Brazilian migrants were found to actively use Orkut’s in-site search function to find and forge links with other local or transnational Brazilians who shared the same interests. The interest-based topics with which the diasporic communities engaged “help(ed) to revitalise and increase a social group’s awareness of a particular subject or create weak links between users (i.e. Brazilians in different places)” (Bustamante, 2010). Similarly, Oostebraan (2010) came to the same conclusion regarding use of Orkut and weak-link development within Brazilian diasporic communities in Europe. Orkut offered the Europe-based Brazilian migrants “the opportunity to crosslink (Brazilian) migrants to one another in a relatively flat network of communication” (Oostebraan, 2010).

The studies described above took a common approach in analysing migrants’ social networking practices on one specific type of social media. They all found that social media use frees migrants from spatial constraints, allowing them to create weak ties with previously unknown co-ethnics, initially in an online setting. Organising offline social gatherings through online conversations further facilitates migrants to strengthen co-ethnic weak ties, thus enabling possible development of stronger ties with a smaller group of co-ethnic contacts. With regard to weak-tie communication, the existing literature has paid less attention to which types of media platform afford maintenance of migrants’ pre-existing weak-tie relationships. As well as co-ethnic ties, media use associated with migrants’ weak ties with people from other ethnic groups is also under-researched.

\(^7\) Orkut is a social network site created in 2004, aiming to help people maintain existing social relationships, regain contact with those they had been linked with in the past, and start new relationships based on common interests according to the different categories on Orkut (Bustamante, 2010).
Cross-ethnic tie formation is discussed in the last part of this chapter when the literature on migrants’ use of international media platforms is reviewed. Accounts of media preference differences in relation to migrants’ internet-initiated and offline pre-existing weak ties are lacking. Elias and Lemish (2009) argue that the internet offers migrant youth “a safe means to interact with local peers, a safe network of transnational social support”. There is still ambiguity about the extent to which migrant youth adopt the internet as a means to meet with local peers from other ethnic groups in the same way that they cultivate co-ethnic weak ties. In regard to this question, Chapter Four will provide detailed analysis of the relationship between young Chinese migrants’ media preferences and their intra- and inter-group weak tie formation.

Other research has taken a more comprehensive approach to studying migrants’ internet usage across media platforms, i.e. e-mail, instant messaging and social networking sites. Xie (2005) examined the use of BBS\(^8\) by North American based Chinese international students, i.e. a youth cohort Chinese diaspora. BBS opened up a pathway for these international students to meet with physically co-located new contacts. The research suggested that some youth added extra media in the form of personal e-mails and mobile phones to keep in touch with their newly-formed ties (Xie, 2005). For the purpose of organising social activities, information was first disseminated through BBS, which helped in reaching a large number of potential participants. At the same time, students who were interested in the activity joined in a Yahoo group (i.e. an instant messaging-based chat group) to get familiar with each other and to discuss details of the social gathering. In this case, the Chinese youth engaged with BBS, e-mail and instant messaging with different

\(^8\) Here BBS refers to the US-based Unknown Space and Wenxue City which were built by international students from mainland China (Xie, 2005).
purposes. Specifically, they chose the location-specific, group-wide BBS to first reach a large pool of potential friends who shared similar concerns or interests. They then switched to more intimate means, i.e. e-mails and instant messaging, to stay in touch with a small group of people with whom they were willing to develop closer ties.

Similar patterns have also been found among Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland (Komito, 2011). In terms of online communications, Komito (2011) suggests that the two groups of migrants employed more than one means to make contact with friends and family in Ireland and their home countries. The Polish and Filipino migrants were found to use social network sites (e.g. Facebook) in a passive way to monitor what was happening to their friends (Komito, 2011), whereas e-mail and Skype were used to have one-to-one communication with family and some friends in an active manner. In other words, the type of media used differed by tie strength.

Haythornthwaite (2005) created the term “media multiplexity” to illustrate the relationship between tie strength and media use arguing that:

Strong ties are robust in that parties linked by stronger ties will adapt multiple media to requirements of their relationship … Strong ties are also more likely to adopt an extra medium if it is useful for maintain relations important to the tie … Organisationally established means of communication can lay groundwork for latent and weak tie connectivity, and a base on which strong ties can grow (Haythornthwaite 2005).
The way that media multiplexity theory addresses the issue of how media use settles into several levels for supporting ties of different strengths is central to my research. In the context of the Chinese migrant youth in the current study, a range of media platforms are used, both China-based and with local Chinese or international counterparts, to maintain social ties of different strengths. For instance, these young migrants use social network sites to connect with groups of homeland school mates, instant messaging for family and selected friends, and online forums to approach co-ethnic fellows in the local area. Young Chinese migrants adapt their media use differently when they are seeking to develop weak-tie relationships with local peers into stronger ones, both in or outside their ethnic community.

With respect to the growth of tie strength, Haythornthwaite (2002) wrote:

> Once established, such (weaker) ties may strengthen, but they also are more vulnerable to dissolution if the media substrate on which they rest disappears or is disrupted. …We may decide to let ties lapse because that switch requires effort above the threshold of activity normally used to maintain the relationship.

The research reported in this thesis will address the following questions: what new characteristics emerge in Chinese migrant youth’s media preferences when they are developing closer relationships with co-ethnic and non-Chinese local peers?; do they adapt their actual practices on specific media in the same way for maintaining relationships with the two types of local networks?; if not, what are the respective different behaviours in relation to the two groups of contacts?; and finally what are migrants’ personal accounts of
the differences/variations in their media use? Detailed discussions on the above issues can be found in Chapter Four.

2.2.2 Social Shaping of Technology and Resources Acquisition

Information Acquisition

Information, emotional support and practical help are specific needs of young migrants facing the transitions at different phases of migration. In the context of the internet, various media scholars have brought different perspectives on the acquisition of resources to meet these needs through online and other communication technologies. Donath’s (2007) research pointed out the benefits of using social network sites in accessing “new or hard-to-find” information from weak-tie networks. Another research study on a typical social network site Facebook, addressed a similar point by analysing its use as a group application (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). The researchers affirmed the merits of Facebook in connecting people with common interests or concerns. Furthermore, Valenzuela et al. (2009) stressed the importance of the group membership which allowed people to obtain “mobilizing information that may not be available elsewhere”. Hampton et al. (2011) compared a range of communication technologies with a specific focus on the diversity of users’ social networks which was found to be positively related with the amount and diversity of their information resources. Their comparison between social network sites and instant messaging indicated a lower level of network diversity associated with instant messaging use, which reduced the possibilities for people to acquire information in particular (Hampton, Lee, and Her 2011).

The research described in the aforementioned literature has looked at the possibilities that specific media and their technological features afford for information acquisition. Other
research has centred on the specific needs which motivate people to request and acquire information through digital technologies. Vitak and Ellison (2012) interviewed 18 Facebook users to obtain their perceptions of Facebook’s properties for accessing information and emotional support. The majority of the participants regarded “the ability to broadcast requests to their entire network (on Facebook)” as important, and this led them to use Facebook for seeking advice or guidance (Vitak and Ellison, 2012). However, the broadcast nature of Facebook was seen as a barrier for information seeking by some users. Vitak and Ellison (2012) suggested that the interviewees who were concerned about the consequences of posting requests to a broad audience of friends, colleagues and acquaintances on the site, tended to limit the visibility of their posts to a selected audience. However, the less heterogeneous their network the less likely users were to be able to reach novel information through their Facebook use. In this sense, how users perceive the technological features of specific media will make a difference to the outcome of their information acquisition.

Cultural dynamics are also closely related to people’s views of media and so adoption and usage. Kohl and Gotzenbrucker (2014) conducted a transcultural study on social network sites comparing Austrian and Thai users of Facebook and its Asian equivalent, Hi5. Regarding Facebook use, their research found that the Western-based Austrian users perceived the social network site as a “strategic networking” tool and an “additional communication channel” for pre-existing friendship maintenance, which helped them “profit from their online connections in terms of knowledge, educational path and future employment” (Kohl and Gotzenbrucker 2014). The way that Austrian users interpreted the role of Facebook use in their social life was seen as having a positive impact on maintaining social capital. In comparison, the Asia-based Thai users interpreted Facebook as a place to
“foster modes of localised informal interaction similar to physical third places⁹”. Such interpretations meant the Thai users were more approachable in terms of networking with acquaintances online, which contributed to the accumulation of social capital.

From this comparison study we can see that users from Western and Asian backgrounds have distinct interpretations of their Facebook use. Specifically, Western users recognise Facebook-maintained networks as a tool which helps them to acquire the resources from those social ties. In contrast to their Western counterparts, the Asian users tended to use Facebook to network with people with whom they were less acquainted. For them, the primary benefit of using Facebook was social network formation rather than subsequent resource acquisition. In this regard, the Facebook-like social network site Hi5 has another feature which nicely satisfied Asian users’ needs for social networking, namely the public display of social connections (Donath and boyd, 2004). Technically by using Facebook, the site users were able to form connections with friends of friends through the network’s display of a mutual friend’s personal connections. In her work on social networks and internet connectivity, Haythornthwaite (2005) argued that “Adding any network-based means of communication lays the groundwork for connectivity between formerly unconnected others”.

As a network-based communication tool, Facebook offers an infrastructure which:

… make(s) a connection available technically, even if not yet activated socially.

These technical connections support latent social network ties, used here to indicate

⁹ Kohl and Gotzenbrucker (2014) described third places as “gathering places with a prevailingingly playful mood that are perceived as an escape distinct from other settings of daily life. These comfort zones facilitate being sociable by providing a neutral ground for conversation in the sense of communication, free of strategic thought”. 
ties that are technically possible but not yet activated socially. They are only activated, i.e. converted from latent to weak, by some sort of social interaction between members. (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

The network display feature enabled Thai Facebook users to reach acquaintances of a mutual contact on the site (Kohl and Gotzenbrucker, 2014). Hence, Facebook provided an effective way for its users to convert existing, technically-enabled connections to weak ties.

The Facebook networking effect may also apply to migrant Chinese youth who share a similar Asian cultural background and are lacking social networks in their host country. In Chapter Four, more detail is provided on the following aspects: the potential and possibilities that Facebook offers to young Chinese migrants in the New Zealand context; and the way in which they use the technological properties of Facebook for weak-tie relationship formation in their local areas. In addition, informed by prior studies this research will also consider the complex interplay of Chinese migrant youth’s perceptions of their media use, and the cross-cultural contexts and migration experiences, which significantly affect their actual practices in using specific media.

In terms of information acquisition, Chaffee (1986) conceived access and credibility as the key factors influencing people’s decision making in choosing information sources. In relation to access, he suggested that people choose information sources based on topic, timing and immediate accessibility (Chaffee, 1986). For the credibility criterion, Chaffee (1986) argued that the expertise and trustworthiness of a source were more influential than the channel in relation to people’s acceptance of the information. Interactions and user-generated content have seen significant growth in the post Web 2.0 era (O’Reilly, 2005).
Walter et al. (2011) used websites such as YouTube, eBay and RateMyProfessor.com as examples to explain the implications of Chaffee’s two criteria for information seeking within the Web 2.0 context. They likened users of these sites to anonymous peers exhibiting “optimal heterophily”, i.e. sharing similarities in terms of interests and perspectives while being differentiated from each other in knowledge of the specific target (Walter et al., 2011). As a result, information gained from these anonymous peers has a relatively high level of credibility. In the current research, the Chinese migrant youth participated in a local Chinese online forum to seek information from co-ethnic fellows who were seen as a major information source with strong trustworthiness and relevant expertise. In exploring the second theme of this chapter, I review some empirical research on migrants’ use of the participatory aspects of ethnic online media and the implications for information acquisition. Details about how young Chinese migrants exploit the full potential of online forums for information acquisition will be given in Chapter Five.

**Obtaining Emotional Support**

With respect to emotional support, Turner et al. (2001) found that people tend to seek support from online sources when their offline sources are not adequate in terms of depth. This is fundamental to understanding the acquisition of emotional support by Chinese migrant youth, particularly during the initial period of adaptation to their host country. Previous research has suggested that emotional support for migrant youth is most likely to be provided in close, intimate relationships (Vitak and Ellison, 2012). In addition, the length of residence in the host country is closely related to migrant youth’s levels of emotional support (Chen and Choi, 2011). As new arrivals, the reduced access to social networks makes it difficult for migrant youth to find readily available emotional support from offline sources such as closely bonded friends. The emergent need for emotional support directs the young migrants to alternative internet-enabled sources in the form of
physically distant but emotionally close-tie networks in their home country. In this situation, the communication channels which help to connect them with close pre-migration friends at home are still going to play a vital role in the transmission of emotional support. Hence, young migrants’ pre-migration media use habits cannot be neglected when investigating their emotional support acquisition in their host country. The young Chinese migrants reported frequenting instant messaging the most prior to their migration to make sure they are connected with close friends both on and offline before they move country. In Chapter Five, I will discuss young Chinese migrants’ patterns of use of instant messaging in more detail and how they use this established communication channel to obtain emotional support from distant contacts.

As with information acquisition, the broadcasting facility of social network sites helps users to easily and efficiently convey their needs for emotional support to the entire network on the site. However, as Vitak and Ellison (2011) pointed out the negative side of this broadcast feature of social network sites can “complicate the process of receiving feedback” as the responses might not be that “genuine”. In their study people perceived the “lightweight” forms of Facebook-enabled responses (i.e. Liking, a brief comment, or a quick Wall post) as less meaningful than those received through private, one-to-one communication channels (Vitak and Ellison, 2011). In comparison, instant messaging promotes real-time communication between individuals. It is also loaded with more contextual cues (i.e. visual and verbal cues) which help communicators to better interpret the meanings of messages and respond accordingly.

Synchronous communication is closely related with emotional support acquisition. It occurs in real time between two or more people when the communicators simultaneously
use software or a website that allows simultaneous conversation (Baym, 2010; Dolev-Cohen and Bark, 2013). Dolev-Cohen and Bark (2013) found that adolescents (aged 14-18) adopted instant messaging as an effective means to communicate with their “highly necessitated” peers so as to “ventilate negative emotions” and to receive “readily available” support from peers for satisfying their emotional need.

Inquiring into the quality of communication within computer-mediated contexts, Webster and Martocchio (1993) suggested that “information richness is the ability of information to change a recipient’s understanding within a given amount time”. Lancaster et al. (2007) further developed this argument:

A medium capable of providing immediate feedback is better than a medium that only provides unidirectional communication, and that a medium that carries cues (e.g. expressions, gestures, tone, etc.) is a better choice than one that carries fewer cues.

They provided empirical evidence to prove the above assumption in a survey carried out with 545 American college students to understand their perceptions of instant messaging and e-mail. The results showed participants’ preference for instant messaging as it is better for conveying emotions between friends, whereas e-mail was preferred for work related communication. The study participants were more likely to use symbols, i.e. emoticons\textsuperscript{10} with their instant messages to convey emotions. The use of emoticons showed users’

\textsuperscript{10} Emoticons are symbols consisting of letters and special characters. Two types of emoticons include text-based emoticons and graphical emoticons. A growing number of emoticons have been created by vendors and users, the process of which seems to “create a new language dedicated to expressing human emotions” (Lancaster et al., 2007).
attempts to simulate the facial cues available in face-to-face communications. As to their added effect, Lancaster et al. (2007) suggested that”

Emoticons are effective shorthand symbols designed to convey specific attitudes, moods and emotions on the internet. They provide the electronic gestures and convey the warmth that is apparent in face-to-face communications.

In addition to emoticons, instant messaging allows users to differentiate subtle changes of vocal tones through audio calls and to read the facial expressions and body language via video calls. Hence, it is beneficial to communicating feelings and emotions within the reduced-cue online context.

As discussed above, the availability of synchronous communication and non-textual cues helps build a positive link between instant messaging and the provision and receipt of emotional support. Apart from instant messaging, social network sites offer built-in instant messaging applications (e.g. Facebook Messenger) which allow site users to communicate with each other in a real-time manner. The positive effects described above also apply to these built-in instant messaging applications due to their shared functionality. Chapter Five will detail the analysis of Chinese migrant youth’s habitual use of homeland instant messaging (i.e. QQ) and the implications for their emotional support acquisition. The discussion in Chapter Five also accounts for the differences in obtaining emotional support from distant and co-located contacts in relation to migrant youth’s length of residence in the host country.
2.2.3 Online Self-disclosure and Relational Development

Self-disclosure refers to “a deliberate or voluntary activity whereby people reveal information, thoughts, and feelings about themselves to at least one other personal during an interaction” (Derlega et al., 2008). It is regarded as a crucial interpersonal mechanism in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Thon and Jucks, 2014). In the context of the internet, some researchers have measured self-disclosure by its depth, breadth and volume whereas others use duration as the third analytical dimension rather than the amount of information disclosed (Trepte and Reinecke, 2013; Thon and Jucks, 2014). This research will examine young Chinese migrants’ online self-disclosure by looking at its depth and breadth in instant messaging, social network sites and microblogging. Depth refers to the intimacy of the content being disclosed and the breadth is the range of various contents revealed including personal information (e.g. demographic data), thoughts, and feelings (Trepte and Reinecke, 2013).

Self-disclosure is seen as fundamental to developing closer social relationships (Derlega et al., 1993; Derlega et al., 2008). Similarly, Buhrmester and Prager (1995) suggested that one of the major functions\textsuperscript{11} of self-disclosure for adolescents is to enhance relationship development. Despite this established positive link, more recent research shows that in some cases relationship development resulting from self-disclosure is not always associated with feelings of closeness (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009). As Derlega et al. (1993) explained, people can “feel close to a person whom we (they) hardly know and we (they) can feel distant to a person whom we (they) know very well”. Ignatius and Kokkonen (2007) pointed out the mediating role that trust plays in this positive effect, in that self-disclosure

\textsuperscript{11} Apart from enhancing relationship development, the other four functions of self-disclosure for adolescents include: receiving social validation, gaining social control, achieving self-clarification and exercising self-expression (Buhrmester and Prager, 1995).
promotes trust, which contributes to development and maintenance of a closer social relationship. Similarly, Whitty and Joinson (2009) suggested that “self-disclosure builds trust by making the discloser increasingly vulnerable to the other person”, which is crucial to strengthening social ties.

Online self-disclosure has been researched in relation to the issue of privacy (Trepte and Reinecke, 2011; Thon and Jucks, 2014; Moll et al., 2014). In their examination of the factors associated with self-disclosure, Ignatius and Kokkonen (2007) found that people have boundaries around disclosing personal information in the communication process, which reflect their “control over privacy” in social relationships of different tie strength. To varying degrees, it is always risky to disclose the self as vulnerability is exposed at the same time, which may then influence the social relationship between the discloser and the recipient. People evaluate whom to trust and whether or not to disclose, which can be translated as “a need to control access to the self from others” within the online context (Thon and Jucks, 2014). In weighing the risks of sharing personal information online, self-disclosing behaviour demonstrates “a willingness to be vulnerable and therefore interpreted as an offer of trust” (Thon and Jucks, 2014).

In relation to the extent of information disclosed (i.e. depth and breadth), intimate self-disclosure and general, descriptive self-disclosure comprise the two types of online self-disclosure examined in this research. Valkenburg and Peter (2009) defined intimate self-disclosure as:
… disclosing intimate information about the self. It refers to verbal communication about personal topics that are typically not easily disclosed, such as one’s worries, fears, secrets, and embarrassing experiences.

In terms of intimacy of self-disclosure, in this research any kind of personal information about the discloser that involves low level intimacy is categorised as superficial, non-intimate self-disclosure. The extent of the self-disclosure (i.e. depth and breadth) affects the trust in relationships with close-tie contacts, and effects may vary in relation to different media contexts.

Focusing on youth internet use practices, Valkenburg and Peter (2009) demonstrated that instant messaging is positively associated with intimate online self-disclosures. Adolescent internet users were found to mostly prefer instant messaging for sharing intimate information with existing close friends. Compared to offline self-disclosure, hyperpersonal communication theory indicates that the reduced cues available online (i.e. visual, auditory and contextual cues) stimulate people to reveal themselves with less concern about others’ perceptions (Walther, 1996). Based on this theory, Joinson (2011) further suggests that individuals are more likely to disclose themselves when they are experiencing heightened private self-awareness and reduced public self-awareness during online communication. In this respect, instant messaging allows users to deliver point-to-point messages, which is advantageous in creating a private atmosphere and alleviating their concerns about being judged by others (Lancaster et al., 2007). As a result, users’ needs for sharing intimate information with close friends are fulfilled.
Dolev-Cohen and Barak (2013) conducted a national survey with Israeli adolescents regarding instant messaging use, which also provided empirical proof of the positive role that instant messaging plays in facilitating intimate self-disclosure. Instant messaging was found to be especially advantageous in creating an intimate and private space for the adolescents to “share worries… to reveal “true-self” without being judged by others but (to be) listened to at eye-level, as it were, by friends”. The more information individuals disclosed, the more they relaxed their privacy boundaries which resulted in more trust offered to close friends. As discussed earlier, higher levels of trust help to strengthen social ties between the discloser and the recipient. Chapter Six will further discuss the Chinese migrant youth’s intimate self-disclosure on instant messaging and the implications for stronger tie development.

Compared to instant messaging, disclosing personal information on social network sites can be more complex in terms of reach, depth, breadth and form of the disclosed information. As providers of a service, developers of social network sites attempt to “maximise the amount of information users provide and the public visibility of the information disclosed” for economic benefit whereas site users engage in restricting access to the disclosed information out of privacy concerns (Ziegele and Quiring, 2011). In their work on privacy issues within social network sites, Ziegele and Quiring (2011) suggested that the user-centric social network sites (e.g. Facebook) promote a “mass management” of existing social ties, which allows users to disclose themselves to a mix of contacts across social networks. The recipients can be a single person, particular groups, a dispersed public or institutions. As for starting a close social relationship, early research has suggested that weak-tie contacts (e.g. acquaintances) use self-disclosure to infer the extent to which they trust one another and to “make forecasts about the possibility for a future relationship”
In this respect, the self-disclosure on social network sites is helpful to forming trust with a wide range of weak-tie contacts. The resulting trust may help maintain the relationships with weak-tie contacts or facilitate the discloser in developing a close relationship with some weak-tie contacts, converting weak ties into strong ties.

Social network sites provide users with autonomy in controlling the visibility of their disclosed information (Ziegele and Quiring, 2011). For example, users can limit the visibility of their profile to friends only or make it publicly accessible. On the one hand, as previously discussed, the less restrictions of access to personal information, the wider the audiences people can reach and build trust with. On the other hand, the extended reach of self-disclosure leads to increased public self-awareness and lowered private self-awareness, which is negatively associated with intimate self-disclosure (Joinson, 2001). Hence, social network sites seem unlikely to play a significant role in promoting intimate self-disclosure. The private message service on social network sites needs to be examined separately as it also affords point-to-point disclosures between strong-tie communication pairs. Whether or not private message services play an equivalent role to instant messaging in intimate disclosure among young Chinese migrants will also be analysed in Chapter Six.

Increasing trust is correlated with self-disclosure on instant messaging and social network sites. Whitty and Joinson (2009) conceived media switching as an effective method for increasing trust in interpersonal interactions. Media switching also applies to the increase in trust resulting from self-disclosing activity which forms part of the social interaction between people. The movement from a public arena (i.e. social network site) to a private domain (i.e. instant messaging) for sharing personal information signifies the building of trust (Whitty and Joinson, 2009). Media switching behaviour will be discussed in Chapter
Six which gives a more comprehensive view of young Chinese migrants’ online self-disclosure and its influence on the development of trust in social networks of different tie strength.

2.3 Social capital and Internet Use

Communication technologies have made people increasingly independent of place, liberating individuals’ sociability from their locality. In the past two decades, the use of internet and mobile technologies has transformed interpersonal connectivity from place-to-place to person-to-person (Wellman, 2001). In the internet era the individual has become the primary unit of connectivity. With the help of internet communication, individuals are able to build their personal network, incorporating different types of social ties (i.e. familial ties, friendship ties and colleague ties) into their individualised network regardless of location. Young adults especially are accustomed to managing their personal network via the internet. Their use of the popular social network site Facebook is an example. Ellison and her colleagues (2007) conducted research on Facebook use in the US context, showing that young Facebook users at college used the site to break the constraints of geography and consequently individualised their social networks. By integrating diverse social contacts onto Facebook, the college students managed to simultaneously maintain new connections built on campus and high-school friendship ties scattered in other places. As the reach of their networks extended, the young internet users were able obtain their required resources from network associates in multiple locations. In a study of new media and its impacts on network diversity, Hampton et al. (2011) suggested that social network site use enabled its users to become less dependent on local ties and gain more opportunities to access support from outside the local setting. With the emergence of network
individualism, geographic proximity has become less crucial to resource acquisition (Wellman, 2001; Chen and Wellman, 2009).

Communication technologies afford the sustaining of connections with their homeland by diasporic communities. Scholars in the area of migration studies have also taken the internet, along with transport technologies, as a vital perspective in studying migrants’ relations with both their home and host countries (Kissau and Hunger, 2010; Ros, 2010; Ip and Hang, 2015). With the penetration of the internet, migrants’ communicative relationships with distant contacts increasingly rely on digital technologies and online interactions.

The young Chinese migrants in the current study, born post 1980s in mainland China, are a group of digital natives, who have been accessing the internet and digital communication technologies since childhood. Engaging in online interactions was already part of these migrant youth’s daily routine before their migration to New Zealand. Chinese youth commonly seek to connect with peers in every possible way, and have been bringing offline friends online ever since their first use of the Chinese instant messaging service QQ in the 1990s. These connections with homeland peers are not interrupted by geographical distance. Migrant youth can easily reach their peers and friends via the existing communication channel QQ post-migration. In comparison to the pre-internet era, the internet has afforded the building of more individualised social networks by young migrants, creating a deterritorialised social space for social relationship maintenance across distances. Following migration, Chinese migrant youth have more media options for social interactions, including pre-existing homeland instant messaging, local ethnic Chinese platforms and the Western counterparts generally used by local youth. These different types
of communication media open up the opportunity for migrant youth to network and socialise with old and new contacts in their home and host countries.

With regard to the maintenance of young Chinese migrants’ individualised social networks, my primary concerns in this thesis are: How the migrant youth prioritise the available media platforms for maintaining networks locating in different places; and how these young migrants’ use of homeland, local ethnic Chinese and Western internet platforms affects their access to resources of their homeland and local networks respectively.

This section reviews the existing literature addressing the relationship between locality and sociability of migrants with a specific focus on the role of communication media. It provides theoretical evidence for the media selection criteria used in this thesis. As young migrants’ social networks become less place-based and more person-based in the internet era, the communication media which they adopt may affect their sociability, i.e. how they maintain social relationships and how they utilise these network connections to acquire resources and support.

2.3.1 Homeland media

The internet has been used as a research tool to study migrant networks in the past 20 years, aiming to advance our understanding of the relationship between home and host country for diasporic communities (Kissau and Hunger, 2010; Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). However, migrants’ consumption of homeland internet platforms and related communication technologies has not gained sufficient academic attention. As some scholars have explained, the information provided by homeland media was not able to reach the migrant audiences in a “timely and direct” manner in the pre-internet era owing to geographical distance (Ip, 2006; Yin, 2014). Traditional homeland media were not capable
of connecting migrants with their home country continuously and consistently. Previously, migrants’ links to homeland were through local ethnic media supplying homeland news (Ip, 2006). As a consequence, homeland media has remained on the periphery, and its impacts on migrant audiences overlooked (Yin, 2014).

The advent of the internet provided migrants with immediate access to homeland media, enabling a direct and continuous connection between migrants and their country of origin. As briefly discussed in the previous paragraph, the research cohort – Chinese migrant youth – in this thesis have grown up alongside the development of the Chinese internet since the 1990s. Through their early adoption of Chinese social media, young Chinese migrants have formed pre-migration media preferences and use habits. It also has also shaped the modes by which migrant youth communicate with different types of social contacts, i.e. family, friends and acquaintances. The homeland internet platforms are still accessible to migrant youth after their migratory move as internet connectivity transcends geographical boundaries. Further, the impacts of pre-existing internet use habits will not disappear as long as the young migrants keep using Chinese social media post-migration. Dependence on this communication path will possibly continuously impact migrant youth’s social relationship maintenance of homeland ties. Additionally, young Chinese migrants’ continuous use of China-based internet platforms may affect their relationship building with co-ethnics who share similar social and cultural backgrounds. China-based internet platforms remain a crucial communication channel for fulfilling migrant youth’s personal network needs, thereby local co-ethnic ties are formed and homeland ties sustained in parallel.
Prior to the age of social media\textsuperscript{12}, homeland media were more likely to serve as news sources, broadcasting homeland news to the migrants. Migrant netizens were passive receivers of content provided by the homeland media. Their homeland media use lacked interactivity. Engagement with home-grown content and other homeland media users was still rare. With their immersion in instant messaging, social network sites and microblogging in everyday life, migrant netizens are now able to socialise with other communicators in different ways. Take the Chinese microblogging website Weibo as an example. In China, the state media, influential media outlets and organisations consider Weibo as an indispensable, complementary channel for publishing and disseminating news contents and information to young people for the explicit reason that social media is known as the dominant channel for young people to acquire and circulate news and information from and with their network contacts. Following official accounts on Weibo enables young Chinese migrants to freely access the latest homeland news. Aside from public accounts, having a personal account makes it easy for migrant youth to acquire social information about their social circle through their contacts’ posts. Both the China news and social information of friends available on Weibo serve as social contexts for migrant youth to find common ground with homeland or co-ethnic contacts, thus promoting further interactions between the two parties. In this regard, young Chinese migrants’ homeland media use is becoming more interactive, which may lead to new use patterns emerging. Hence, there is a need to re-examine young Chinese migrants’ social use of homeland media, to enable an accurate understanding of its impacts on their personal network development.

\textsuperscript{12} Here, social media refers to instant messaging, social network sites and microblogging.
2.3.2 Local Ethnic Media

Local ethnic media is produced by diasporic communities and serves the communities’ own needs (Sun, 2005). First, it supplies the migrants with host country news and provides a location-specific social space for migrants to interact with other co-ethnic fellows. Second, it feeds migrants’ demands for homeland news, sustaining the connection with their country of origin. In this study, I am particularly interested in young Chinese migrants’ purposive use of ethnic online media and its impacts on their social capital accumulation in the host country context. However, the role that local ethnic media plays in sustaining Chinese migrant youth’s homeland connection and the subsequent resource acquisition process is not been addressed in the current research. The primary reason is that local Chinese websites are not accessible to netizens residing in mainland China, thus no interaction can actually take place without specific technical assistance (e.g. VPN service). Apart from this, the previous section has indicated that young Chinese migrants still rely heavily on pre-existing China-based communication channels for homeland network maintenance post-migration. My primary concern lies in the needs that drive Chinese migrant youth to engage with local ethnic media and changes in their ethnic media use practices at different stages in their migration process. Accordingly, I revisit the current literature on migrants, especially young cohort’s consumption of ethnic media in the digital era.

The nearly ubiquitous internet accessibility has given rise to new features of migrant ethnic media consumption. Specifically, the participatory web culture has profoundly influenced the way that migrant netizens consume news, acquire information and their social networking (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). A study by Mehra and colleagues (2004) showed the importance to a group of African-American women of an ethnic community website with respect to accessing health information. As the authors stated, health information was
“subordinated to the expertise of professionals” in the health domain and out of reach for women from the African community in the US. A community-based health-related website SisterNet enabled female users upload their personal health practices and experiences of using health services. Such user-generated content (UGC) was particularly important to “increase the availability of culturally appropriate information resources that are more in tune with the needs and expectations of other marginalised users” in the community (Mehra et al., 2004). The UGC of co-ethnic fellows empowered the female African-American users to gain more knowledge on health, thus helping improve their own health and form healthy lifestyles. As this example shows, engaging in the ethnic website is an important way for minorities to access needed information resources.

Ethnic online media use also enables migrants to reach co-ethnics outside their immediate social circles and increases their potential to access needed resources. In the host country, it is difficult for newly-arrived migrants to form a sizeable local network by face-to-face interaction or through traditional ethnic media (i.e. television, print media). It is also not easy for them to find specific information tailored to helping them as newcomers address practical issues in an unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile, migrants can hardly turn to previous homeland networks for advice or guidance as these distant contacts are not familiar either with the social, cultural and behavioural norms of the host country. The adaptation challenge leads new migrants to seek and try every possible way to reach new people and to acquire necessary resources, including ethnic online media. What differentiates ethnic online media from traditional ethnic media is that the former promotes participation in content production and interaction with co-ethnic site users. Previous studies have affirmed the virtue of such participatory attributes of ethnic online media in expanding migrants’ networks and facilitating “tailor-made” information acquisition.
In a recent study of mainland Chinese migrants in Singapore, Chen and Choi (2011) reported the growth of local Chinese websites in Singapore and their importance in promoting information sharing among local Chinese, elaborating reasons for this in three dimensions. First, topics on the site are migrant-oriented, which means they are tailored for the ethnic group which created the website. This is beneficial in that migrants who use the local ethnic website are more likely to be able to access their target information, i.e. location-specific and context-specific information. Second, the ethnic website serves as a platform, allowing migrants to post lived experiences accumulated in the host country to the public, mainly their co-ethnic fellows. Prior immigrants’ lived experiences as a type of information resource are vital to new arrivals, accelerating the newcomers’ initial adaptation to the host society. Third, migrant netizens are able to meet a larger network of co-ethnic fellows online compared to face-to-face settings. The online connectivity with co-ethnic fellows supplements the information-seeking needs of new migrants who are short of offline sources. As the authors stated, “the sheer number of people online increases the possibility for individuals to find a match with their specific type of need.” (Chen and Choi, 2011). It means that, by participating in the local ethnic website, migrants can compare similar, relevant information resources provided by other co-ethnic site users. There is a higher potential for resource seekers to locate the specific information and expertise to help resolve their own problems.

The positive impacts of ethnic online media on migrant youth have been discussed previously in describing Parker and Song’s (2006) content analysis of second-generation British Chinese’s use of a local Chinese online forum and its impacts on their social capital building. The ethnic forum examined was founded by young British-born Chinese, aiming
to connect ethnic Chinese dispersed in various locations in Britain and to increase interactions between co-ethnics. Their research suggested that the participatory ethnic website – British Born Chinese – enacted everyday experience sharing regarding racism among forum participants (Parker and Song, 2006). “The material posted refers not just to lived experiences, but the felt experience of growing up as Chinese in Britain.”, and the sharing of personal stories enabled individual users to relate to a collective experience manifested in the thematic discussion of racism. Engaging in forum discussion stimulated exchanges of migrant participant’s thoughts and ideas on racism, providing relevant information for others facing racialised everyday encounters in the host society.

Another empirical study by Elias and Lemish (2009) showed that aside from co-ethnic connection formation, local ethnic online media also has a positive effect on migrant youth’s cultural adaptation to the host society. Seventy Russian migrant youth in Israel were interviewed, and the young participant disclosed awareness of migrant parents’ incompetence in adjusting to the Israel society, a finding in common with the East Asian immigrant youth in New Zealand according to a study conducted at similar time by Bartley and Spoonley (2008). In the Israeli context, the migrant youth turned to local Russian-language website for information about Israeli youth culture, including Israeli music popular among the local youth (Elias and Lemish, 2009). This example indicates the merits of local ethnic online media in stimulating cultural adaptation in two aspects. First, the ethnic website provided a non-threatening linguistic environment for those young migrants who were not proficient in Hebrew. Second, the information was drawn from content produced and shared by other co-ethnic Russians on the site. In this regard, the UGC on the local Russian website contributed to Russian migrant youth’s cultural adaptation:
… the internet (local Russian website) offers information provided by the more ‘veteran’ immigrants participating in the chat and discussion groups (on local Russian website), thus facilitating a transfer of valuable knowledge from more experienced to less experienced immigrants… the information (accessible on local ethnic website) serves as their (Russian migrant youth) guides into the local cultural labyrinth (Elias and Lemish, 2009).

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies has changed the way that people engage with the internet. The content available online will increasingly come from the internet users and their social networks (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). Given the rise of user-generated content, the conventional three-step model (i.e. production-text-consumption) also requires modification in studying the media usage of diasporic communities (Sun and Sinclair, 2016). As discussed above, the migrant youth who were born during the rise of the participatory internet culture, are used to expressing personal experiences online and sharing them with other participants on the same site. Meanwhile, the convergent nature of recent ethnic media has been described by media scholars as “the everyday praxis of minority community media … located somewhere on the continuum between participatory communication and ethnic media production” (Deuze, 2006). The development of participatory ethnic online media gratifies the migrants’ demand for engaging with co-ethnics and strengthens their sense of being connected with the ethnic community. It also applies to the young Chinese migrants in this thesis regarding their information seeking and intra-group networking behaviours. Nevertheless, the relationship between homeland communication media and local Chinese online media has not been adequately researched. In this regard, previous studies have mostly accounted for the homeland-ethnic media relationship from the viewpoint of media content. Homeland media
has been identified as the major source of country news for local ethnic media, which effectively strengthens migrants’ cultural identification with their home country (Sun, 2005; Ip, 2006; Sun et al., 2011). In the context of young Chinese migrants, they actively use both homeland and local Chinese online media for personal network development. However, little research has touched on the role that each channel plays in these young migrants’ local network building. To fill this gap, Chapter Four of this thesis offers an analysis of young Chinese migrants’ homeland and ethnic media use practices to improve understanding of their network formation in the host country.

2.3.3 International Media

Prior studies have drawn extensively on ethnic media use to explore the changing characteristics of migrants’ relationships with home and host country, their ethnic, cultural and national identity development (Sun, 2006; Lin, 2010; Sun and Sinclair, 2016; Alonso, 2010). In comparison, little research has touched on ethnic minorities’ or migrants’ use practices of homeland and international communication media within the internet context (Yin, 2014; Wilson et al., 2012; Zhang and Leung, 2014). Moreover, it is difficult to draw a full picture from previous research in this domain of how migrants’ use of homeland, ethnic and international internet platforms respectively affect their communication with people in their home and host country. For example, in examining the internet usage of mainland Chinese migrants in Singapore, Chen (2010) sought to evaluate its impacts on migrants’ intercultural adaptation in two dimensions, i.e. information retrieval and communication. With regard to information retrieval, her research identified a negative relationship between the length of migrants’ residence in Singapore and their usage of both home country websites and ethnic websites. However, a positive link was found between their length of residence and Singapore-based website use. As to communication, the research did not specify the consequences of the usage of each media on migrants’ online
communication with contacts in local area or the origin country, respectively. Internet-usage was treated as a one-dimensional concept, operationalised by time spent and frequency of communication with homeland and local contacts.

The Chinese migrant youth interviewed in this thesis have been using international communication platforms to interact with local contacts since their first arrival in New Zealand. Instant messaging MSN and the social network site Facebook were reported as the two platforms through which the online conversation between young Chinese migrants and their local communicators was enacted. In comparison to MSN, Facebook has constantly supported the migrant youth to network and interact with people in the local area for over a decade. It is also the most researched site by scholars according to a review of social network site studies between 2006 and 2011 (Zhang and Leung, 2014).

Given that Facebook is such a social phenomenon, Wilson et al. (2012) reviewed 412 academic articles published in the social sciences, categorising them by five themes: descriptive analysis of users, motivations for using Facebook, identity presentation, the role of Facebook in social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure. The descriptive analysis of Facebook stressed the rapid growth of Facebook in the international social media market with 80% of users living outside the US, its country of origin. It potentially boosts the communication between Facebook users from different ethnic backgrounds. From the perspective of academic research, Wilson and colleagues (2012) argued that “Facebook provides a convenient context to assess a wide range of socially important behaviours across cultures.” Other US-based Facebook research provides supporting evidence that the ethnicity of Facebook users in America has become increasingly diverse over time (Chang et al., 2010). Despite the ethnically diverse Facebook demographic, the
The focus of existing literature has been users from the majority group within countries primarily located in the North American or European context.

Existing research has established positive links between Facebook use and migrants’ transnational and local ethnic network maintenance (Aguirre, 2014; Horst, 2010). For instance, Horst (2010) examined the internet-based media practices of young Jamaican migrants within North American and European contexts. Jamaican migrant youth showed more interest in using international social media (i.e. Facebook, YouTube) than the Jamaican-oriented counterparts to maintain connections with Jamaicans in both local and global contexts. They created or joined in Facebook discussion groups to reach more fellow Jamaicans and exchange ideas on topics related to Jamaican culture within their ethnicity-based networks. Their ethnic peers consisted of family members in their homeland and fellow students of Jamaican descent across North America, the Caribbean and Europe (Horst, 2010). The second study examined the identity construction of New Zealand based Filipino migrants by looking at their engagements in a Philippines-based blog and Facebook (Aguirre, 2014). Aguirre (2014) suggested that Facebook is the crucial communication tool for Filipino migrants sharing and discussing their New Zealand experiences with distant contacts, i.e. family and friends in the Philippines. The Facebook-facilitated discussions helped keep these migrants’ homeland social ties alive and maintain their connections with their country of origin. The type of continuing linkage with the home country consequently influences migrants’ sense of identity as Filipinos in New Zealand (Aguirre, 2014).

However, it is not sufficient to draw on the analytical framework of previous empirical research to study mainland Chinese migrant youth’s maintenance of their homeland ties.
The key reason is that, like most Western internet platforms, Facebook is unavailable to internet users who live in mainland China. It is therefore not the optimal path for the Chinese migrants in sustaining communication with pre-existing networks in their home country. The role is fulfilled by Renren, the Facebook of China (Marshall, 2008), and other China-based instant messaging or microblogging platforms. In other words, it is the China-based media use that contributes to mainland Chinese migrants’ homeland tie maintenance from a distance. As to Facebook, the Chinese migrants are not able to use it in the same way as Filipino or Jamaican migrants do to manage their dispersed social networks through a single platform. The international platform Facebook serves primarily as a location-specific communication tool which promotes Chinese migrants to interact with their host country based social contacts. In the case of Chinese migrants, Facebook may be more beneficial to expanding and maintaining their cross-ethnic social networks rather than their geographically distant homeland networks.

In addition to these Western-perspectives, I have also reviewed relevant cross-cultural studies with a specific focus on ethnic Chinese populations in multi-ethnic contexts. The following three recent comparative studies provide insights into the social network use of ethnic Chinese from different perspectives (Li and Chen, 2014; Cao et al., 2012; Qiu et al., 2013). The three empirical studies share similarities in research cohorts and research sites. First, all the participants in these three studies were international students originally from mainland China studying in overseas universities in the United States, Singapore and New Zealand respectively. Second, the two social network sites being investigated were the international platform Facebook and its Chinese counterpart Renren. The research based in the US and New Zealand examined the usage differences, i.e. the intensity and/or frequency with which Chinese international students engaged in the two social network sites. Both
studies sought to explore the potential that home and host country-based communication media provided to Chinese international students regarding social capital or social support acquisition.

In the US context, Li and Chen (2014) found that using Facebook was more effective than Renren for weak tie formation and maintenance in the host country. These weak-tie social networks were more useful for the Chinese international students in accessing diverse information. My research findings are consistent with these two findings. For Chinese migrant youth, Facebook is a host country based, well established and group-wide communication platform. Facebook is used primarily to maintain weak ties between young Chinese migrants and their New Zealand based peer networks. However, the US-based research found no significant relationship between Facebook use and Chinese international students’ maintenance of strong-tie relationships, these results differing from those of previous studies of local US college students (Li and Chen, 2014; Ellison et al., 2007). Li and Chen (2014) explained that apart from Facebook, the availability of various China-based and other international online communication media facilitated Chinese students continuing connection with their strong ties. In line with this explanation, my research findings in Chapter Four also indicate that Chinese migrant youth in New Zealand adopt all available means to stay connected with their strong-tie contacts. They also add intimate co-ethnic friends on Facebook. In this regard, the Facebook connection is more an indicator of the close relationship between young Chinese migrants and a selected number of their co-ethnic friends.

Findings from the New Zealand study showed that Chinese international students had a relatively large co-ethnic network and so more perceived social support (Cao, 2012). Cao
and her colleagues (2012) also pointed out the lack of offline interactions with peers from other ethnic groups reduced the chances of expanding local networks among these Chinese international students. They concluded that insufficient face-to-face social interactions resulted in the low-frequency of Facebook use among the young participants. How their Facebook use in turn influenced the international Chinese students’ offline interactions with non-Chinese local peers is not discussed. Neither was the Chinese international students’ perception of the role of Facebook engagement in their local network development examined. These missing points are crucial to the understanding of the internet-facilitated sociability of these ethnic minority students in acquiring social support when they have reduced access to social networks in the offline setting.

The third study in Singapore offered specific insight into how Chinese international students’ culturally shaped perceptions of specific media use influenced their social behaviours on Facebook. Qiu et al (2013) suggested that the Chinese international students had distinctive views on the use of Facebook and Renren. Despite their technical similarities, the Chinese youth perceived the cultural practices on Facebook to be more individualistic compared to the relatively collectivistic culture of Renren. These young Chinese people’s perceptions of the individualistic Facebook culture versus the collectivistic Renren culture were shown to be largely influenced by their national culture in relation to “their host culture’s shared practices and imperatives” (Qiu et al, 2013). More importantly, the culturally shaped perceptions of Facebook use led the participants to engage with less in-group sharing there than on the Renren site. In other words, minority users consciously adapted their media use practices in response to the cultural contexts where they were situated. Hence, more research attention should be given to the ethnic
minorities’ perceptions of using Facebook or other host country-based communication media.

In New Zealand, Facebook is the most widely adopted tool for social networking among local youth nationwide (WIP, 2011). Chinese international students and the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants are both bilingual ethnic minorities living in a multi-ethnic host society. In this regard, Facebook opens up the same opportunities for Chinese migrant youth to foster weak ties with local peers. The main difference between the two cohorts of ethnic Chinese youth is that young Chinese migrants have lived in the host country (New Zealand) for a relatively longer time and started to experience the internet culture of the local youth population much earlier, i.e. ever since their late adolescence. The migrant youth’s perceptions of host country-based media may change along with their migration process in response to their experiences of both the home and host culture. To address the issue of migrant youth’s changing perceptions, Chapter Four offers an analysis of participants’ accounts for their different views on Facebook use in regard to networking in the local context. It helps us to understand Chinese migrant youth’s communication practices on Facebook at different times.

2.4 Conclusions

Internet matters. Digital native is a metaphor which best characterises my research subjects, i.e. young Chinese migrants who have grown up with the Internet and digital communication technologies. Internet connectivity has profoundly transformed the way that migrant youth interact with social contacts. Furthermore, internet-facilitated interactions exert an impact on how migrant youth use their social network as a resource to access desired support or resources. The social network, resources and support, and the
social interactions together comprise the social capital which helps young migrants to face cultural adaptation and their transition from adolescence to adulthood at the same time.

The social shaping perspective was taken to discuss the possibilities that digital communication technologies offer to migrant youth and their actual practices in using specific technical features. The examination of migrant youth’s internet use practices should be situated in cultural contexts. This is extremely important as young migrants’ pre-migration internet use habits have long been neglected in academic research. In addition, migrant youth also develop new perceptions of both pre-existing and newly-adopted platforms. The changing perceptions are likely to result in new layers of media use in response to their ongoing cross-cultural living experiences. In this regard, this research employs media multiplexity theory to analyse young Chinese migrants’ different levels of communication media use. It helps us to understand migrant youth’s strong and weak tie relationships maintenance within the internet context.

*Pre-migration use habits matter.* Migrant youth tend to keep using particular media in a consistent manner to communicate with social contacts from the same ethnic, cultural and migration backgrounds. Take the use of instant messaging as an example. The proven role of instant messaging lies in its facilitation of real-time one-to-one conversation between closely-bonded communication pairs. Prior to their migratory move, Chinese migrant youth have established the practice of using (China-based) instant messaging to connect with whole classes of students in their secondary schools and to participate in group chats on the instant messaging platform. Later on, they continue using the instant messaging service to both maintain the large network of homeland school peers and expand co-ethnic networks in their host society.
User perceptions matter. Migrant youth’s perceptions of specific communication platforms affect their social behaviours on the sites. This is quite a phenomenon in the use of international platforms by Chinese migrant youth. Take Facebook use as an example. In relation to minimising loneliness, relieving boredom or birthday reminders, a recent review of Facebook research suggested that people’s primary use of Facebook is motivated by “the desire to keep in touch with friends” (Wilson et al, 2012). Chinese migrant youth’s perception of Facebook use undergoes transformation as their length of residence in New Zealand increases. The role of Facebook shifts from a school class-based, group-wide study platform to a communication platform for informal interactions across ethnic groups. Young Chinese migrants’ communication practices may shift correspondingly with changes in their perception of Facebook. The positive perception of Facebook, the increase of either direct communication (i.e. comments, private messages) or passive browsing of news feed may help migrant youth to activate the technically possible latent ties to become weak ties.

As Georgiou (2002) suggests, “Diasporic communities have always relied on networks, which expanded from the immediate local to the transnational and global”. Specifically, migrants’ connections with their home country mainly consist of communication relationships which are largely sustained with the aid of the internet (Kissau and Hunger, 2010). In the 2015 World Migration Report, reduced access to social networks is seen as one of major barriers\textsuperscript{13} for migrants in accessing resources and opportunities (International Organisation for Migration, 2015). In his examination of the dynamics of connectivity in

\textsuperscript{13} Six major barriers which impede migrants access to needed resources and opportunities consist of linguistic barriers, legal and administrative barriers, reduced access to social networks, reduced knowledge of the local environmental and social context, inadequacy of skills for urban labour market, lack of representation, discrimination and xenophobia (International Organisation for Migration, 2015).
the computer-mediated communication context, Wellman (2001) identified the emergence of networked individualism arguing that advances in communication technologies afford a fundamental liberation of connectivity from place. The internet and related communication technologies enable people to build person-to-person connections and access specific types of resources through their specialised relationships in different locations.

*Location matters.* In this research, young Chinese migrants use three types of social networks in their home and host countries, comprising their homeland network, co-ethnic network and non-Chinese network in the host country. Not surprisingly, these young migrants make the most use of the internet to keep in touch with family and friends regardless of physical location. They rely on pre-existing communication channels (i.e. homeland platforms) to chat with grandparents or school peers in China. They find fellow co-ethnics who share common interests through local Chinese online forums and utilise China-based platforms to discuss interest-oriented topics with these newly-formed co-ethnic ties. The migrant youth also adopt international platforms to form links with local people from other ethnic groups, converting latent ties into weak ties. Incorporating media multiplexity theory into the analytic framework will facilitate us to understand how these migrant youth navigate their personal networks via available communication media. Meanwhile, it helps comprehend the way that young migrants utilise the technical properties of specific media to acquire support and resources from their specialised ties. The term specialised ties refer to the homeland, co-ethnic and non-Chinese local ties that provide migrant youth with access to different types of resources or support. For example, close friends in the home country serve as the main source of emotional support contributing to young Chinese migrants’ psychological adaptation to their host society early in their migration.
In the first section previous literature on social capital was discussed with a specific focus on migrant youth. The operational definition of social capital used is based on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of social networks and accessible resources. This research also incorporates interaction as another element of the definition. The youth cohort of migrants has long been constructed as benefitting social capital within the context of family systems and education services (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). In their emerging adulthood, the spotlight has not been on how migrant youth form social networks and access needed resources in their own right. The third component – interaction – is particularly crucial to understanding migrant youth’s agency in acquiring social capital.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

3.1 Methodological Framework

This research employed qualitative methods to study the social capital of young Chinese migrants in both the online and offline contexts. The methods included semi-structured in-depth interviews and textual analysis of user-generated contents on social media. The former was a well-established method in both migration studies and social capital research. Migration scholars employed the interview method to study the ethnic identity formation (e.g. intra-/inter-ethnic group relationships) and transitions to adulthood of young migrants (Phinney and Rosenthal, 2009; Chen and Miller, 2000). Social capital researchers tended to interview migrant youth to explore their relationship development in family and school settings (Weller, 2010; Gillies and Lucey, 2006; Helve and Bynner, 2007; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). The qualitative interview method allows the youth’s voices to be taken into account, enabling scholars to illustrate the researched phenomena with participants’ lived experiences.

As in media studies, with the advent of Internet and digital technologies the interplay of young people’s social relationships, identity presentation and their media use has drawn considerable research attention. Remarkably, the sites for data collection in previous studies were predominantly based in the western context, and heavily biased towards the ‘mainstream group’ if the research is conducted in multi-cultural societies. For instance, Facebook was launched in the US and has become a hot media research site in the global context for over a decade (Ledbetter and Mazer, 2014; ref.). Specifically, in 2015, German media researchers completed 207 surveys to analyse potential risks which the new chat
feature, i.e. seen-function of Facebook brought to young Germans’ (aged 24 on average) relations with close friends and acquaintances. In addition, the majority of research participants in existing media research were from the dominant group rather than ethnic minorities (Ledbetter and Mazer, 2014; Van Zalk, Branje et al., 2011). Ledbetter and Marzer (2014) conducted 325 surveys to evaluate US undergraduates’ attitudes towards Facebook use with 90.5 percent of white/Caucasian participants recruited. Van Zalk and her team/colleagues (2011) carried out 197 questionnaires to assess how young adults’ online communication affected their emotional support acquisition in the Netherlands. Of all the 197 young adults taking part in this quantitative study, 181 participants were of Dutch origin.

In the New Zealand context, the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of young netizens were paid less attention compared to gender and age variables. For instance, the World Internet Project New Zealand (WIPNZ) have gathered 5855 responses from four waves of surveys in order to study the impacts of internet use on New Zealanders’ daily lives (Crothers, Gibson et al, 2014). As to the social relationship development, the quantitatively collected data enables researchers to uncover the trend that the elderly aged 60 and over become increasingly active in email communication with families and friends, whereas younger users shift to maintain social relationships via instant messaging (IM). In terms of the young internet users, types of IM platforms and distinctive cultural preferences of ethnic minorities and majority New Zealand young adults were left largely unexamined.

This study is based on specific media interests of the Chinese migrant youth’s media preferences, which have been established or transformed in parallel with their migration process. For the sake of media preferences, the interview method was adopted so as to
collect concrete examples of how in-between position shaped young Chinese migrants’ media practices in their daily communication. The in-between position/identity consisted of two dimensions of meanings. First, the migrant life situated Chinese youth in New Zealand’s multi-ethnic society blending with the Chinese culture in their blood. The two cultures competed with each other and together affected how young Chinese migrants conceived sharing private life on social media was appropriate and acceptable to communication partners living in different cultural contexts. Second, these Chinese youth experienced and lived through their late adolescence in early migration, inventing their adulthood as well as entering the job market in the host country. Becoming an adult signalled that the young Chinese migrants were more likely to make life decisions according to their own will, to the information and resources acquired from their own social networks on/offline, in the New Zealand context. Therefore, the interview method was adopted to enrich the knowledge of young Chinese migrants’ cross-cultural interactions and transition from school to work. It also facilitated “to unfold the meaning of their experiences” manifested in mediated communications (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

Aside from the interview method, textual analysis of young migrants’ online accounts was also employed as the “triangulation of methods increases (d) the validity of interpretation” (Hine 2000; Orgad, 2005). Most importantly, the choice of combining the two methods was driven by the nature of this particular research. The interview data contextualised participants’ internet use practices in the context of everyday life. That meant that, participants’ experiences online were embedded in their stories when conducting interviews. In this instance, the user-generated contents as the immediate experiences of using the internet were crucial to meaningfully interpreting the subjects’ conceptions of their media use.
3.2 Semi-structured In-depth Interview

This study is devoted to bringing out the research subjects’ lived experiences and their points of view on the internet use with specific focus on social capital. With this as the guiding principle, the whole data collection process commenced with semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview approach provided primary data for illustrating the transformations which digital technologies and mediated communication induced to the social capital development of young transnational Chinese migrants.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to approach young participants’ immediate experience of living in two sociocultural contexts. Aside from demographic questions, all other questions listed on the interview schedule were open-ended which gave the migrant youth ample freedom to describe their personal experiences in relation to the social capital topic. The semi-structured interviews also offered flexibility for making adaptations timely to the sequence of questions. The adaptations were important and necessary especially when the subjects reflected, discovered new aspects of specific themes and pointed out the dimensions which they perceived as deserving more research attention and inquires. Additionally, conducting in-depth interviews facilitated the researcher to capture the cognitive interpretations given by the participants on the studied phenomena. Meanwhile, the method also lent opportunities for the interviewer to acquire confirmation immediately from interviewees when inconsistent articulations occurred in the course of the interview.

Specifically growing up in the big boom of Chinese internet with free access to western-developed internet platforms, young Chinese migrants experienced changes of the mediated communication as much as it did in their migrating movements from China to New
Zealand. To investigate the dual transformations simultaneously impacting on the studied group, the interview method endowed the researcher chances to directly ask questions to the subjects, thus obtaining their understandings of the transformations on and offline (Markham, 1998).

3.2.1 Research Sample

This empirical study is also based on thirty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews with the young Chinese migrants in New Zealand. The criteria for recruiting interview participants included:

- Migrated as a family unit from mainland China;
- Moved to New Zealand during adolescence (13-17) and currently aged 18-30 years old;
- Had been living in New Zealand for 3 years or more.

I conducted the interviews in two major cities, i.e. Auckland and Wellington. Thirty out of the thirty-five interview participants were recruited in Auckland. The 2013 New Zealand Census released in the middle of my fieldwork. This latest Census showed that Auckland was the most culturally diverse region with more overseas-born residents than elsewhere in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand 2014). Moreover, an Auckland-based research identified that 72.8 percent of the China-born population\(^\text{14}\) Statistics New Zealand, "2013 Census QuickStats about Culture and Identity," http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-culture-identity/birthplace.aspx# (accessed 5/20, 2015). (i.e. 64,887) settled in Auckland (Friesen 2015). The above research

\(^{14}\) In 2013, the population of Chinese migrants who were born in People’s Republic of China (hereafter China) reached to 89,121.
further pointed out that, on average, Auckland’s Chinese population was very young, with those between 20 and 34 comprised the largest proportion of its total population. The participants recruited from Auckland immersed in its multicultural living environment, allowing them to easily reach co-ethnics and develop local networks across ethnicities. Therefore, I chose Auckland as the major site for interview participant recruitment. Wellington was the other site for sampling, where resided 16,344 ethnic Chinese according to 2013 census results (Statistics New Zealand). The lack of a sizeable co-ethnic community might lead to higher chances of intercultural communication among the participants from Wellington. In addition, the widely used ethnic Chinese online forum i.e. SKYKIWI being examined in this study only arranged one small sub-forum for its consumers living in the capital city, with combing all types of Wellington-based contents into that sub-forum. The relatively small size of Chinese population and the limited ethnic media contents available together might result in distinctions between Wellington interviewees’ online media consumptions and which of the Auckland counterparts. Based on the above reasons, I recruited five young Chinese migrants from Wellington to participate in my research.

The age at migration and the occupation status were two key factors which affected young migrants’ transitional life experiences and social network composition. This study purposely recruited interviewees with varying length of homeland school education and also pursued a balance between student and employee participants. I categorised the thirty-five interviewees by their highest education obtained pre-migration i.e. primary school education, junior middle school education and senior high school education. Eighteen interviewees immigrated with families when attending middle school, which accounted for the largest subgroup of my participants. The other fourteen young migrants had a slightly
longer schooling experience in China, allowing them to expand school-based networks over years. The remaining three participants left China with families at end of primary school education, leaving their only peer network formed at school in China. The overseas-born ethnic Chinese under fifteen made up a small proportion of the Chinese population in New Zealand, declining from 6.4 percent in 2006 to 4 percent in 2013 (Statistics New Zealand).

In this instance, it was not easy to recruit the migrants who were in their early adolescence at the time of migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at migration</th>
<th>New Zealand (Education at migration)</th>
<th>China (Highest education obtained)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary (Year 1-8)</td>
<td>Secondary (Year 9-13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Participant Recruitment

The participant recruitment was undertaken on and offline at the same time. On the one hand, I approached potential interviewees through personal networks and snowballing which were well-established methods in qualitative research. On the other hand, I put the research advertisements on both Chinese-language online platforms, such as SKYKIWI online forum, Weibo and the locally recognised SNS i.e. Facebook to call up participants. Interestingly, the majority of my interviewees (24 migrants) reached me through my online contact information which was acquired from either the advertisement or the third person (a referrer). Among them, twenty-two young migrants preferred using the Chinese mobile instant messaging i.e. WeChat for our initial contact and the formal interview arrangement. The other two migrants sent inquiry emails for privacy protection information at first and
switched to text the researcher via WeChat messages to confirm the time and place for interview. In comparison, only eight interviewees chose to contact the researcher through mobile text messages. The way in which young Chinese migrants joined in the research to an extent reflected their transforming information acquisition and the everyday communication habits.

Table 3. 2: Recruitment Methods and Sample Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Personal Network</th>
<th>Snowballing</th>
<th>Online Advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SKYKIWI Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first six student participants were recruited through personal networks in the Auckland region. Based on personal observation, the researcher found that the campus recreation centre was a place where a large number of young Chinese students paid regular visits after class. I also joined the social gatherings organised by a literature fun club which was comprised of some very sociable Auckland Chinese youth. Although the population was mixed up with considerable international students or ethnic Chinese from different home regions, the relatively diverse demographics increased the potential of spreading the research information to broader target audiences, especially in the initial stage of recruitment. However, the employee participants were unlikely to be found in the above occasions. In this instance, I sought to pass on the recruitment information to my fellow Chinese PhD students who had experiences of working with local Chinese employees on collaborative projects. As a result, my PhD peer network helped me find the first four qualified employee participants who showed interests in this research project and were willing to share their personal stories with me.
As to the Wellington region, it was even harder for the researcher, a new arrival in New Zealand at the time, to approach potential participants through an extremely localised network formed in Auckland. In the pilot interviews, I had emailed the recruitment advertisement with briefing my research project to six associations founded by the ethnic Chinese residing in Auckland and Wellington, including three university students’ associations and three location-based Chinese associations of the two cities. Despite that the participant recruiting information had been distributed and broadcast to members of these associations, I was rarely approached by the young Chinese members. A few active members did send the researcher personal emails to ask for detailing the topics being interviewed. However, they declined to join in the formal face-to-face interview after further negotiations. Reasons for their refusal include the lack of trust on the interviewer who was stranger to the youth and the unease to be interviewed in person. Although all the key information (i.e. the research topic, the interview procedure, data protection and the ethnics approval from the researcher’s university) was delivered in electronic files to potential participants, it turned out that the form of email contact was not as effective as it was supposed in convincing those young migrants to open up and share their lived experiences with the researcher whom they had never encountered offline. Few young Chinese migrants who met the recruitment criteria agreed to participate but only in the alternative form of mobile instant messaging interview (i.e. WeChat interview). They all showed unease and reluctance to converse with the researcher in a synchronous manner by proposing to conduct the interview in a mediated communication environment which allowed them to respond not immediately.
The second method employed was snowballing which enabled me to recruit eighteen participants in the two fieldwork sites, i.e. fourteen in Auckland and the other four in Wellington. Specifically, eight student participants and six employee participants were referred by prior participants in Auckland. Under the category of snowballing, the four young Chinese migrants recruited in Wellington were employee participants. The distinctions in occupation and location were likely to generate particularity in the media preference and use practices of the young migrant participants. To an extent, the relatively balanced number of participants in the two occupation categories could help avoid the homogeneity in participant composition of the snowballing group.

When conducting pilot studies, I also placed my research advertisements on the noticeboards in major buildings of both University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, expecting potential student participants to contact me. Not surprisingly, I had received little feedback after running the advertisement for more than two weeks. At the time, the researcher also made efforts to contact five local Chinese papers, and the Wellington-based NZ Chinese Press agreed to help advertise my recruitment information for free on their newspaper online. I had not succeeded in approaching potential interviewees through newspaper advertisements. In comparison, my advertisement placed on the local Chinese internet platform i.e. SKYKIWI online forum received about a hundred pageviews within one week. The first male student interviewee contacted me and expressed his willingness to participate in my research after reading the advertisement on SKYKIWI forum. After this successful attempt, I realised that online advertisements outperformed the printed flyers in attracting awareness from young migrants. I made minor modifications to the original advertisement to improve its readability on three selected online platforms (i.e. SKYKIWI forum, Weibo and Facebook). Meanwhile, the non-
edited version which was approved by the ethics committee was scanned and attached for viewers’ interest.

My intention of using SKYKIWI forum was to approach student participants in particular. For one thing, student users were more flexible to access the forum and spent longer time on it compared with those who worked full-time. It was of higher potential that my research advertisement could be seen by the student cohort. For another, SKYKIWI forum run a specific sub-forum named as Academic Forum for student users with categorising its posts by thirteen major universities and colleges in New Zealand. This forum provided a zero-cost environment for users to post and circulate study-related information. The academic-friendly mechanism helped promote the research information to the student population. Specifically, the research advertisement post was highlighted in red and pinned on the top of post lists for three days by the forum editor. In Auckland, three out of ten student users who met the requirements were recruited through SKYKIWI forum.

Apart from SKYKIWI forum, the researcher also spread the recruitment information to targeted Weibo users who had considerable young followers living in New Zealand. The targeted Weibo accounts included both ethnic media outlets and individual users. In particular, active Weibo users such as one international education consultant and one social marketing company CEO who ran business in the China market both reposted my Weibo advertisement within one day. The advertisement was also reposted with positive comments by an official account belonged to a Wellington-based Chinese newspaper. With the promotion of above Weibo users, two student participants and two employee participants saw the advertisement in the repost Weibo and sent me private WeChat messages to confirm their participation. The Weibo promotion significantly accelerated the
recruiting process in Wellington when the researcher failed to reach potential participants there by other means. Specifically, the first Wellington interviewee learnt about this research through the Weibo advertisement with referring another two young migrants to participate in my interviews at the meantime.

Likewise, I followed five public Facebook accounts owned by either university Chinese alumni clubs or local Chinese associations. From my observations, they all actively engaged with the followers and regularly posted social activities information on Facebook. I contacted the above official Facebook accounts privately for allowing me to post my recruitment advertisement on their home page without taking it down. Among them, Wellington New Chinese Friendship Association offered to write a Facebook post to help promote the recruitment information to its followers. However, compared to the Chinese-language platforms, the researcher did not receive positive response on the locally recognised platform i.e. Facebook. In terms of media selection, one possible reason for this negative result was that Facebook was not the preferred media path that the targeted subjects chose to connect with the local Chinese community. In all, seven young Chinese migrants were found through the online recruitment.

3.2.3 Interview Schedule Development

The design of my interview schedule was driven by the research purpose i.e. taking the media use perspective to research on young Chinese migrants’ social capital development. On the one hand, migrants’ relational maintenance has always relied on the use of communication technologies and been affected by their media selection and use practices (Vertovec 2004, 219-224; Bruneau 2010; Kissau and Hunger 2010). On the other hand, the targeted young migrants in my research were also known as digital natives whose information acquisition and communication modes have been transformed by their heavy
use of the internet and digital technologies. Therefore, I am determined to collect the youth subjects’ accounts on their online communicative activities with specific focus on their changing social capital post-migration.

The schedule was divided into two parts. The first part set out to collect demographic information of the participants, including their age, gender, age at migration and duration of residence in New Zealand. In addition, the interviewees were asked to provide information of their educational attainment in both home and host countries as well as their working experiences, occupational status at the time of interview. Before inquiring about their internet use, the first couple of demographic questions allowed participants to briefly review their migration process, creating the context for the following topical interview conversation.

The second part consisted of three sections which tended to approach the topic from three dimensions, namely, social network, resources and social interaction. The first section looked into participants’ migration experiences, including their personal (lived) experiences in the family setting, school setting, workplace and the larger society. Meanwhile, participants were invited to name the communication media platforms they frequented before migration and how their time was spent on the platforms. Later on, the researcher asked the interviewees to elaborate on their media choices for social purposes post-migration. The data collectively offered some important insights into the shaping effect of participants’ migration experiences on their transforming media preferences. In addition, the young migrants were encouraged to exemplify the particular characteristics of the chosen platforms which satisfied their needs for communicating with local and transnational contacts. Participants’ subjective accounts enabled a better understanding of
how the social affordances of communication media affected migrant youth’s media adoption, frequency and time of communication with dispersed social networks. The media preferences and the internet usage pattern (i.e. communication frequency and time) were essential to the assessment of young Chinese migrants’ social network maintenance and formation regarding the network size and tie strength of networks.

The network resources and support were topics of the second section. Specific focuses were placed on the types of resources, the acquisition and provision of resources through migrant youth’s goal-oriented media practices. The researcher asked interviewees to provide examples of the difficulties, trivial troubles which they were unable to cope with by their own in the early adaptation and later settlement. The difficult times that participants have experienced helped the researcher to identify the types of resources which young Chinese migrants desired to acquire. The young migrants were asked to illustrate the way they utilised communication media to address those difficulties. The interviewees’ answers enabled us to further understand how young migrants made use of the social affordances of selected internet platforms for resources acquisition. Meanwhile, the researcher invited participants to reflect the circumstances in which they were capable of offering help in any forms to network associates through internet communication. Participants’ self-reflections could deepen our insights in how the internet empowered the young migrants to act as the resource providers rather than passive receivers only.

The last section focused on Chinese migrant youth’s online social activities i.e. self-disclosure and interactive communication. Interviewees’ accounts for their purposive behaviours allowed us to comprehend the social interaction process which enacted the production and accumulation of social network and network resources from the youth.
perspective. Questioning about the depth and breadth of personal information that participants revealed as well as their predisposition towards the self-revelation helped understand young migrants’ online social behaviours for trust maintenance and establishment with their social contacts. In addition, the forms and the frequency of interactive communication were also investigated to enrich our knowledge on the reciprocal nature of migrant youth’s online social activities.

I have conducted four pilot interviews to test the scheduled questions as outlined above. Two female and two male Chinese migrants were interviewed, with their age at migration evenly distributed between thirteen and seventeen. Two major modifications were made to the interview schedule after the pilot test. First, I removed questions about one local mainstream media i.e. Twitter from the initial schedule. In the beginning, a comparison was proposed to made between Twitter and its Chinese counterpart Weibo regarding to young migrants’ weak-tie network building. However, the pilot interviews showed that Twitter was excluded from Chinese migrant youth’s preferred communication media, with none of the participants using Twitter for information acquisition or social purposes. Thus, it was unlikely to draw sufficient evidence for a discussion of migrant youth’s distinctive uses of local mainstream and homeland microblogging. Second, all the four participants paid annual visits back to China, which had a long-term effect on their homeland media use. As a consequence, I adapted the last section of my interview schedule, allowing migrant youth to talk more about their social interactions with homeland networks both on and offline.

3.2.4 Conducting Interviews

The interviews started with Auckland-based participants from February 2013 to August 2013 after receiving the ethics approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. The Wellington-based interviews were carried out in early
August 2013 when time was suitable to all the five participants and the Faculty Doctoral Research Fund was granted for supporting the field work trip.

In the beginning of each interview, I first introduced myself and my research project to the participant. The Participant Information Sheet and Content Form were also prepared for each interviewee. Meanwhile, the researcher spent three to five minutes informing the participant about the interview purpose and procedures, the digital recording of interview conversations, the use of data for the doctoral thesis and future publications, and the information confidentiality protection. The briefing facilitated the participants to have an overview of the interview and its research context. After the explanation, participants were asked to sign the Content Form for allowing me to continue the interview.

The interview last for no longer than two hours as mutually agreed by the interviewee and the researcher. All the thirty-five interviews were conducted dominantly in Mandarin Chinese according to participants’ preference. Speaking of their social life in New Zealand context, the migrant youth chose to express their feelings and viewpoints in English and then naturally switched back to Mandarin Chinese for the rest of the interview. As to the places for interviews, student interviewees chose to meet at a public café on campus and employee participants preferred to be interviewed near their workplace. Only one female participant was interviewed in her home where she was able to look after her one-year daughter conveniently. In the middle of the interview, participants reserved the right to ask topic-related questions which helped relieve their privacy concern and continued to share their personal story with the researcher. Within the next two weeks, the participants were free to withdraw the interview information they provided. The interview was conducted, transcribed and translated by the researcher herself. A copy of the interview transcript
would be sent to the participant on his/her request and the transcript was welcomed to be amended concerning factual errors.

Apart from the demographic questions, this semi-structured interview provided enough space for participants to think of and answer the open-ended questions in the main part of the interview. The majority of my participants, especially the female participants, tended to give responses and complete the interview by following the predetermined, thematic questions. In these instances, the researcher spent more efforts encouraging the young migrants to clarify their statements explicitly with specific examples. By contrast, some male participants left the suggested questions aside, articulated their conceptions of the research themes and summarised their answers in their own logic. Given the immediate meaning of participants’ answers were relevant, the researcher cautiously adapted the structured schedule and the sequence of the questions to “contribute dynamically to a natural conversational flow” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015: 158). More importantly, the above situation required the researcher to be very attentive to the information that participants have already offered and pose follow-up questions to assure all research themes were covered.

Introductory questions served to elicit spontaneous and rich descriptions from participants in relation to the research topic (ibid, 160). Probing for further, precise illustrations of the given, descriptive statements was crucial to acquiring young migrants’ cognitive clarification of specific research themes and the implicit message of their accounts. Specifically, when investigating the strength of young Chinese migrants’ social ties, it was common that the participants defined their local contacts as “close schoolmates” or “close co-workers”. The expressions of participants showed their general views towards the tie
strength theme; however, the responses were not accurate enough for evaluating the perceived intimacy which migrant youth held in their local social relationships. The researcher then repeated participants’ expressions and asked them to give precise, detailed explanations for the specific wording. In other cases, silence or pauses were intentionally employed for a slow-down in the conversation, stimulating participants to engage in further self-reflections and carry on the interview by themselves. At the end, the researcher concluded by summarising some main points obtained from each section of the interview, allowing participants to offer supplementary comments on my feedback and the overall research topic.

3.3 Collecting Online User-generated Content

Face-to-face interviews situated the researcher into the subjects’ offline living contexts, taking the subject oriented/centred perspective to understand their online social engagements as essential parts of everyday life. Importantly, to make sense of young migrants’ perceptions of their internet use and the use practice itself, there was a need to immerse into the online contexts in which the subjects engaged (Orgad, 2005). Therefore, this study also collected young Chinese migrants’ user-generated contents (UGC) online with permission.

Two practical concerns were also taken into account when deciding to gather online data. The first concern lied in the level of research subjects’ articulacy. Some participants, who were inarticulate in conversing face-to-face, were able to smoothly express themselves online. Whereas the others tended to talk about themselves more when meeting the interviewer in person, the latter group might be lurking online for most of the time. The second concern was the extent to which interviewees opened themselves to the researcher
with telling their lived experiences as detailed as possible. It was not unimaginable that some participants accepted the interview invitation; however, they were still cautious to the information given out and answered the interview questions in very short statements. Such circumstance was understandable as Herring (2005: 11), a media discourse researcher, suggested that “…CMD (computer-mediated discourse) allows users to choose their words with greater care, and reveals less of their doubts and insecurities, than does spontaneous speech”. One pilot interview with a female participant also verified my guess that she accepted my interview without hesitation. However, the interview did not go smoothly as the participant was only willing to share her insights on a very superficial level. However, this young migrant was very active in revealing herself in online contexts. In this instance, conducting qualitative textual analysis of UGC data was necessary to supplement the interview data for a comprehensive understanding of the participant’s internet use.

In the following section, I shall first introduce the Chinese-language social media which the migrant youth frequented and then I shall give a brief background of the mainstream media which they started to access post-migration.

3.3.1 Fieldwork Sites for Data Collection

Site 1: Weibo

The online data used in this research were collected on three social media platforms, namely, Weibo, Renren and Facebook. All the textual data of these three sites was accessible to the public. The first two platforms were developed in mainland China, and enjoys a large user base in Chinese young adults. Weibo is a Twitter-like microblogging service launched by
the Chinese internet company Sina in August 2009. According to Weibo’s recent quarterly financial reports, in September 2014, the monthly active users (MAUs) of Weibo was 167 million and the daily active users (DAUs) on average was 76.6 million. Among the 167 million MAUs of Weibo, 72 percent of them were young netizens aged 19 to 35.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weibo User</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post 80s</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 90s</td>
<td>19-25</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in this table, the major group of active Weibo users were born after 1980s or 1990s (Weibo Data Centre, 2015). In this study, all of the twenty-four participants who had Weibo accounts were in either Post 80s or Post 90s user group. In its profile webpage, Weibo highlights its powerful communication and social interaction functions/capacities as below,

“… Weibo provides an unprecedented and simple way for people and organizations to publicly express themselves in real time, interact with others on a massive global platform and stay connected with the world.” (Weibo Corp 2015a)

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17 Weibo Data Center, 2014 Weibo User Development Report Summary (Beijing, P.R.China: Weibo Corp,[2015]).
18 Ibid, p 6-10.
19 Initially, Weibo only provided simplified and traditional Chinese to the site users who were fluent in Chinese. The site finally introduced the partially English-language user interface (UI) in January 2013, which helped non-Chinese users to familiarise basic and technical features/functions of Weibo, thus facilitating social interactions in the global level. Steven Millward, "China's Sina Weibo Rolls Out Partial English Interface [UPDATE: Sina Confirms],” TECHINASIA, https://www.techinasia.com/sina-weibo-rolls-out-english-interface/ (accessed 5/12/2015, 2015).
The initially Twitter-like Weibo not only allows site users to create original textual contents (maximum 140 Chinese characters) also encourages uploading image attachments at the same time. With increasing in-site social features and social products from platform partners available, Weibo users are able to express themselves in multiple media forms, including music, short videos and long-form content (Weibo Corp 2015b). Attaching images have gained great popularity from Weibo users and has become a key form of self-expressions to users. According to Weibo official statistics, 69 percent of the Weibo posts have included image contents (Weibo Data Center 2015, 6-10). All the contents are broadcast to the public. For the twenty-four Weibo adopters in this research, Weibo has created a public arena for them to “stay connected” with pre-formed offline social networks, anonymous Chinese netizens and the Chinese-language cyberspace. The relationship between Weibo users can be asymmetrical, allowing ordinary users to forge connections with government agencies, organisations, media outlets, alumni clubs and leaderships in specific areas. First, migrant netizens can personalise their information providers/potential communicators on Weibo although the communication relationships are non-reciprocal. The self-tailored Weibo accounts which young Chinese migrants have followed enable them to acquire customised and up-to-date news and information directly from the informants which the migrants perceive as reliable and worthy of attention. Second, the trending topics shown in communication partners’ Weibo pages reflect their ever-changing focus in life, enriching the communication contexts for migrants and the communicators whom migrants care about. Despite the non-reciprocal relationships, the latent connections forged on Weibo offer young Chinese migrants the chances to have mediated interactions with influential figures, organisations and social groups and take part in the activities and events they create on the site.
Site 2: Renren

The other Chinese SNS, Renren, specifically serves as a campus networking tool for young Chinese migrants to maintain the bonds with their schoolmates met in different times. Renren which was previously named as Xiaonei\(^{20}\)(meant “On Campus”), initially targeted universities/colleges students, encouraging the students to network with others within the Xiaonei-created semi-public bounded system (Boyd and Ellison 2007). From November 2007 onwards, Xiaonei relaxed the registrations to allowing Chinese white-collar netizens and high school students to join the site. Renren as a campus SNS helped site users connect with school-based contacts and communicate primarily on school life, personal interests and trending topics with a network of peers growing up together. The site expanded to 1000 overseas universities in February 2008, attracting nearly 119,952 of registered users outside mainland China (excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) (Tencent Corp 2008). Different from the above-discussed Weibo, Renren promotes real-name social networking services which enable students and young migrants abroad to easily find and stay connected with offline friends by conducting searches using their friends’ names and their schooling information. Similar to its western counterpart Facebook, Renren allows site users to view their friends’ list of connections on the site. Renren users are more likely to get back in touch with many of their missing contacts through the visible connections and profiles.

In this study, eighteen of the thirty-five participants had Renren accounts and first logged in Renren between 2007 and 2009 when they started schooling in New Zealand. Meanwhile, social networking services enjoyed its fastest development in mainland China at the time.

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\(^{20}\) Xiaonei was founded on 8\(^{th}\) December, 2005 and was renamed as Renren on 14\(^{th}\) August, 2009. The activation procedure of Xiaonei accounts required either valid IP addresses or email addresses which confirmed the identity of an applicant as a student from the selected universities before November 2007.
According to CNNIC\(^2\), the number of mainland Chinese SNS users grew explosively from 176 million to 235 million in 2010. Despite a significant loss in young netizens, the CNNIC report showed that netizens who aged 20 to 29 still represented the dominant user group and accounted for 37.4 percent of the SNS users in 2010. Compared to other Chinese SNS brands, Renren strategically targeted college students who were the most active SNS user group in China. The accumulation of college student users and its vertically expansion to white collar professionals and high school students led to a total number of 122 million Renren users which accounted for 51.9 percent of the overall SNS users\(^2\) in China’s cyberspace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Internet Users (million)</th>
<th>SNS Users %</th>
<th>20-29 SNS Users %</th>
<th>Renren Penetration Rate%</th>
<th>Renren Usage Rate%</th>
<th>Renren Users (million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/12</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/12</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/12</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>49.5% (inc. Qzone)</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/07</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>33.4% (inc. Qzone)</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, fourteen of my research participants accessed Renren after enrolling in universities whereas the other four youth got on the site in high school. The limited interview data suggested that Chinese migrant youth’s post-migration media preference was not dramatically different from that of mainland Chinese youth. In the home country, young netizens chose to transfer their school-based contacts dispersed in different cities onto Renren so as to maintain the offline connections. Across two countries, all the eighteen young Chinese migrants also employed Renren as a “campus networking” tool to identify

\(^2\) CNNCI, 2010 China Social Network Sites Usage Report (Beijing: China Internet Network Information Center, [2011]).

\(^2\) Ibid, p 25.
their pre-migration schoolmates who were the principal members of these migrant youth’s homeland network.

**Site 3: Facebook**

In the context of New Zealand, SNS communication was still in its early development in 2007 and had not become netizens’ primary online communication path at the time. According to the World Internet Project New Zealand (WIPNZ) 2007 survey report, only 28 percent of the internet users visited social network sites (including Facebook), which was much lower than email users (77 percent) and IM users (34 percent). Within the small group of SNS users, over half of the active ones were young netizens under 30s who accessed the sites on a weekly basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Internet Users %</th>
<th>SNS Users /Internet Users %</th>
<th>SNS Users Under 30s %</th>
<th>Facebook Users /SNS Users %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1429</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1255</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speaking of SNS use, the number of young users under the age of 30 has been steadily growing since 2007. In many ways, SNS communication has gradually become as common as other media paths (e.g., text messages or phone calls) to the social relationship development among young New Zealanders. Meanwhile, the ratio of Facebook users had a marked increase and reached the peak (i.e. 96%) among the overall New Zealand SNS users in 2011.

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23 According to the WIPNZ 2007 report, the survey sample size was 1,121 and 78 percent of the participants were depicted as current internet users when the survey was conducted.  
26 The data in table 3 is extracted from four WIPNZ survey reports which respectively summarise the internet demographics of New Zealand from 2007 to 2013.
However, Facebook has been legally accessible to Chinese netizens\textsuperscript{27} for very short time. When it was still accessible, Facebook launched its Chinese language version in June 2008, seeking to expand its user base in China (Kiss 2008). From July 2009 onwards, the site was banned by the Chinese government and netizens could only visit Facebook by employing virtual private networks (VPNs) in mainland China. It was the same year when Chinese social network sites overwhelmingly penetrated into the everyday life of Chinese young netizens. As shown in table 2, almost one out of two Chinese SNS users was a young adult in 2009. The Chinese real-name SNS, i.e., Renren gradually took over the youth market with 76 million users increase in the next year. In other words, Chinese young netizens had alternative paths which functioned similarly as Facebook to connect and socialise with friends both at home and abroad. The hurdles of using Facebook has been a powerful deterrent. But an even more decisive factor for the declining popularity of Facebook amongst Chinese migrant youths is that their friends in China have difficulty accessing their posts.

As to the Chinese migrant youth, the vast majority of my research participants activated their Facebook accounts after high school so as to continuously interact with a few close-knit schoolmates. Some other important reasons also motivated these youth to keep active on Facebook in universities or after employed, for instance, joining a Facebook study group and forging new links in the work field. When the data collection was undertaken in 2013, young Chinese migrants held the same localised media preference as mainstream SNS users in New Zealand. Seven out of ten New Zealand netizens reported Facebook as their most-

\textsuperscript{27} In this study, Chinese netizens refer to the internet users residing in mainland China. Netizens from Hong Kong and Macao were not taken into consideration owing to the different regulations of the internet in Hong Kong and Macao SAR.
used social network site. Likewise, thirty-three of the total thirty-five research participants perceived Facebook as the first choice in terms of online communication in the host society. Take a close look at the SNS membership distribution, apart from Facebook, migrant youth had significantly different preferences in SNS adoption from which mainstream netizens of the host country held.

Figure 3. 1: SNS Membership Distribution in New Zealand in 2013

Figure 3. 2: SNS Membership of Thirty-Five Research Participants

28 A. Gibson et al., World Internet Project New Zealand: The Internet in New Zealand 2013 (Auckland, New Zealand: Institute of Culture, Discourse & Communication [2013]).

29 Ibid, p 12.
In other words, the cross-ethnic networking and interacting behaviours were more likely to take place on Facebook, the shared playground for all netizens including ethnic minority users. Therefore, this research took Facebook as the only English-language SNS monitoring site to study how using the mainstream SNS affected young Chinese migrants’ post-migration social capital building.

3.3.2 Data Gathering Process

The data collection of user generated online contents followed each interview with the young Chinese migrant. The interviewees’ online accounts gave me the opportunity to observe young Chinese migrants’ social interactions and self-expressions online. Such first-hand empirical data helped the understanding of how these migrant youth behave in their online social field apart from their self-reported perceptions of and attitudes to the internet-mediated social life. This research set out to collect the interviewees’ online accounts for a period of three months. The time span extended to ten months after the pilot interviews were completed. It was found that this group of young Chinese migrants’ regular return visits to mainland China had long-term impacts on their media preferences and practices. The transnational movements increased the frequency of these migrant youth’s interactions with homeland networks. The data collection involved interview participants’ online accounts on the above mentioned three platforms. The procedure would only start after obtaining the permission from each young migrant when conducting the interview. All the online data was accessible to public audiences. Specifically, the types of textual data encompassed status updates, reposting, tagging, multimedia content sharing and comments.
3.4 Analysis of Interview Data and Online Textual Data

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis of Interviews

This research employed a thematic analysis approach to identify, analyse and report patterns and themes of the interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen as a result of the researcher’s specific analytic interests in the interdisciplinary topic across media studies, migration studies and social capital research. The investigative process included transcribing interviews, generating initial codes, forming categories and themes as well as reporting the findings of interviews.

The analysis started from the transcribing of audio-recorded interviews into written form for codes, categories and themes production from the interview texts. Transcription as an interpretative act rather than a mere mechanical act was arguably a meaning-making phase within overall data analysis process (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). Besides transcribing the voice tapes, the researcher also set out to familiarise with the interview data by repeated reading and note-taking, generating ideas which would link interview data to the research questions. The second phase involved codes generation. The coding process was predominantly theory-driven i.e. “approaching the data with specific questions in mind that you (the researcher) wish to code around” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 89). In this study, the analytic questions encompassed features of migrant participants’ social connections, selection of online communication paths, kinds of interviewees’ social use of the internet, their internet use habits and characteristics of young migrants’ user-generated contents etc. A complementary inductive approach was also adopted for codes identification. This data-driven coding approach assisted the researcher to find the code i.e. a feature of the data, which was rooted in the subjects’ detailed accounts. For instance, “job hunting” was an
initial code generated by the theoretical approach. While re-reading the interview texts around this code several times, I found another featured aspect i.e. the specific types and the nature of jobs repeatedly occurred in young Chinese migrants’ responses. Notably, a similarity was recognised concerning types and the nature of participants’ choosing major/specialty in the college. The shared feature of the data drove me to search for the linkage which might be a potential, supplementary code for interview interpretations. In this case, the communication partners whom young migrants discussed regarding the two mentioned situations were found to be the same groups of people i.e. homeland and co-ethnic peers. These interviewed young migrants’ accounts showed their interests and concern about how the peers from the same ethnic background chose and perceived specific types of jobs and college specialties. The interests and care manifested the information needs of young Chinese migrants in terms of reference frame formation, and the information was acquired through their online communication with targeted contacts. Therefore, I decided to add “reference frame” as another code which was likely to help answer the resources-related research questions of this study.

The third phase moved to categorising codes and themes formation. First, the researcher revisited all the emerging codes, analysed how the codes were interrelated under the research topic and then organised the codes into meaningful categories. Second, forming themes required the researcher to analyse and identify distinctions between the categories in a broader context i.e. the entire data set rather than the data extracts. The third step was to map the themes after carefully thinking about the relations between each theme and the main research questions.
In the last phase, the researcher reported the analysis results according to the identified themes and a selection of interview data extracts. The three themes shown in Table 6 were generated with each theme addressing one research question. Specifically, data extracted under the first theme served to capture the research subjects’ distinctive internet use patterns (i.e. media preferences and usage of selected platforms) and explain their social implications on this studied group of internet users’ network building. Findings from the second theme uncovered the degree of activeness of the Chinese migrant youth concerning their acquisition and provision of resources through various online medium. Analysis results of the third theme elucidated the impacts of young migrants’ online activities on their social interactions offline in home and host countries.
3.4.2 Qualitative textual analysis of User-generated Content

This study took a directed analysis approach to cope with the online textual data (Hsieh et al., 2005). The codes were generated prior to the analytic process. In this specific research, the initial codes were produced in the interview analysis process, based on the specific topics which emerged during the interviews. As the analysis continued, supplementary codes could also be generated when the initial ones were found to be insufficient to cover specific features of the textual data. Notably, the textual analysis of online data was originally designed for the investigations of social interaction dimension. The researcher intended to combine the online textual data with the interview data so as to “capture the multi-faceted nature of users’ experience” (Orgad, 2005: 53). As a consequence, the findings generated from the two methods would be analysed and examined together in Chapter six. In the middle of the online data collection, the researcher found that the user-generated contents (UGCs) which characterised the give-and-take of resources on Weibo could be coded into the second theme i.e. Types and transmission medium of resources”. Therefore, textual data featured resources acquisition was incorporated into the analysis of participants’ articulations of their goal-orientated media practices in Chapter five.

3.5 Reflections on Conducting a Qualitative Research

The research design was developed based on a comprehensive review of literature in migration studies, media studies and social capital research. As to the interviews, I set specific criteria for recruiting young Chinese migrants to participate in my research. An interview schedule was designed as a guide to conducting interviews. I revised some questions listed in the initial schedule based on feedback from the first four pilot interviews. Sufficient time was allocated to each interview in order to cover all the questions and gather young migrant participants’ subjective accounts as detailed as possible.
As a migrant netizen, I was familiar with and used all target internet platforms that my research participants frequented in daily life. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I formed connections with my interviewees through China-based internet platforms i.e. QQ and WeChat, which facilitated me to arrange time and place to interview the young migrants in person. In the middle of each interview, I asked the participant for consent so as to connect with them on other social media which were being researched in this project. In addition, I shared my personal experiences of using different types of platforms with the participants. The similar cultural background and the shared experiences of social media use pre- and post-migration helped close the emotional distance between the researcher and the interview participants who had no prior contact with each other before the interviews. By doing so, I was able to build a good rapport with the interview participants, making them feel comfortable and willing to disclose their perceptions and experiences of using the internet in relation to their personal social relationships. In addition, I continued observing the participants’ online activities on the research platforms, which allowed me to better understand their specific media use habits.

While conducting this research, I joined in an academic study group to discuss my project with fellow PhD students from various research backgrounds. I shared my research proposal, fieldwork experiences and empirical findings with researchers from media studies, sociology and political science. By doing so, I was able to request and receive valuable feedback from different perspectives on my research design and interview question development. Moreover, the study group members provided me with critical suggestions with respect to the analysis of the interview data and Chinese translation of specific interview quotes.
I employed the abovementioned strategies to ensure the credibility and validity of this qualitative research. Despite that, the interpretations of the research data and its analysis varied from person to person and were highly dependent on contexts (Julien, 2008). In this instance, I invite and appreciate readers to evaluate this qualitative research based on their own lived experiences and perceptions of this research topic and the particular group of research subjects in my PhD project.
Chapter Four: Charting social networks

This chapter investigates how the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants maintain or form social networks across internet platforms post-migration. In this research, the Chinese migrant youth engage in online social activities on various types of internet platforms. The online platforms vary from instant messaging (IM), online forums, microblogging to social network sites (SNS). In addition, the Chinese migrant youth are able to simultaneously use homeland, local Chinese and global internet platforms to fulfil their needs of social networking. By examining the use of specific online platform(s), this research provides insight into the impacts that the internet exerts on the social connectivity of the Chinese migrant youth in New Zealand.

The research findings of this chapter are drawn from the in-depth interviews conducted with thirty-five Chinese migrant youth. This study employs the interview approach to explore the reasons that young Chinese migrants give for their internet platform preferences regarding social network development. It also allows us to understand the perceived tie strength of these migrant youth’s transnational and local social networks.

Chapter Four consists of four sections which examine the young Chinese migrants’ internet usage and the respective impacts on their social network development in New Zealand and China. The first section illustrates the way that Chinese migrant youth utilise all available means to maintain their co-ethnic ties in the host country. The second section presents how the migrant youth employ global internet platforms to forge links with local contacts across ethnic groups in New Zealand. The third section looks into the impacts of China-based
internet platforms on Chinese migrant youth’s homeland network maintenance. The last section summarises the relations between young Chinese migrants’ internet use patterns and their social network development.

4.1 Co-ethnic Network in New Zealand

In this research, the young Chinese migrants purposively use both homeland and local ethnic online media to build co-ethnic network in the host country. Previous studies have centred the research focus on how ethnic media influenced migrants’ social relationship development within the ethnic community (Song and Park 2006; Chen, 2010). The role that homeland online media might play in forming migrants’ co-ethnic ties is under-researched. Whether the China-based platforms can also exert an impact on this cohort of migrants’ social network building locally or not, it will be discussed in this section. Apart from this, the ethnic Chinese internet platforms can also be important alternatives to fulfil the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants’ needs of social networking in the host society. Therefore, I will respectively examine the role that each of the communication paths plays on young Chinese migrants’ social network building in New Zealand. Based on the interview data, my research found that the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants have made the most use of the China-based internet platforms to build up social connections with local ethnic Chinese contacts in New Zealand. All the thirty-five interviewees employed the China-based instant messaging and social network site to connect with their ethnic Chinese contacts in the host society. In this research, QQ is the homeland instant messaging which helps Chinese migrant youth to network with other ethnic Chinese in New Zealand.

4.1.1 Existing Co-ethnic Tie Maintenance

The Chinese migrant youth utilised the homeland instant messaging QQ as the primary internet-based communication tool to maintain their co-ethnic tie which was formed offline.
With regard to the QQ use, an interviewee Alice (F 20 PR) offered an example which showed how QQ use facilitated her to build a direct, personal social connection with another ethnic Chinese classmate in the same university. She said that,

“When I was in the university, I used to join in a QQ chat group. All the members were from the department of Computer Science, took the same course and were all ethnic Chinese. I accepted the friending request from a member A of this chat group and then we started to have one-to-one private chat later on. The conversation on QQ was quite a pleasure to me. After chatting privately for a few times, we met with each other more often after class, talked with each other in person and became very good friends with each other.”

According to her interview account, Alice was not familiar with her classmate A because the large size of the course made it not easy to have direct conversations with other classmates. Fortunately, both the interviewee Alice and her classmate A used QQ and belonged to the same QQ-based chat group. The QQ-facilitated connection increased the possibility of having direct communication between the young migrant and her ethnic Chinese classmate. Meanwhile, the online conversation via QQ helped this communication pair to know each other better. Hence, the use of homeland instant messaging played a positive role in developing the young migrant participant’s classmate relationship into friendship relationship.

Some other interviewees perceived the homeland mobile instant messaging WeChat as important to strengthening their social ties with offline co-ethnic friends. For example, a
female interviewee Olivia (F 27 NZ) shared her view on how WeChat use enhanced the strength of tie with her co-ethnic friends in New Zealand. She explained that,

“My Chinese friends (in New Zealand) and I created several different chat groups on WeChat. Each one caters to our different needs. For example, we had a happy-weekend group, a high-school group as well as a chat group for our university friends. For me, WeChat is a very convenient platform to contact and communicate with my Chinese friends here (in New Zealand).”

Apart from instant messaging, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants also sought to use other China-based SNSs to build up their ethnic Chinese networks in New Zealand. Helen (F 23 PR) pointed out the great popularity of Renren among her ethnic Chinese friends that,

“From my experience, almost all the Chinese (who came to New Zealand at a similar age) they have Renren accounts. Though there are many other choices, we still (Helen and her local Chinese friends) prefer to communicate through the site of Renren.”

It was found that nearly half of the interviewees used both the China-based IM and SNSs simultaneously to keep connected with co-ethnic friends and to interact with them in daily life. Frank (M 24 PR) commented on his regular contact with ethnic Chinese friends on WeChat and Renren that,

“I use both Renren and WeChat to keep in touch with my Chinese friends in New Zealand. These friends and I moved to New Zealand at similar age and we share
similar migration background. We all see China-based internet platforms as the primary communication tool to contact with ethnic Chinese friends here (in New Zealand). So we choose to use Renren and WeChat to interact with each other online.”

4.1.2 Forging Connections with Co-ethnics

The above examples showed us how young Chinese migrants maintained their offline co-ethnic ties by using homeland online media. Aside from this, the migrant youth simultaneously adopted local Chinese and homeland internet platforms to forge new connections with other co-ethnics in the host country. The internet platforms examined here included the ethnic Chinese online forum (SKYKIWI forum) and the China-based IM, i.e. QQ. For instance, Derek (M 21 PR) who has immigrated to New Zealand for nearly 6 years said that,

“I found one QQ chat group on the University of Auckland sub-section of SKYKIWI forum. It welcomed all the first year Chinese students (in the University of Auckland) to join the chat group. … Later on, we (Derek and other QQ group members) became friends offline and hang out together.”

Existing research has demonstrated that the ethnic media enabled online social space significantly enhanced the communication between migrant netizens (Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist, 2010: 259). As discussed previously, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants were able to network with ethnic Chinese peers by continuously using the China-based platforms. To this cohort of Chinese migrants, the ethnic Chinese media did play an important role in co-ethnic network formation. However, it was only seen as an entry point. Most interviewees who intended to expand their ethnic Chinese networks preferred to
access SKYKIWI forum at first, searching for QQ chat groups which were based in New Zealand. Then the migrant youth shifted to use the homeland instant messaging to internet with the newly-built co-ethnic ties.

Similarly, Eric (M 21 PR) who kept using QQ after migration also actively used SKYKIWI forum to search for information about QQ chat groups based on Auckland. He gladly talked about how he further used QQ – his favourite internet platform – to socialize with his ethnic Chinese peers first knew from the forum:

“First, I use SKYKIWI forum very often. It’s a useful tool for the Chinese in New Zealand. I joined some Auckland-based QQ chat groups which I found from the SKYKIWI forum. We (Eric and other QQ members) not only chatted online, also, we met each other offline. I think this is a good way to socialize with more people in New Zealand.”

The two interviewees above were both university students. Their combined use of SKYKIWI forum and QQ particularly helped them to build up social networks with ethnic Chinese in the university setting. However, the network diversity did not increase with the size of these migrants’ ethnic Chinese networks. In other words, these young migrants’ ethnic Chinese networks composed of only a certain number of ethnic Chinese students attending the same university. Actually, the potential that SKYKIWI forum brought to migrant netizens’ diverse networks within the Chinese community was far beyond that. In other cases, some interviewees who sought to reach out of their school or work setting tended to make more effort in using the SKYKIWI forum. For example, Iris (F 25 NZ)
explained how she searched for all sorts of chat group information from different sections of the SKYKIWI forum. She expressed her view that,

“SKYKIWI forum helped me to make a lot of friends outside school. Especially when I was a new arrival here (in New Zealand), I first went to SKYKIWI forum to search and join various QQ chat groups which were all based in Auckland. Well, the groups were founded for different aims. For example, I joined a chat group in which our group members discussed daily shopping in Auckland. Some of the members and I became friends and we went shopping together offline.”

Though all the QQ chat groups are locally based in Auckland, Iris has developed a more diverse ethnic Chinese networks beyond the ones she socialises with offline. She is found to make the most use of SKYKIWI forum – the ethnic media – as her entry point to network with a larger and more diverse group of ethnic Chinese in New Zealand. Mike (M 22 PR) who is waiter believes that the intense workload and limited social opportunities in the workplace leads to his small and simple-structured social networks offline. He stressed the changes that using SKYKIWI forum and QQ have brought to his ethnic Chinese network building in the host society,

“I’ve made many friends via QQ chat groups here (in Auckland). Well, I mean I first found these chat groups on SKYKIWI forum, in different sections. These chat groups I’ve learnt on SKYKIWI forum catered to our Chinese in various aspects, i.e. party-weekend, karaoke-together, etc. In New Zealand, I think QQ is a quite powerful platform for ethnic Chinese to socialize and make friends.”
4.2 Local Network across Ethnic Groups

In this section, I will analyse how the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants employ the global internet platforms, i.e. MSN and Facebook to connect with local social networks in New Zealand. Each of the platforms has been used by these migrant netizens to fulfil different socialization needs. The actual internet use practice of these young Chinese migrants and the driving forces vary from their early migration to the recent years. In the early years of migration, the globally used MSN has been a major place on the internet for young Chinese migrants to socialize with people outside the ethnic Chinese community in New Zealand. The IM-featured MSN facilitates the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to form the intimate but small size of cross-ethnic networks. For example, Helen (F 23 PR) has started to use MSN to communicate with friends from different ethnicities since 10 years ago. She explained that,

“All my contacts on MSN are living in New Zealand, they might not be Chinese. Generally, I’ve got more friends from other ethnicities i.e. Kiwis, Koreans, etc. They are all my high school friends. I think it was the quickest way for me to make friends in a new social and cultural environment. Also, it was very limited to contact others if I didn't use MSN, even in the early 2000s. Well, I also had friends from Hong Kong, because they couldn’t speak mandarin very well. But we could communicate in English instead.”

Also, another interviewee, Iris (F 25 NZ) particularly compared her use of two IM platforms – QQ and MSN in the similar span of time. She pointed out that,
“During the earlier 2 or 3 years, I have more contacts on MSN compared to QQ. For me, MSN is better for communication because I can add all my friends (I knew offline) from different ethnicities on a single platform. They are local Kiwis, Indians, or other ethnicities.”

In terms of local social networks building, this practice of young Chinese migrants’ using MSN is quite different from how they use the China-based IM, i.e. QQ. The later has been discussed in the last section to illustrate how it has been used to generate a large size of ethnic Chinese networks beyond migrants’ offline contacts. In comparison, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants only make the most use of the global counterpart – MSN – to connect with their cross-ethnic contacts who they already knew in their offline life. The diversity of migrants’ social networks developed in this way is limited. Blair (F 27 PR) explained that,

“Actually they (MSN interactants) are almost Asians, because I contact more frequently with my Asian friends offline in daily life. For me, I would never add any strangers on MSN, no matter they are Chinese or other ethnicities. Only when I thought our (Blair and her interactants) relationships were close enough, I would ask for their MSN contact information. Statistically, my contacts on MSN are more likely to be ethnic Chinese from Singapore, Malaysia, etc.”

In rent years, the widely used global SNS, i.e. Facebook has also become a major path for the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to build up social networks across ethnicities in New Zealand. Compared to the IM-featured MSN, Facebook is more likely to help these migrant netizens develop both larger and more diverse cross-ethnic networks. For example, Frank
(M 24 PR) stressed the importance of Facebook to his connections with friends outside the ethnic Chinese community in New Zealand. He said that,

“I opened the Facebook account because I want to find my foreign friends in my high school here. In New Zealand, using Facebook is the most convenient way to find and contact them.”

Another interviewee, Iris (F 25 NZ) who used Facebook on a daily base clearly pointed out how she used Facebook to expand her non-Chinese social networks in New Zealand. She explained that,

“I use Facebook because I can reach more people. For example, I add a friend who has mutual friends with me. My friends’ friends might also be recommended to me on my Facebook homepage. … Well, they generally cannot speak Chinese, so it’s more convenient for us to communicate in English. I’d like to add new friends from various ethnicities through these ways. Facebook just very efficiently helps me to expand my social networks in New Zealand.” (Iris, F 25 NZ)

Apart from the connections and communications that Facebook afford between the young Chinese migrants and their current interactants from other ethnicities. The 1.5 generation Chinese migrants also emphasize the potential that Facebook can bring to their long-term social relationships building in the host society. Among them, one interviewee’s view is very revealing. Nelly (F 22 NZ) said that,
“If Facebook doesn’t exist, I would never be able to contact with my foreign friends in high school. Don’t laugh, it is true. From my own experience, all the people in New Zealand use Facebook. In terms of online communication, Facebook offers me an alternative to stay in touch with my colleagues in the future. In other words, if I wanted to, Facebook would help me to build up much stronger ties with others or to maintain the social relationships with people in the long run.”

4.3 Homeland Network Maintenance

As the internet gives more opportunities of communication, migrants manage to more easily build up social networks both in the home and host countries. In the early adolescence, 1.5 generation Chinese migrants primarily utilise instant messaging (i.e. QQ) to sustain their local friendships in China. After migration, their continuous use of QQ and other social media platforms facilitates the 1.5 generations to maintain established homeland ties. The temporal and spatial restraints on their social network building have been greatly weakened by the online communication. The communication patterns of these 1.5 generations display differences over time in the online social space. It has partly to do with the increasing sociability, interactivity and mobility that each social media platform can afford in the web 2.0 era. In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate how 1.5 generation Chinese migrants utilise homeland platforms to maintain their existing networks in China.

Among the various options, 1.5 generation Chinese migrants still prefer Chinese internet platforms to connect with their contacts in China. The communication paths vary from e-mail, instant messenger to social network sites. These young Chinese migrants’ preferences for particular types of paths and their usage of them both have gradually changed over time since their arrival. E-mail has been adopted by
The increasing use of Chinese SNSs enhances young Chinese migrants’ ties with their existing contacts in China. For the same purpose, e-mail has been adopted by a small number of young Chinese migrants when they were new arrivals in the host society. Instant messaging remains to be a major platform for most of them to connect with the homeland networks. That is to say, the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants purposely select different China-based platforms to keep homeland ties alive post-migration.

4.3.1 Instant messaging: Small intimate networks

The 1.5G Chinese migrants primarily use China-based IM to connect with a small intimate homeland network. The average size of this intimate network afforded by IM is three to five contacts. It includes these migrants’ family networks and close-knit peer networks. The China-based IM here refer to QQ and WeChat where migrants and homeland communicators engage in more intimate conversations (Anabel Quan-Hasse and Alyson L. Young, 2010). As digital natives, all the 35 interviewees reported that they had access to the internet at an early age (around 12) pre-migration. Apart from one exception\(^{30}\), thirty-four of them identify QQ to be the medium through which close kinship and friendship in China have been sustained post-migration. Twenty-six of the participants utilized QQ to communicate with friends weekly when they were in China. They continued using it to maintain the homeland ties when first arrived in New Zealand. The other nine participants were suggested by either schoolmates in China or migrants from mainland China to register QQ accounts after migration. Their use of QQ is found to mainly satisfy the communication needs with homeland contacts. In other words, the homeland ties are not diminished immediately after the interviewees’ leaving mainland China.

\(^{30}\) Due to software configuration faults, Olivia (F 27 NZ) is the only exception who sends emails to contact her three close friends in China in her early adaptation to New Zealand.
First, the synchronous communication through IM enables young Chinese migrants to maintain their geographically separated networks of family and friends in China. By utilizing QQ, the synchronicity of IM allows text messages transmitted immediately between migrants and their homeland communication partners (Nancy K. Baym, 2010). The IM-enabling deterritorialised social space enhances young Chinese migrants’ sense of connectivity with homeland ties. Four-fifths of the interviewees have retained the habit of utilizing QQ to communicate with families and friends in China. As Eric (M 21 PR), a postgraduate who immigrated to New Zealand at the age of 16, explains:

“I add my parents, grandparents and my cousin on the QQ contact list. My grandparents and I have video chat fortnightly. And I send text messages to my mom. We always communicate in Chinese. The conversation is just the same as what I had with my families before I went overseas.”

Engaging in real-time conversations also offers possibilities for these migrants to involve in lives of their homeland networks. The synchronous mode of communication supports young Chinese migrants to maintain intimacy and proximity with family networks across distance. For instance, Cindy (F 20 PR), who now lives with her father in Auckland, describes the regular communication with her mother staying in China that, “Normally, mom and I arrange a time to chat on QQ every week. Whatever tiny stuff she come across in China, she always shares with me in details when we text to each other on QQ.”

Some respondents, such as Alice (F 20 PR), who immigrated to New Zealand for family reunion, claim to actively and continuously communicate with her two close friends in China:
“It’s been nearly ten years since I started to use QQ in China. But I only communicate with two close friends (in China) after migration. If we are both online, I will actively text them to start the conversation. I’d like to arrange my schedule to communicate with them because they are my good friends. I always tell them what has happened to me here (in New Zealand) – good or bad – because I feel closer with them.”

Second, the use of IM is primarily to fulfil migrant netizens’ communication needs with a small size of networks. Specifically, the average size of 1.5G Chinese migrants’ homeland networks afforded by QQ is three contacts. The maximum turns out to be five contacts. Twenty-nine of the interviewees who are still using QQ to contact their homeland networks come to the similar conclusion. To illustrate, Jack (M 28 NZ), who has resided in New Zealand for over 14 years, emphasizes the actual number of his QQ contacts in China:

“Well, I would talk with my friends in China if I log in QQ. But the number of my friends whom I still communicate with via QQ is only two. I keep the connections with these two close friends all the time. The one-to-one synchronous communication via QQ makes me have the similar feeling of intimacy.”

Similarly, Derek (M 21 PR) also mentioned the small number of his homeland contacts on QQ. He said, “Of all the friends I have in China, I only have contact with two very good friends through QQ. They’re my classmates in the middle school. Our friendship used to be very close before I left China.” The synchronous media, i.e. QQ enables young Chinese migrants to maintain their existing friendships built up during their early adolescence in
China. As Mike (M 22 PR), who only finished half of the middle school education in China, put it:

“In terms of homeland networks, apart from relatives, I only have contact with some middle school classmates through QQ. We’ve grown up together and become very close friends at school. Despite of migration, the friendship between us is important to me. Well, the size of my close friend networks in China is really small. The number is less than 5 people.”

In recent years, voice messages and images are transmitted more than text messages through young Chinese migrants’ use of IM. The auditory and visual cues embedded in the messages offer social contexts for migrant users to meaningfully interpret messages (Baym, 2010). Also, the multiple forms of messages allow migrants’ long-distance communication to be more intimate and tangible. (Rianne Dekker and Godfried Engbersen, 2013). Among 1.5G Chinese migrants, the use of WeChat fulfils their needs to send/receive more ‘tangible’ messages instantaneously to/from their homeland networks. Rather than phatic communication, migrants’ conversation with distant homeland contacts goes to more detailed discussions. The communication details involve either daily mundane life or memorable life events of these people who are geographically separated. The impact of locality on migrants’ homeland network maintenance is alleviated.

A few interviewees, such as Nelly (F 22 NZ), who immigrated to New Zealand right after her primary school graduation, uses WeChat to keep connecting with a small size of homeland ties. She explains:
“My homeland network includes few close friends I first met in New Zealand. They come from mainland China and have gone back to China for career. We use WeChat to communicate with each other very often. They show me whatever they are doing at any places in China. I feel close to these friends because we can always send voice messages to each other through WeChat. I feel just more involved with their life.”

The mobility of WeChat also motivates 1.5G Chinese migrants to communicate with their homeland networks. Thirty-three of the interviewees have installed WeChat on their smartphones. And they all utilize WeChat to communicate with homeland networks or local Chinese in New Zealand every day. The use of WeChat facilitates young Chinese migrants to have person-to-person communications with homeland contacts regardless of location (Barry Wellman, 2001; Baym, 2010). The mobile-based IM, i.e. WeChat makes migrant netizens’ long-distance communication more instantaneous. The transmission of messages become increasingly immediate and convenient compared to the web-based QQ. The deterritorialised social space improved by WeChat enables young Chinese migrants to virtually co-present with friends in the social events underway across distance. The virtual co-presence activates migrant netizens to interact with homeland ties after migration. Moreover, the WeChat-enabling online interaction helps to reinforce 1.5 generation Chinese migrants’ bonds and connections with their homeland networks.

Also, the IM-featured WeChat has been found to be crucial for some young Chinese migrants to rebuild connections with pre-existing social networks in China. Among the cases, Olivia (F 27 NZ)’s experience is very extreme but revealing. What makes it extreme is her failure to connect with friends in China when she first arrived in New Zealand. The
unsolved computer configuration errors led to no access to QQ on Olivia’s laptop. During the first 3 years after migration, she couldn’t have the routine chat with friends in China as before. She said that,

“When I got my QQ contacts back (after three-year high school in Auckland), we (Olivia and her homeland contacts) transferred to use WeChat instead. WeChat is much easier for contact because it doesn’t require us to type messages. But I only added my very few good friends on WeChat. They are all my close friends in the middle school.”

In general, over thirty of the young Chinese migrants reported their use of China-based IM as a daily routine activity after migration. Scholars suggest that the synchronicity of IM effectively closes up the psychological and emotional distance between those who are being physically apart (Nancy K. Baym, 2010: 8). Apart from the merit of synchronicity, the China-based IM has also developed to fulfil these migrant netizens’ communication needs with increasing sociability. It further weakens the negatives of spatial dispersal on the migrants’ bonding relationships maintenance. The possibilities that instantly transmitted messages – in multiple forms – bring to migrant netizens’ social relationships contribute to their pre-existing social ties the most. In this sense, the young Chinese migrants benefit from using the China-based IM for their retaining social relationships pre-existed. However, the platforms are only able to afford the social networks in a rather small scale.

4.3.2 Social network sites: Larger networks for acquaintances
The interviewees also make the most use of SNSs which are China-based so as to maintain their pre-formed social connections in China. The platforms include the earlier Qzone, Renren to the currently most adopted Sina Weibo. Notably, none of these migrant netizens expressed their willingness to use China-based SNSs to initiate new friendships with new
people in the homeland. In a large scale, the platforms help to sustain the social relationships with those who were already known offline. In other words, the use of China-based SNSs also has little impact on expanding young Chinese migrants’ bonding social network size in China. One interviewee Olivia (F 27 NZ)’s response is very direct and clear. She said that,

“As to Renren, they (the contacts) are all my friends in the middle school (on the site). It (the use of Renren) was quite targeted. I decide to use it because I want to find them (my classmates) and keep in touch with them. That’s it.”

Different from IM, SNSs provide wealthy social cues and relational contexts to facilitate interactions between netizens and their homeland communicators. The China-based SNSs mentioned above cater to the young Chinese migrants’ communication needs from the following three aspects.

First, the social information available on the SNSs enables migrant netizens to stay informed of their friends’ activities in China and vice versa. A variety of cultural, social and interpersonal contexts are brought into the communication. The SNSs are also suited to hosting either synchronous or asynchronous communication between the migrant site users and their friends. (ref.) Thus, it becomes much easier for the young Chinese migrants to start or continue the interaction with friends in China. Frank (M 24 PR), a Business School graduate in Auckland, was a veteran to manage his social networks through SNSs. In his view, the China-based SNSs have influenced his maintaining pre-existing social networks in a very different way compared to which IM offered. Frank explained,
“On the site (Renren), there’re no such contacts which have to be maintained intentionally. I mean things like, ‘How are you? Well, I’m fine. Have you had lunch yet?’ wouldn’t happen here. Well, when they shared something on the site, I would think about why they posted the contents and left my comments behind. Then we might catch up a bit.”

As we can see, Renren plays a catalyst role to maintain the interviewee’s social connections with their homeland friends meaningfully and continuously. Another interviewee, Eric (M 21 PR) shared a similar view referring to his use of Qzone, a pioneer social network site in the early 2000s in China. He said that,

“I think this (the ShuoShuo embedded in Qzone, which is similar as the status-update on Facebook) is more interactive. Well, if you use IM to have a chat with them (homeland interactants) directly, the conversation would run out quickly, it’s really embarrassing. However, if we leave comments and replies under each other’s ShuoShuo, our communication can last for a bit longer. It helps to create topics of interest for us. Well, it just keeps us interacting with each other. I feel pretty good about using it.”

The SNSs enable migrant netizens to maintain a larger size of their pre-existing social networks with less effort. Without real-time communication, migrant netizens are also included in the “social know” by the SNSs (quote). That is to say, all the social information is broadcast to the entire social network to which migrant netizens have connected online. The SNSs-supplied social information fulfils migrant site users’ communication and socialization needs with friends far afield. It helps to reinforce the young Chinese migrants’
sense of membership in their pre-existing networks in China. Olivia (F, 27, NZ) who has resided in Auckland for over 11 years explained concretely for her frequent use of Renren as below,

“On the site (Renren), we, the whole class (in the middle school) are connected together. I also added my classmates in primary school as well. … I went on the site and refreshed the news feed very frequently to see what happened (to friends in China). Well, when I found some of them who have recently posted interesting stuff, I would ‘Like’ it and gave my comments. Then we might have a casual chat after that.”

Apart from this, SNSs also promote migrant netizens to generate contents as well as to conduct interactive activities with friends on the same sites. Both types of activities are likely to reinforce migrant netizens’ sense of connectedness with people in the homeland. The migrant user-generated contents embrace a variety of self-disclosed activities. For instance, update status, post photos of themselves as well as repost from third parties which relate to their interests. Frank (M 24 PR) offered his view on generating contents on a China-based SNS, i.e. Renren for a large size of homeland peers that,

“Earlier, I wrote blogs on Renren regularly. Well, later, I reposted the same contents with a new title. … I don’t want to spend too much time on the site. You know, I just want to make it (his homepage) rich in content. Then let my friends (in China) know I am still there and still alive. They are all my classmates in primary and middle school.”
All the updates that migrant netizens have made are automatically shown on each of their friends’ news feed. The interviewees have had their presence/attendance in the homeland interactants’ social life in a virtual way. With the clickable contents, both the interviewees and their friends in China are able to catch up each other’s daily life bit by bit. The self-disclosed activities or interactive activities do not necessarily require migrant netizens and their homeland interactants to be simultaneously online. It generally depends on the interactants’ availability. Moreover, the migrant site users do not need to spend time to communicate with each individual friend. The extent to which migrant netizens get involved into their homeland interactants’ social life is likely to be either casual or intense. In a sense, the China-based SNSs support young Chinese migrants to maintain their pre-existing social networks in a large scale with less effort/social cost.

Second, as content providers, the China-based SNSs also serve migrant netizens with first-hand information about their homeland. Migrants as site users can fast and simultaneously acquire all the information desired in their native language. Alice (F, 20, PR) described her daily use of Sina Weibo for information about China that,

“Now, I get all my news from Weibo. There are always hot debates on Weibo when there is breaking news. The domestic news, I mean national news in China. I would click for a further read.”

This point of view was echoed by other interviewees when asking their motivations of using China-based SNSs. For example, another interviewee, Penny (F, 25, NZ) also shared similar views that,
“Actually, I don’t have many friends on Weibo. But I do follow various public accounts. I like reading the materials they provide because the contents are more closely related to the China society.”

By utilizing China-based SNSs, the information in hand helps migrant netizens to connect with the homeland society in real time. It bridges the enormous gap between migrant netizens and their homeland social and cultural environments. In other words, these sites allow the young Chinese migrants to live in a networked society. The communication paths that young Chinese migrants have employed strengthen their connection and attachment towards the homeland. What’s more, the connection with homeland society indirectly contributes to migrant netizens’ bonding relationship with people in China. The multiple contexts help to enrich the playfulness and meaningfulness of their mediated communication, thus facilitating migrant netizens’ engagement into their bonding relationship maintenance.

Last, two back-bone components of SNSs enable migrant netizens to reconnect with offline peer networks formed in the homeland. It includes the public display of connections and social search (danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, 2008; Anabel Quan-Haase and Alyson L. Young, 2010). In this research, the interviewees reported how these two components help them to identify and reconnect with friends in China. In terms of the visible connections, netizens have two choices to achieve their reconnection goals, namely, friends recommended list and Friends list. For one thing, the friends recommended list displayed on migrant netizens’ homepages shows and dynamically updates a list of people who are part of the same network with them. The young Chinese migrants are able to see these users’ profiles on the list and the number of mutual friends they both have. The profiles of all their
mutual friends in this site are clickable for further details. Kate (F 21 PR) explained how she rebuilt connections with her classmates in the same middle school by the friends recommended list on the site of Renren.

“I filled in my education history on the personal information section, including my middle school education in China. Then the friends recommended list came out on my homepage. I found several of my middle school classmates who were also on the site. So, I clicked their profiles to take a look and added them as my friends on Renren.”

According to each individual’s profile, the SNSs recommend migrant site users with a list of friends who share commons in education history, place of origin, etc. The list widely provides the young Chinese migrants with a large number of people whom they might connect offline in the homeland. It thus helps migrant netizens to reconnect with their peer networks in China. For another, the migrant netizens are also able to view and traverse the Friends list of their existing friends on the same site. This type of public display of friends’ social networks efficiently assists migrants to identity their pre-existing networks with more relevance. One interviewee, Helen expressed her excited feelings about this:

“They (friends existed on the site of Renren) have the entire system, they’ve got our other (middle school) classmates’ Renren accounts. I can see their names, profiles and then send them friending requests. Well, you see, we are all connected again, the whole class of people are connected again. That’s it.” (Helen, F 23 NZ)
Apart from this, the migrant site users also actively employ the ‘social search’ tool embedded in SNSs to rebuild their social connections with peer networks in China. The site allows migrant netizens to type certain descriptors such as gender, location, and schooling information of other users in the system. It thus helps to find the old contacts those young Chinese migrants desire to reconnect with. For instance, Frank (M 24 PR) emphasized the importance of this ‘social search’ tool to his pre-existing networks maintenance:

“On the site (Renren), I can directly search and find my school mates who are still in China by myself. I just need to type their names in the search box, identify the correct ones among the results provided and then add them as friends on Renren. Well, sometimes, it needs more detailed information to get a more accurate result quickly.”

Another interviewee shared a similar view, “There’s a search box on the site (Renren) to help me find my ‘old school mates/friends’. (Helen, F 23 NZ) Due to her migration at an early age (13 years old), Helen have lost in contact with her old friends in China for more than 5 years. She said that,

“I could still remember several of my classmates who left me a strong impression when we were attending the same middle school together in China. I searched their names one by one via the search tool on Renren. So finally, I got them back and reconnected with my old friends in China. I felt so happy.”

Notably, the size and diversity of young Chinese migrants’ social networks in China does not necessarily go in the same direction. In this research, the diversity of the 1.5 generation
Chinese migrants’ social networks in China has not been found to increase by their use of the China-based platforms. This cohort of migrants’ communicative relationships afforded by the China-based platforms includes their family networks and school-friend networks in the homeland. Previous literature emphasizes the great potentials that social network sites bring to netizens’ diverse social networks building (Keith N. Hampton, Chul-joo Lee, and Eun Ja Her, 2011). However, the differences are obvious when looking into the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants’ internet use practice and its impact on their social network building. For this particular cohort, they take advantage of the China-based platforms – both the IM and the SNSs – to maintain their pre-formed social networks. Within the existing social networks, the young Chinese migrants exploit the China-based SNSs to its full potential to reach a large number of contacts in the homeland.

4.4 Discussion

Research on other ethnic migrant groups placed the major focus on the global platforms which influenced migrants’ transnational communication activities. The international online platforms which have been extensively researched in other ethnic migrant groups, were unlikely to make a deterritorialised impact on Chinese migrants’ homeland social network maintenance. The main reason was that those widely used international online platforms were not accessible within mainland China. This technical barrier thus made a direct impact on Chinese migrants’ media preferences with regard to their communications with homeland contacts. In the context of Chinese migration, researchers in Canada found that the general use of the internet liberated the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs’ social networks from the geo-location constraints (Chen and Wellman, 2009). Prior research mainly studied Chinese migrants’ ethnic media use practices and its impacts on their social network development and social capital accumulation. Little was known about Chinese
migrants’ use practices of the homeland online media and how it affected the migrants’ social capital in both transnational and local contexts. As to research on migrant youth, some prior studies have concentrated on young Chinese migrants’ consumption of local ethnic media and its consequences on their co-ethnic network formation in the contexts of Britain and Singapore (Chen, 2012). Similarly, Chinese migrants in New Zealand employed the ethnic Chinese online forum to connect with the local Chinese community, which allowed them to access the desired practical information shared by the fellow Chinese forum users. The way in which Chinese migrant youth use all available media i.e. homeland media, ethnic Chinese media and international counterparts to acquire social capital has not been adequately addressed.

In this research, China-based online media helps migrant youth to sustain pre-existing homeland network. Meanwhile it facilitates these youth to expand co-ethnic networks in the host country. The homeland communication media transcends the geographical boundaries, allowing migrant youth to reach whoever they want to connect with and manage their social network in multiple locations. The path dependency of Chinese instant messaging is unlikely to assist migrant youth to forge links with new contacts in the country of origin. It mainly serves as a means for strong-tie communication pairs to hold private conversations. Reversely, if the young migrant uses homeland IM (one-to-one chat function) to connect with an individual co-ethnic fellow met for the first time, it is naturally of higher potential for the communication pair to develop closer relationship with each other. With regard to families living in China, the path dependency and the features of video and audio calls which provide sufficient space for private conversations together help maintain the strong-tie between families and migrant youth.
In comparison, the international counterparts succeed in transcending the ethnic boundaries, promoting migrant youth to forge connections with non-Chinese peers in the local context. However, it fails to liberate the communication from being local as the inaccessibility of international social media in mainland China. Migrant youth prefer to use organisationally established, group-wide platform i.e. Facebook to connect with weak-tie network of local peers from other ethnic groups. The group-wide means is unlikely to provide safe space for discussions that allows closer relationships grow (creates a stronger tie) (Haythornthwaite, 2005). In details, the public display feature of social network sites positively associates with network size. The technical property of SNS enables migrant youth to sustain social relationship with a large group of homeland peers. Meanwhile, it also facilitates young migrants to form online connection with friends of friends, thus expanding the size of local networks. The three media channels together enhance migrant youth’s communication capacity and level up their individual agency and autonomy to operate their dispersed social networks.

The precondition of investigating SNS use of migrants is that migrants perceive SNS to be crucial to their network maintenance and development and significant to the integration to the host society and sustaining the sense of being connected with the homeland. Theoretically, SNS allows migrants to form connections with any other site users regardless of geographical location. Migrants can randomly choose to reach anonymous others from a third country other than their home and host countries for personal interests, such as social gaming. However, previous studies suggested that the main purpose of adopting SNS was to sustain offline social connections. This SNS use pattern applies to the Chinese migrant youth in my research. The young Chinese migrants choose to use social network sites as they recognise the importance of SNS to their relationship development. Interview data
provided sufficient evidence in this regard. In addition, the migrant youth emphasise in the interview that they see social network sites as an effective tool for them to keep up with the social trends of the home and host country. Specifically, migrant youth adopt China-based SNS which is widely used by the homeland peers so as to maintain their homeland ties and to acquire news about the homeland. Both the homeland ties and homeland news allow young migrants to generate a sense of connection with the home country. In the host country, the migrant youth consciously employ the global SNS which gains the greatest popularity among local peers. According to the interviews, the migrant youth have the willingness to make friends with local residents in the new social environment. Their media choice indicates that migrant youth see SNS as an effective tool to fulfil their needs of forming local connections in the host society. Meanwhile, the SNS provide a channel for migrant youth to take a close look at the norms and culture practised by the locals and the news being discussed within the local community. The newly built local connections as well as the local news together facilitate the migrant youth to get familiar with the new social environment and to associate themselves with the host country, which is crucial to achieving a better integration outcome.

The investigation of migrant SNS use should be conducted within a larger media landscape in which migrant youth employ various types of media for socialising. By doing so, it allows me to specify the role that each relevant media plays in the social network development process among migrant youth. In addition, it helps to understand the mutual influences between all platforms by which migrant youth manage their social relationships transnationally and locally. The polymedia theory and media multiplexity theory are both relevant to discussion in this aspect.
The imbalanced SNS use has to do with migrant youth’s perception of the role that each SNS plays in their social relationship development process. In other words, young migrants will proactively engage in the international platform which they regard as an effective path to develop social networks in the host country. Similarly, the migrant youth will keep the existing user practices that continuously using China-based SNS to interact with homeland peers if they still think the Chinese SNS to be crucial to their homeland tie maintenance. Notably, the migrant youth’s perception towards each of the platforms is likely to change along with their migration experiences (depending on the length of residence in the host country). The effect can be negative in the condition that the migrant youth have been living the host country for a considerable amount of years. It is crucial that the perceived importance of the international SNS is unchanged or strengthened over years of migration. The migrant youth can benefit more from their SNS use regarding social capital acquisition.

The local contacts that migrant youth connect with on Facebook included co-ethnic friends and local New Zealanders and peers from other ethnic groups. The relational closeness varied across all types of these contacts. As to close co-ethnic contacts, Facebook served as an additional communication path for connection maintenance and interactions. Such choice was made because the migrant youth predominantly selected to use homeland media (China-based IM and SNS) to connect with co-ethnic peers. In comparison, young migrants perceived Facebook as the primary online social space where they socialised with close friends from the ethnic majority and other ethnic minority groups in the host country. Despite that a variety of international social media (such as Whatsapp, Snapchat, Instagram) available, Facebook was rated to be the most crucial communication media to sustain close ties outside the Chinese community in New Zealand. The migrant youth perceived that Facebook was the most widely adopted social network site across all ethnic groups locally.
and globally. The perceived importance of Facebook drove the migrant youth to choose using the site to network with a large number of weak ties in the host country. The second reason was that Facebook provided both social cues and relational cues which made it easy for migrant youth to engage in public communications with weak-tie contacts. These weak-tie contacts were mainly migrant youth’s colleagues and other acquaintances (of a mutual friend) who had social contact with migrant youth in the offline setting. The intensity of Facebook interactions between migrant youth and the weak-tie contacts was relatively low, which helped to keep the weak-tie connection alive. The third reason was that Facebook allowed migrant youth to technically maintain the connection with a few of weakly-tied contacts (or latent ties). These contacts rarely had any types of interactions with the migrant youth in both the online and offline settings. In other words, the Facebook connection opened up the opportunity for migrant youth to reach those weak/latent ties whenever it was needed. Therefore, the perceptions of migrant youth on the relationship between Facebook and local social relationships varied dependent on ethnicity and relational closeness (tie strength).

It’s a paradox for migrant youth. On the one hand, young migrants recognised the importance of SNS use to their integration into the host society. They consciously used SNS as a crucial communication tool to approach local peers in order to forge and maintain more new local social ties apart from the ones built in the offline context. To Chinese migrant youth, the China-based social media did create a deterritorialised communication space for networking with and acquiring resources from homeland contacts and co-ethnic contacts in the host country. On the contrary, the international social media exerted a significantly local impact on the social relationship development of the Chinese migrant youth in New Zealand. To the migrant youth, the main purpose of using Facebook is to
connect with New Zealand-based acquaintances outside the local Chinese community, hence increasing the number of their local non-ethnic contacts. In this sense, the Chinese migrant youth weighed the weak ties more important than the strong ties in the context of Facebook use. In addition, Chinese migrant youth perceived the Facebook use as a supplementary tool to maintain the relationship with close ties. As the media multiplexity theory suggested, the migrant youth were likely to employ a range of communication technologies to stay connected with close-tied contacts. The interview data showed that Chinese migrant youth not only adopted Facebook to connect with local peers but also frequently used mobile phone calls and texts to contact local friends in daily life. More importantly, face-to-face interactions were rated to be the primary way to interact with close friends. Therefore, Facebook interactions were crucial to weak tie maintenance as the offline contact with local acquaintances took place less frequently. Chinese migrant youth regarded the communication practice i.e. Facebook use as a salient element comprising the New Zealand youth identity.

As previous studies suggested, people with a high need to belong perceived their networked contacts to offer bridging capital (informational resources) to them. From the interviews, Chinese migrant youth had the desire to belong to the pre-migration homeland school peer networks. They were longing for remaining as a member of the school peer networks formed pre-migration and willing to take up every available communication means to stay connected with those peers left behind in China. The need to belong influenced Chinese migrant youth’s media choice in homeland network maintenance. They were keen on following the media preferences of former schoolmates in China. The demand for fulfilling their sense of belonging motivated the migrant youth to employ homeland SNS to connect with groups of schoolmates in China. The technical affordances of social network sites also
provided a variety of ways for migrant youth to engage with their former schoolmates across distance. In terms of types of interactions, Chinese migrant youth not only spent time reading contents generated and shared by homeland school peers also engaged in directed communications with those distant contacts, including comment, wall posts (e.g. sending festival greetings) and like.

The social consequence of young Chinese migrants’ active engagement in homeland SNS was that they maintained the connection and preserved the sense of closeness with homeland school peer networks. The SNS-cultivated sense of connectedness and sense of closeness helped meet migrant youth’s individual need to remain part of their school peer networks in China. As previous research suggested that with the desire to belong, the migrant youth perceived that their homeland school peers could provide them with needed information. Therefore, engaging in homeland SNS also enabled migrant youth to approach the perceived accessible source (i.e. homeland peer networks) for the informational resources in demand. It was especially salient when the migrant youth looked for information for future job and career development.

In sum, this research improved our understanding of young Chinese migrants’ Chinese-language online media use and its role in these migrant youth’s transnational social relationship maintenance. The findings demonstrated that the availability of China-based and local-based internet platforms has significantly influenced young Chinese migrants’ disposition to differentiate the role of their transnational and local social networks. Specifically, utilising China-based SNS Renren to easily stay connected with homeland school-based peer networks and to keep a low-frequency interaction with pre-migration school peers has raised Chinese migrant youth’s aspiration to sustain their homeland
networks. The China-based IM QQ and WeChat promoted young Chinese migrants to have both synchronous and in-depth communication with a small number of close friends and family members in China. The distant interactions facilitated by China-based platforms helped sustain Chinese migrant youth’s membership of their peer groups in China, thus fulfilling their sense of belonging towards homeland peer groups.

In addition, this research enriched our knowledge of young Chinese migrants’ networking experiences in the host country by looking into their Facebook use in particular. The Chinese migrant youth employed another SNS Facebook to network with local schoolmates and colleagues. With regard to the motivations for using Facebook, my research results indicated that firstly it was the need of looking for practical information. The information was instrumental to completing coursework or collaborative tasks when the migrant youth found it was hard to fully comprehend the lecturer’s requirements. In this case, it was the information rather than the information possessor that mattered to the migrant youth. The ultimate goal for the young Chinese migrants was to find an effective path to access the needed information. Facebook provided a convenient and efficient channel for migrant youth to approach the network of classmates, obtaining the access to the information in demand. In addition, the site created a comfortable social environment, allowing Chinese migrant youth to get to know the personal interests, personalities of new local contacts across ethnic groups. The deepened understanding of new contacts affected Chinese migrant youth’s attitudes to the newly built social relationships. The positive attitude drove young migrants to invest more time to interact with the associates on Facebook, thus contributing to the relational maintenance. Noticeably, this study found no clear evidence to prove that Facebook interaction stimulated Chinese migrant youth to develop the acquaintance relationship to close-knit friendship relationship.
Chapter 5: Acquiring Resources and Support

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the social network building of young Chinese migrants by looking at their media selection and media use on the internet. Their pre-existing homeland networks are found to be primarily maintained by young migrants’ use of China-based internet platforms. Meanwhile, the global media facilitates these migrant netizens to connect with diverse ethnic groups locally. The aggregate and expansion of young Chinese migrants’ social network allow them to access various forms of resources possessed by the individuals and groups whom they connect with. Specific needs drive migrant youth to use the internet to obtain the needed and wanted resources from social networks. Migrant youth’s needs are transforming over time. The length of residence in the host country is an important variable. It is relevant with both information and emotional support acquisition. This chapter examines how 1.5 generation Chinese migrants use the internet to exchange resources and support across different ethnic and cultural settings in the host society. It also aims to offer insight into the reciprocity and trust development between young Chinese migrants and their networked associates along with the resources exchange process online.

Drawing on the interview data, this chapter explores participants’ perceptions of the resources which they accrued from internet-mediated communications with their social network. The interview approach also promotes these young migrants’ accounts regarding to the bi-directional resources circulation in which they have participated on different online platforms. I analyse the networked resources of these migrant interviewees in relation to their communication practices from three dimensions, namely, information,
emotional support and instrumental resources. The first section focuses on the informational resources that young Chinese migrants exchanged with the social network which they associated with post-migration. This section specifically helps us understand how these migrants evaluated the information circulated through mediated interactions impacts their sociocultural adaptation to the host society and the future planning in their crucial transition toward adulthood. The following section emphasises the requests and provisions of emotional support between migrant netizens and their peer network. The emotional dimension of support which migrant youth requested and obtained by communicating with other youth is crucial to their psychological adaptation in a new place especially during the early phase of their migration. The third section sheds light on the exchange of instrumental resources (or help) between young migrants and their transnational and local social network. This section sets out to look into how the internet enables young Chinese migrants to acquire actual help from and offer instrumental resources to their social network so as to suit their own ends regardless of physical location.

Previous research empirically illustrates the positive impacts that various forms of networked resources have on migrant youth’s transitional life experience and their adaptation outcomes. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), either actual or potential resources are emphasised as a form of social capital which individuals derive from their social network. Networked resources in this study are divided specifically into informational, emotional and instrumental resources that young Chinese migrants obtain from their transnational and local social network. This chapter also elucidates the bi-directional exchange process of these migrants’ network resources. Some researchers believe that the youth always gain benefits from adults and are typically passive recipients of social capital (Helve and Bynner, 2010). In this research, however, the Chinese migrant
youth are less likely to acquire sufficient information or support from their immediate family members (Bartley and Spoonley, 2008). The researchers further suggest that adult migrants’ incapable of offering guidance, support and resources to younger generations are caused by their lack of English fluency and cultural differences. Apart from this, migrant youth are found to have increasing interactions with peer network and develop growing dependence on their network peers during their emerging adulthood (Susie Weller, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that young migrants actively search for resources from their peer group and provide their network peers with the information or support in need. The internet-mediated communication helps to reduce the limitations of time and space, therefore enabling young migrant netizens to timely and efficiently exchange resources with a theoretically unlimited range of social network.

**5.1 Informational Resources**

The young migrants request specific informational resources from their transnational or local social network by using different media channels. The information that migrant youth receive empower them to understand cultural differences, to resolve practical problems and to gain life-skills on their own. Thus, those important informational resources serve as a means to facilitate migrant youth accommodate the new sociocultural environment and achieve a better transitional life experience to their adulthood. The previous chapter exemplifies the significant role that communication technologies play in creating a deterritorialised social space where migrant netizens conveniently maintain transnational social ties and build connections with local peer groups. More importantly, the informational resources possessed by a range of dispersed social networks become accessible and attainable to migrant youth through the mediated communication.
During the interview investigations, I designed three main questions to look into participants’ mediated communication practices related to the networked resources exchange theme. For the informational dimension, participants were asked to describe the topics and characteristics of the online conversations, focusing on the differences emerging from young migrants’ interacting with distant communicators and local contacts; the follow-up questions probed young migrants’ media selection orientations and their attitudes towards the mediated information sharing process. Semi-structured interviews provide me with sufficient openness to approach each participant’s distinctive understandings of the value which lies in the multi-medium transmission of the informational resources.

5.1.1 Ethnic Media: obtaining information from the Chinese community

The interviewees shared their media use experiences in parallel with the ongoing adaptation and resettlement process. They reported their using SKYKIWI forum – the most widely used Chinese online media in New Zealand – to seek specific information from the local Chinese community ever since their early migration. Being new arrivals in the host country, the migrant youth had very little knowledge of the social norms and cultural differences especially in the everyday encounters. As a consequence, early migrants’ lived experience and information about the new social circumstances, especially the school settings, available on SKYKIWI forum were important resources to the Chinese migrant youth. The information derived from other migrant netizens on the forum enables those young migrants to negotiate early-stage transitions, accelerating their sociocultural adaptation to the host society.

First, seeking informational resources from ethnic peers by using ethnic online media facilitates Chinese migrant youth to adapt to the school life in the host country. Stepping into the university study was the turning point at which migrant youth gradually and
increasingly relied on peer network and the resources they provided. The impact of young migrants’ familial network on their school life transitions became less silent. Apart from this, the improving condition of internet infrastructures in New Zealand also indirectly influenced the ethnic media use of migrant youth from early 2000s onwards.

Among the thirty-five interviewees, twenty-seven migrant youth immigrated to New Zealand and continued their secondary school education in the host country before 2006. And it was the year when the internet broadband was widely introduced to the households in New Zealand. Around that time, the young migrants reported that they seldom frequented the internet when they were in the secondary school. For instance, Sally (F, 27, PR) pointed out that ‘There was no broadband but dial-up internet available in my home when I started my study in year 11 here in 2002. At that time, I seldom got online because the internet was really slow and it also conflicted to the landline service which my mom used a lot for her newly founded business.’

The majority of the research participants start using SKYKIWI forum for information seeking after getting into the universities. These migrant youth demand specific information to help accommodate the university environment. As indicated in the previous chapter, the SKYKIWI forum was founded by the Chinese migrants in New Zealand, encouraging community-wide communications and interactions. It provides the local Chinese with migrant-oriented resources which are dominantly user generated contents. That means, the migrant netizens share their lived experiences and circulate information with other forum users. When I asked for the reasons why selecting SKYKIWI forum to seek information, some male participants shared similar views on the question. For example, Derek (M, 21, PR) who was a third-year graduate student firstly stressed the efficiency of
communicating in Chinese with other forum users and then recalled his initial use of SKYKIWI forum as a new student in the university,

‘I use SKYKIWI forum because it is an ethnic Chinese media exclusively for the local Chinese community in New Zealand. … I remember that when I just got into the university, I almost knew nothing about the faculties, the departments and the courses. At that time, I didn’t discuss the issues with my friends because they stuck in the same difficulties. … I was interested in how other students fitted into the university. So, I chose to search for the information online, i.e. on SKYKIWI forum. Because the senior students (who are ethnic Chinese) in my university shared their previous university life experiences on the forum, including course selections, specific course introductions and advice on academic major selections.’

Another male participant Eric (M, 21, PR) made a comparison of QQ and SKYKIWI forum to explain why the ethnic forum was significant to accessing diverse information. The instant messaging, i.e. QQ was another important media channel which the interview adopted to connect and interact with his ethnic Chinese peer network. However, he pointed out that the QQ-connected peer network was too homogenous to offer him with the information in need. As to the use of SKYKIWI forum, Eric illustrated that,

‘I started to use SKYKIWI forum since I went to the university. … I think it is an important information channel because I have obtained very specific information related to my field of study from other forum users. Although I am not a friend of the forum users, I can access to the informational resources they provide on SKYKIWI forum.’
Noticeably, both of the interviewees pointed out that the friendship network became less salient in information provision. As some social capital researchers (Tracey Reynolds, 2010; Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, 2012) suggested, friendship network as a typical bonding social network of the individuals is characterised by its clannish nature, high level of emotional closeness and intimacy. The membership of the friendship network promotes emotional support exchange within the network; however, it is less likely to provide the network members with the access to diverse information (Michael Chan, 2014; pp. 5). By realising the limitations of friendship network, the interviewees are found to use the ethnic media to reach the wider local Chinese community, therefore obtaining the community-wide resources to help get through the school transitions.

In addition, the participants also exemplify how the use of ethnic online media empowers them to learn from other Chinese migrants’ lived experiences beyond the school settings. The lived experiences of other ethnic Chinese are perceived as the most valuable form of informational resources among the interviewees. The Chinese migrant youth further suggested that the information above assists them to solve problems in the circumstances which are similar to those described by the resources providers, i.e. other ‘old settlers’ of the Chinese community in New Zealand.

Another young Chinese migrant Frank (M, 24, PR) reported himself as a heavy user of the ethnic online media, i.e. SKYKIWI forum, indicating the frequency of his forum use is at least once in two days. He further explained the reasons for his initial use of the ethnic online forum as ‘The forum posts are all written in Chinese. Therefore, it saves me a lot of time when I am looking for specific information among a huge number of forum posts.’ As
a migrant who has resided in New Zealand for over nine years, Frank keeps the habit of using SKYKIWI forum till the time of the interview. He shared his views about the irreplaceable role that the ethnic online forum plays in Chinese migrants’ life in the host society. He said that ‘Because the forum is a community-wide online forum which allows the ethnic Chinese to express their concerns, to ask for help and to exchange informational resources with other community numbers.’ When suggesting the availability of other local media alternatives, Frank gave a very specific example to explain the advantages of utilising the ethnic media in addressing Chinese migrants’ difficulties. He noted that,

‘For example, I used to help apply visitor visas for my relatives who wanted to visit me from China. You know, it’s hard to find the specific resources if I did the general search on the web. So, I just went on the SKYKIWI forum directly to look for the information related to the visa application process. It’s very efficient to find solutions on the forum to properly deal with my problems. Because the resources provided by other ethnic Chinese are exactly what they have already experienced in New Zealand. From their personal experience, I learn how to avoid certain troubles if I come across similar difficulties.’

In response to the same question above, another interviewee Eric (M, 21, PR) also expressed a similar view towards the usefulness of other ethnic Chinese’ lived experiences attainable on the ethnic media. He commented that,

‘Apart from the resources related to the study, I also learnt how to take a sick-leave properly from the forum posts generated by other university students for instance.'
The contents are all about their individual experiences. And this kind of information is useful to me in real life.’

Drawing on the interview conversations, this research found that the ethnic online media, i.e. SKYKIWI forum has provided a mediated social space for informational resources exchange within the local Chinese community. The informational resources coping with the everyday social circumstances in the host country are transmitted efficiently from old settlers to the new comers. This study identifies two major forces that drive young Chinese migrants to select the ethnic online media for information seeking. The first reason is that compared to the friendship network formed offline, the use of ethnic online media enables these migrant youth to reach a more heterogeneous network within the ethnic Chinese community. Consequently, the young migrant netizens gain the access to other forum users’ resources due to the newly built membership in the above heterogeneous group. The second reason is that the form of the informational resources, i.e. the lived experiences of other ethnic Chinese is open to the migrant youth. Although all the ethnic forum users are theoretically anonymous to each other, the sharing of personal experiences in the publicly accessible online forum increases the reliability of the information which is conveyed to migrant youth from the resource providers, i.e. other forum users.

Second, some migrant youth also make the best use of the ethnic online media to help adapt to the host culture outside the school settings. To be specific, the informational resources which the Chinese migrant youth obtain from other SKYKIWI forum users contribute to their adaptation to the local youth culture. By saying the local youth culture, this research puts the focus on the part-time job culture in particular. From the cross-cultural perspective, doing part-time jobs is popular among the youth population who are living in New Zealand.
It is perceived as a part of the youth culture in New Zealand. From the developmental perspective, having a part-time job opens up the opportunities for the Chinese migrant youth to embrace the local culture and to interact with the wider society especially during their transitions to adulthood.

Among the thirty-five interviewees, thirty-four of them reported that they had part-time job experiences when they were in either secondary schools or the universities. Prior to their migration to New Zealand, the Chinese migrant youth were not legally allowed to work part-time in mainland China where they immigrated from. In contrast, young adolescents are eligible to apply for part-time jobs when they are 16 years old and over in New Zealand. Of all the channels to get a part-time job opportunity, the current study found that nearly half of interviewees search for part-time job opportunities on the internet. Among the various options, some participants pointed out that the ethnic online media was the major channel for them to search for part-time job information in the first two or three years of their migration.

For instance, Alice (F, 20, PR) who has resided in New Zealand for four years had two part-time jobs when she participated in my interviews. When I asked her about how she used ethnic online media in everyday life, she described that ‘I went onto SKYKIWI forum about three to four times every week. I used it mainly to look for job recruitment information. …’ I followed up to ask her to explain the reasons why she chose to use SKYKIWI forum for job hunting. Alice replied that,

“At first, my elder sister told me that I needed to find the job information by myself if I really wanted to do part-time jobs. And you know, SKYKIWI forum is an ethnic
Chinese-oriented online forum. The ethnic Chinese employers post job recruitment information onto the forum. The recruitment information is written in Chinese. This is important to me because my English was not very good when I just arrived in New Zealand. So, it is much easier for me to understand the job requirements that the employers posted on the forum.” (Alice, F 20 PR)

When I asked her about why she decided to do part-time jobs in the host country, Alice responded that,

‘I have never experienced doing part-time jobs when I was in China. But here, in New Zealand, young people have part-time jobs ever since they are in secondary schools. I felt that the study pressure was not very high in New Zealand so I decided to do some part-time jobs after school. Also, I want to have my working experience officially recorded. It is good for my future career development.’

Another male respondent Mike (M, 22, PR) who has immigrated to New Zealand for over 7 years shared his three part-time job experiences with me and commented on the first question that,

‘When I asked for advice from my parents at first, they told me to look for the job information on SKYKIWI forum by myself. The forum is the most adopted ethnic Chinese forum in Auckland region. And I see it as a very powerful information exchange platform within the local Chinese community. The ethnic Chinese post a wide range of job recruitment information onto the forum. I found all the three part-time jobs on the forum.’
As to the reasons for doing part-time jobs, Mike’s answer was very simple that ‘Almost all my friends here are doing part-time jobs.’ His reply indirectly indicates the popularity of the part-time job culture among the youth generation in New Zealand. By looking for the job recruitment information and experiencing the three different part-time jobs, the interviewee gradually fits himself into the local youth culture in the host society.

The above cases show that the ethnic online forum serves as an increasingly crucial information exchange platform to the young Chinese migrants. By utilising the forum, the Chinese migrant youth are able to obtain a great number of job recruitment information which is directly posted by diverse employers. Notably, young Chinese migrants are less likely to rely on their traditional information sources which used to provide them with useful information for their job hunting and career development in the home country. The traditional information sources here refer to the familial network and the extended kinship network of the Chinese migrant youth. After migration, however, the migrant youth have been aware of their parents’ “incompetence regarding various aspects of life” in the host country and they are unable to receive sufficient help, advice and guidance from parents as before. In addition, among the thirty-five respondents, only one female interviewee reported that she had a younger cousin lived together with her families in New Zealand. The rest of the thirty-four participants immigrated with their parent(s) and have been living in the host country with their immediate families till the field interviews conducted. Therefore, the resources which are possessed by kinship network become also unavailable to the migrant youth. The impact of familial network and kinship network on young Chinese migrants’ job hunting decreases along with their migration process. Meanwhile, young migrant netizens frequent the ethnic online forum to reach the community-wide
informational resources provided by members of the ethnic Chinese community. The various resources obtained through the mediated communication contribute to young Chinese migrants’ sociocultural adaptation to the host country.

5.1.2 Homeland Media for Information Acquisition

This section explores the homeland media use practices of the young Chinese migrants, focusing on their information exchange with the homeland peer network. The information exchange process in relation to the internet use differs from which I discussed in the previous section. The results of my interview data show that young Chinese migrants conduct the information exchange with their pre-existing peer network in China. The types of the media channels which support the resources exchange process include homeland instant messaging (IM) and homeland social network sites (SNSs). The reliability and usefulness of the networked resources offered by peer network are perceived to be higher than those obtained from other media channels, i.e. state media or other social agents, i.e. influential professionals in specific areas. The motivations that drive these migrant youth to exchange information with homeland peers vary from career development to reference system development.

The majority of my interviewees utilise China-based media platforms to communicate with homeland peers in relation to information exchange. Specifically, among the thirty-five interviewees, thirty participants whose age of migration is over 14 admit that they keep the connections with their pre-existing homeland peer network pre-formed at school in China. And they have continued communicating with the homeland peers through the internet post-migration. The participants suggested that they exclusively exchange informational resources with their previous school friends who are the only peer network they have in China after migration.
For example, Mike (M, 22, PR) who has finished his junior middle school education\(^{31}\) in China described his communication partners in China that ‘I’ve been using QQ to communicate with my school friends studying in the same junior middle school in my hometown. I lost contacts with my primary school friends because it was not popular to leave QQ contacts to each other when I was in primary school in the late 1990s in China.’ When I asked him about the conversation topics between him and his homeland peers, Mike further illustrated his QQ communication with those school friends that,

‘I still care about my friends in China and we talk about all sorts of things in each other’s life. … You know, I’ve been away from China for several years, and I don’t know how people’s life in China really looks like. … I want to learn about the quality of education that my homeland friends have in their universities and what kinds of jobs they are doing after graduation from universities.’

In this case, we can see that the communication topics between the participant and his homeland peers include this young Chinese migrant’s transitions towards adulthood. During the interview conversations, Mike indicated that he had been working full-time one year earlier before this interview conducted. Subsequently, I asked him to explain why he was still interested in the career development of homeland peers who lived in a different working environment in China. He responded that,

\(^{31}\) That means, Mike has equally finished the Year 9-10 level of secondary school education in New Zealand context.
‘I want to know about the working environments in different cities in China. It is possible that I may return China for my future career development. I need to plan for my own future. … I want to acquire the information from my homeland friends because it is more reliable than what I received from other media channels online. Also, my friends always tell me about their lived experiences so that I can get more detailed information about the work life in China.’

Following up Mike’s comments, I continued to ask him about why he was keen on the QQ communication with homeland peers, he replied that,

‘My homeland friends use QQ less frequently now but I believe that they will keep the accounts forever unless Tencent Company is closed. And I’m the same with my friends. … So, with the help of QQ, I’m still able to ask for specific information or support from my homeland friends if needed in the future.’

In response to the same question, another participant Frank’s (M, 24, PR) comment is more revealing. He suggested that,

‘My communication aim is quite clear that I want to know about my homeland friends’ current jobs and what future plans they have for their career development. That’s the reference for my future career planning. For example, a friend of mine found a new job recently. When we talked about his new job via QQ, he told me that the new job kept him very busy every day. The communication helps me gain the zero-distance lived experiences of my homeland peers. That’s really useful for

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Tencent Company is provider of QQ service.
me to understand the job market and work life in China, because I do consider returning China for my future career.’

From the above interviews, we can see that the reliability and usefulness of the informational resources obtained from the homeland peer network are perceived to be very high by the young Chinese migrants. The Chinese migrant youth identify their relationships with homeland peers as trustful social relationships despite that they are physically separated.

The career development and reference system development are two major indicators for assessing the youth population’s developmental transition from late adolescence to adulthood. In this study, it is found that the informational resources which the Chinese migrant youth gain from their homeland peer network have an impact on their developmental transition regarding to the two above aspects.

In contrast to the majorities, the other five participants emigrated from China between 2002 and 2003, experiencing the whole secondary school education in New Zealand. These five migrant youth have developed their homeland friendship network during primary school education in China. However, compared to traditional phone calls, the internet was rarely adopted by Chinese youth to maintain the connections with offline pre-existing social networks in the early 2000s. In other words, the migrant youth have not developed the habit of using the internet to communicate with their homeland friendship network pre-migration. The five respondents all noted that they had never contacted their primary school friends through the internet communication since they left China. The international telephone calls were only made to kinship network in the home country. For these five interviewees, the
internet has not been found to facilitate them maintaining the homeland peer network. As a consequence, they are unable to access the informational resources possessed by the homeland peers.

5.2 Emotional Support

As shown in the previous section, the information resources that young Chinese migrants proactively requested and obtained from their personal networks were crucial to their sociocultural adaptation to the host country and their transition into the adulthood. Specifically, using the ethnic online forum helped connect the newly-arrived Chinese migrant youth to the Chinese community in New Zealand, enabling them to access the information which co-ethnic fellows possessed and shared on the forum. Young Chinese migrants got increasingly familiar with the local norms and the social environment of the New Zealand society by learning from the lived experiences of old settlers. The process of sociocultural adaptation to the host county was accelerated as a result of migrant youth’s successful acquiring of the needed information via local Chinese online forum. In addition, the use of China-based instant messaging and social network site both facilitated young Chinese migrants to mobilise their homeland ties so as to obtain up-to-date information in relation to professional development and career planning in China. This type of information was critical in shaping young Chinese migrants’ decisions for choosing where to stay and work in the near future.

This section focused on the emotional need of Chinese migrant youth and how they used the internet to solicit support so as to satisfy themselves emotionally. Based on the interview data, young Chinese migrants’ emotional need has been gradually and constantly changing over time. The sources of support that Chinese migrant youth relied on were not
confined by geographical location. The transnational and local support networks both provided comfort and care to the migrant youth, which were perceived as equally important. Notably, the preferred online communication platforms for young Chinese migrants to express their emotional needs and request support remained the same i.e. China-based instant messaging. The specific technical features, such as synchronicity, well served the migrant youth to communicate their emotional feelings with their intimate ties in both China and New Zealand. In the following, I will first examine the emotional communications which young Chinese migrants had with their homeland ties on the Chinese instant messaging QQ.

5.2.1 Uninterrupted Support from Homeland Ties

The homeland network consisted as a crucial source of the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants’ emotional support system. At the early stage of migration, Chinese migrant youth especially relied on their friendship formed in China, seeking company and comfort across distance. The support received from the remote homeland was highly relevant to young Chinese migrants’ psychological adaptation to the host society. To communicate emotional feelings, the migrant youth preferred to continuously use China-based instant messaging QQ at the beginning.

As to the reasons for reaching out to friends at distance, young Chinese migrants perceived that the high-level of relational closeness and shared histories with homeland peers drove them to initiate the emotional conversations transnationally. For instance, one young male interviewee Jack who left China at the age of fourteen, shared his experiences of being a stressful adolescent migrant after arriving in New Zealand. He recalled that,
“I had very few friends to talk about the unpleasant stuff. Sometimes, I felt that in Auckland I had no one to talk about what happened to me, which I did not want to let my parents know. The study pressure was very high when I started attending school here (in Auckland). With whole lot of pressure, getting some comfort was very important to me since I was too young at that moment.” (Jack, M 28 NZ)

Moving to a new country to start a new life was never easy to a migrant youth. Catching up with the study and adapting to a new school environment in an unfamiliar place caused great pressure to the newly-arrived Chinese migrant youth. In this circumstance, he was looking forward to emotional support which helped him to get through the stressful days. Jack chose not to tell his study pressure to anyone in his immediate social circles including his parents, classmates and school teachers those who were supposed to be the right people to help him overcome the unease at school. When I further asked Jack about the reasons why he rejected or felt reluctant to communicate the stress with the people whom he was able to meet and talk in person every day, he explained that,

“The westerners\textsuperscript{33} were very different from us (Chinese migrants) in thinking. They could not understand what I felt and experienced. After I got in touch with the westerners for a while, I thought that there was no need to talk about my stuff (the study pressure) with them anymore. They perceived me as a weak person after I talked about my feelings with them before. I would rather talk with my friends in China on QQ.” (Jack, M 28 NZ)

\textsuperscript{33} In this research, the westerners primarily referred to local New Zealanders.
From the young Chinese migrant’s perspective, the cultural differences between the west and China and the lack of knowledge of migrant life experiences caused his local peers incapable of adequately understanding his stress. Another female interviewee Lydia who arrived in Wellington at the age of sixteen tried hard to fit in the local environment in her early days of migration. She willingly reached out outside the Chinese community so as to make friends and communicate with local peers from other ethnic groups. Despite of all her efforts, Lydia expressed her frustration with the responses from her local friends whom she turned to for understanding and comfort. She explained to me in examples that,

“I found that it was difficult to accurately express the emotions to my friends here (in Wellington) in English. I used to complain to my English-speaking friends about the stress of getting along with my parents. For example, my mom did not allow me to go back home late and spend too much time with my classmates after school, which made us mad with each other. I told my friends that I would buy a house for my mom after I earned enough money. They perceived my idea as crazy and incomprehensible. My local peers never understood the relationship between ethnic Chinese youth and their parents. They were not really helpful when I needed to vent that stressful feeling.” (Lydia, F 24, PR)

As we could see from Lydia’s case, English proficiency was still a barrier which impeded her from precisely expressing the thoughts and feelings to non-Chinese local peers in her early days of moving to Wellington. More importantly, the young migrant believed that her local friends’ poor understanding of Chinese family culture significantly decreased her willingness to seek emotional support locally. In other words, the local peer network did not well meet the Chinese migrant youth’s need of understanding and support when they
came across emotional difficulties at the early stage of migration. In the cases of Jack and Lydia, they both turned to the homeland peers in China, using the China-based instant messaging QQ to seek understanding and obtain support across distance. Jack emphasised the reasons underlying his emotional communications with friends in the home country as below,

“As to my friends in China, we have known each other for very long time. We grew up together, so I had nothing to hide from them. They knew me well. I could complain to them about the unpleasant things happened in my life in New Zealand, such as my poor academic performance. They listened to me and comforted me.”

(Jack, M 28 NZ)

When questioning about his homeland friends’ disadvantages in having a proper understanding of New Zealand context-specific issues, the interviewee further explained that “No matter if they could feel the stress that I experienced as an immigrant here, my friends in China would know my pressure. We Chatted with each other via QQ, which made me feel relaxed and less pressured.” The young Chinese migrant perceived the shared histories with homeland peers as the key to gaining understanding from those distant communicators. In addition to the shared histories, the other participant Lydia pointed out that a good understanding of her personalities was crucial to the acquisition of emotional support. She explained the reasons why she preferred to confide to her two close friends in China that,

“We talked very little about the specifics in each other’s everyday life. Most of the time, we shared our worried feelings with each other. I thought that they understood
me better than others (friends in Wellington). My friends in China might not have
the similar migration experiences like me but they knew my personalities very well.
Even without overseas experiences, they were still able to help me think things
through. We always thought for each other’s own good and support each other.”
(Lydia, F 24, PR)

The two interview participants who immigrated to New Zealand in the mid 2000s both used
the pre-established online communication channel i.e. China-based instant messaging QQ
to request emotional support from close friends in China. Despite that Jack did not receive
the desired comfort locally, he managed to use QQ to stay connected with his homeland
friends, thus enabling him to acquire the needed emotional support transnationally. As
discussed in previous chapter, instant messaging was the primary online communication
channel which connected young Chinese migrants with a small number of close ties in both
the home and host country. In particular, they used China-based instant messaging QQ to
connect to families and a small group of close friends left behind in China. Like other young
Chinese migrant fellows, Jack indicated in his interview that he chose to communicate with
his two very close homeland friends via QQ. He highlighted two particular features of QQ
which fulfilled his needs of communicating emotional feelings with the two intimate
friends. Jack suggested that,

“I chose QQ because it was convenient for me and my two close friends in China
to chat in real-time. I sent them text messages and then they replied me immediately.
Compared to other social media platforms, QQ offered me a relatively higher-level
of privacy. I felt secured to talk about my pressure and the stressful feelings in one-
on-one private conversations with each of them.” (Jack, M 28 NZ)
As shown in Jack’s response, the young Chinese migrant made use of the synchronicity and one-to-one communication features of QQ to facilitate the emotional communications with his two close friends in China. The QQ-enabled person-to-person communications reduced Jack’s privacy concern on expressing personal emotions online, thus increasing the possibilities of eliciting support from his close friends at distance. The support from homeland friends which was delivered through their immediate responses on QQ fulfilled the young Chinese migrant’s emotional needs. The merit of synchronous communications in assisting Chinese migrant youth to request emotional support transnationally was also found in another young female participant Nina’s instance. Despite of the reluctance of leaving from the home country, Nina immigrated to New Zealand under her parents’ decision at the age of fifteen. She experienced great nostalgia and difficulties to get familiar with the Kiwi English accent in the first month of migration. Starting a new life in the host country where she could not understand the locals when conversing with them, which frustrated the young migrant and made her cry a lot. In the reflections of her QQ use, Nina shared her chat experiences with few intimate friends in China at the time of first arriving in Wellington that,

“I told them that it was not my decision to come to New Zealand and I wanted to return home (in China). I missed my life in China so much. Although we were physically separated, my close friends in China offered their company to me by chatting with me on QQ in a real-time manner every day.” (Nina, F 20 PR)

The real-time company that the young Chinese migrant experienced in her QQ conversations with homeland friends psychologically supported her to get through the very
first month of migrating to New Zealand. The instant communications helped reduce the negative influences of physical separation on the relationship maintenance between the distant communication pairs, making the transnational acquisition of emotional support possible for the Chinese migrant youth. Further, I asked the interviewees about how they perceived the support that they received through the QQ communications with homeland connections. In Jack’s response, he suggested that,

“Actually, no substantial details underlying my pressure were mentioned in our QQ conversations. I just wanted to complain to them when I felt pressured or something unpleasant happened to me and I felt bad about it. They might not totally understand what I was talking about. But they would definitely send their comfort to me via QQ. Their words relieved my pressure and made me feel better especially when I felt alone in New Zealand.” (Jack, M 28 NZ)

Similar to Jack’s accounts, the younger female participant Nina shared her view of the importance of transnational emotional support providers in dealing with her initial adaptation to the host country. Nina stressed that chatting with her few close friends in China in real-time via QQ always cheered her up and made her feel much better when she worried about her new life in the unfamiliar environment of the host country. She repeatedly indicated in her interview that “They (intimate friends in China) were always supporting me spiritually.” From the above, the instant messaging QQ enhanced the young Chinese migrant’s sociability by facilitating them to maintain the close relationship with intimate friends in the home country. Furthermore, the QQ-facilitated one-on-one online communications liberated the emotional support acquisition from geographical location. In other words, using the instant messaging QQ increased young Chinese migrant’s
communication capacity to obtain support which successfully fulfilled their emotional needs in his early migration.

5.2.2 Increasing Support from Co-ethnic Connections

As shown in previous section, it was difficult for young Chinese migrants to obtain emotional support in New Zealand at the early migration. On the one hand, they longed for understanding and comfort from peer networks outside their families during the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood. On the other hand, the Chinese migrant youth have not established a network of close ties locally which they could turn to for support. While failing to acquire emotional support in the host country, young Chinese migrants consciously employed the online communication tools to maintain their connections with intimate friends in China. By sustaining the pre-existing close ties, they were able to request and obtain the desired support transnationally. Specifically, young Chinese migrants proactively engaged in IM-enabled real-time communications with close ties in China. The synchronicity of instant messaging afforded the migrant youth to express personal feelings and receive supportive responses immediately across distance. Hence, young Chinese migrants’ emotional needs were fulfilled transnationally with the facility of China-based instant messaging QQ.

This section illustrated how the internet use facilitated young Chinese migrants to acquire emotional support locally as their length of residence in New Zealand increased. As time passed by, the Chinese migrant youth have entered their young adulthood and gone to universities in the host country. The type of support they demanded differed from which they needed in the teenage years when arriving in New Zealand. The sources of support varied as a result of their changing needs at different stages of life. The prior chapter on network building indicated that Chinese migrant youth primarily relied on homeland online
media to connect to their offline co-ethnic contacts in the host country. In particular, they largely utilised Chinese instant messaging QQ at their early migration and took on the mobile social media application WeChat ever since it came out in 2011. In the following paragraphs, I will detail the way in which young Chinese migrants used WeChat to accomplish emotional support acquisition locally in New Zealand.

When immigrating to New Zealand as adolescents, the Chinese migrant youth experienced loneliness, study pressure, social and cultural differences. Meanwhile, they were seeking independence from parents and longing for understanding from peer networks. The shared histories and perceived deep understanding of migrant youth’s personalities enabled the homeland close ties to provide Chinese migrant youth with the support they desired. The transnationally acquired support played a key part in facilitating Chinese migrant youth to psychologically adapt to the New Zealand society. As the length of residence in the host country increased, the support that young Chinese migrants demanded were much beyond understanding and company. A female interviewee Olivia (F 27 NZ) who has been living in Auckland for over ten years suggested that “understanding, comfort and more importantly valuable advice” were of greater importance to her compared to comfort only. Another undergraduate participant Kate (F 21 PR) echoed with Olivia’s accounts regarding the support she needed after she went off to university in Auckland. She took me an example that “when I had trouble collaborating with someone in group projects at the university, I wanted to know my friends’ opinions on it aside from venting my frustration and anger.” From the two interviewees’ accounts, it was clear to us that young Chinese migrants were looking for the type of support which consisted of a combination of advice, understanding and care when they entering the young adulthood in New Zealand.
Notably, the source of support which met young Chinese migrants’ changing demands primarily consisted of their co-ethnic close ties formed in New Zealand. The Chinese migrant youth have fostered strong ties with a small network of selected co-ethnic peers while attending secondary schools and universities in New Zealand. Similar to my research participants, their co-ethnic peers immigrated to New Zealand from different parts of mainland China. Some of them arrived in the host country in the middle of primary school in China; some first came to New Zealand as international students and applied for permanent residence later. The perceived similarities between the two parties motivated the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to express personal feelings to and request support from their co-ethnic peers. Some young migrants gave their explanations of choosing co-ethnic peers for emotional support acquisition in the interviews. For instance, the participant Olivia perceived her close Chinese friends in New Zealand as her primary source of support. She explained her choice by comparing her co-ethnic friends to friends in China that,

“I did not expect my friends in China to understand me when telling them about my experiences in New Zealand and how I felt about it. Because the social and cultural environments in which my homeland friends and I lived were so different from each other. I preferred to talk through the details with my close Chinese friends in New Zealand when I felt unhappy or sad. They could understand what I said to them easily. I thought that I had been increasingly relying on my local Chinese friends over the past ten years of immigrating to New Zealand.” (Olivia, F 27 NZ)

The young Chinese migrant Olivia’s accounts explicitly indicated that the differences between the Chinese society and New Zealand society were the main reason which impeded her homeland friends from providing sufficient support to her. As a result, the participant
perceived the homeland peers not as the suitable source to go after for acquiring the support in need. In comparison, living in the same social and cultural environment of the host country enabled the co-ethnic counterparts to better understand young Chinese migrants’ unhappiness or sadness as well as the reasons behind those emotional feelings. Hence, to Olivia, the close ties to local Chinese friends were crucial in allowing her to access the wanted emotional support. The impact of having lived experiences in New Zealand on support acquisition was also manifested in Kate’s instance. She explained that,

“I did not even need to explain too much to my local Chinese friends about what I had suffered. It really felt like automatically they understood what happened to me and the circumstance in which I situated. It was different when I talked about the same thing with my friends in China. I had to explain all the relevant background information to them in details. They might comprehend only part of the information since we lived in different social environments. For me, I saw no point in explaining too much about the background of what I suffered. If I had to detail everything, what was the point (of my talking to them)?” (Kate, F 21 PR)

Clearly, it costed too much time and patience for the young Chinese migrant to communicate unhappy incidents with her homeland friends. With much of the time spent on explaining the situation she came across in the New Zealand context, the young migrant lost her interest in sharing thoughts and feelings with friends in China. On the contrary, the participant perceived that her co-ethnic peers equipped with sufficient knowledge of the host society, which formed the premise for her to share personal emotions and express the need of support. In addition to the familiarity of the host society, similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds affected the sources which young Chinese migrants turned to for support
locally. Grace (F 23 PR) who has immigrated to New Zealand for over six years received less support from homeland friends than from her local peers. Without knowing the social context of New Zealand well, the homeland peers could hardly offer an appropriate level of understanding and comfort which met the young migrant’s emotional needs. Within her network of local connections, Grace perceived that she was able to obtain more support from co-ethnic friends than from her Kiwi connections in the emotional dimension. She emphasised the impact of ethnic and cultural differences on her emotional support acquisition in New Zealand that,

“My Kiwi friends might interpret my thoughts and feelings in a very different way because of the cultural differences between the west and China. Take my part-time job for example, my Kiwi friends thought that I worked part-time just for some pocket money. For me, earning money was only part of the story. Such work experience fulfilled me psychologically as it allowed me to achieve a sense of self-growth. I would not do a part-time work if I was in China. My Kiwi friends could not get the point of my opinions towards doing a part-time job.” (Grace, F 23 PR)

From Grace’s accounts, the reason why her homeland friends failed to meet her emotional needs also applied to explaining for the instance of the young migrant’s non-Chinese local network. Specifically, the young Chinese migrant’s homeland peers lacked of New Zealand context-specific knowledge whereas her local Kiwi friends knew little about Chinese culture and the mainland Chinese society. Both of them impeded the young Chinese migrant from acquiring the emotional support she needed. The participant was situated in a dilemma of in-betweenness because of her migrant identity. Grace further expressed her view of her co-ethnic peers in relation to support acquisition that
“It was relatively easier for me to communicate emotions with my Chinese friends in New Zealand. We shared more similarities with each other compared to the other two groups of friends (i.e. homeland friends and local Kiwi friends). Therefore, we could go deeper in exchanging opinions on what I had experiences. I felt being supported by my local Chinese friends because they were able to better understand my feelings.” (Grace, F 23 PR)

In this instance, the similar migration experiences, the shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as the New Zealand context-specific knowledge became increasingly important and were taken into consideration by the young Chinese migrant while choosing the source of support she was after. The young migrant participant relied on the co-ethnic friends for support which helped her get through the transition towards adulthood and adjust to the host society in the sociocultural dimension. As illustrated in previous chapter, young Chinese migrants consciously brought their co-ethnic peer networks onto a variety of internet platforms so as to stay connected and interact with each other when inconvenient to meet up in person. They made use of multiple internet platforms to primarily enhance the connections with a small number of close Chinese peers in New Zealand, thus maintaining the accessibility to the desired emotional support. Among all the online platforms, the Chinese mobile instant messaging WeChat was most closely associated with emotional support obtainment among young Chinese migrants. The interview participant Olivia suggested that,

“My close Chinese friends here (in New Zealand) and I rarely had a lengthy conversation for sharing personal feelings on WeChat. We used WeChat to inform
each other about the incidents happened to each side respectively. If it triggered me to express more about the details, I would discuss with them on WeChat to fix a time to meet up. Then We continued our WeChat conversations in the face-to-face meetings. I did not like talking with them through the internet when the emotional feelings were really strong.” (Olivia, F 27 NZ)

The research participants who were more willing to request support from co-ethnic peers than from homeland friends and non-Chinese friends in New Zealand showed the same pattern of WeChat use as it of Olivia. In a word, the acquisition of emotional support in New Zealand largely took place in the offline meetings between young Chinese migrants and their co-ethnic peers. The migrant youth perceived that the digital communication tools contributed to their support acquisition by enabling them to arrange time and place for face-to-face communications with local Chinese friends. In the context of New Zealand, WeChat communications only played a supplementary role in facilitating young Chinese migrants to obtain emotional support.

5.3 Instrumental Help

The previous section focused on the emotional needs of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants and how they took advantages of various internet platforms to obtain needed support. The interview findings suggested that young Chinese migrants proactively used China-based instant messaging to maintain their close ties in the home and host country, thus allowing to request and acquire emotional support transnationally and locally. Specifically, the shared histories and the well understanding of migrant youth’s personalities motivated the young Chinese migrants to seek emotional support transnationally. The Chinese migrant youth largely accessed the Chinese instant messaging QQ on desktop computers at the early
stage of migration. They willingly expressed the emotional feelings to close friends in China through real-time one-on-one communications on QQ. The immediate responses from closely-tied homeland peers fulfilled young Chinese migrants’ needs of company, understanding and comfort. The transnationally acquired emotional support played a key part in facilitating the newly-arrived Chinese migrant youth to psychologically adapt to the New Zealand society.

As the length of residence in the host country increased, young Chinese migrants’ demands of support went beyond understanding and comfort. The support which these migrant youth increasingly desired consisted of a combination of understanding, comfort and advice, which was critical to their adjustment to the host society in the sociocultural aspect. Notably, young Chinese migrants acquired such support primarily from co-ethnic close friends in the host country. The similar migration experiences, shared ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as the New Zealand context-specific knowledge together caused the co-ethnic ties to become the primary source of support to young Chinese migrants. With the fast growing of China-based internet platforms, Chinese migrant youth mostly adopted the homeland mobile instant messaging WeChat to strengthen the connections with close co-ethnic friends. Their engagements in WeChat communications mainly served the young Chinese migrants to fix the time and place to meet their local Chinese friends in person. The Chinese migrant youth acquired the emotional support from close co-ethnic ties mostly through face-to-face communications.

The last section illuminated the way in which young Chinese migrants used the internet to fulfil their instrumental needs in both the home and host country. On the one hand, migrating to New Zealand caused the young migrants not to be able to show up when their
family members in China were in great need of help. To contribute on their part, Chinese migrant youth used homeland internet platforms to mobilise their strong ties in China so as to request for practical help. The young Chinese migrants relied on the close ties formed pre-migration to offer instrumental help to their extended families in the home country. On the other hand, using mobile instant messaging benefited Chinese migrant youth in asking for small favours from families and local Chinese friends in the host country.

As an adult, young Chinese migrants expressed the willingness to help out their extended families, especially the senior family members left behind in China. The physical distance between the home and host country did not hinder the Chinese migrant youth from making their efforts to mobilise relational resources for instrumental help acquisition. With the facility of the Chinese mobile instant messaging WeChat, some young migrants were able to seek assistance from their pre-existing close ties in China. The homeland close ties ultimately helped solve the problems for the family members of Chinese migrant youth on behalf of them. For instance, a female participant Penny who immigrated to New Zealand with her parents at the age of thirteen recalled her experiences of using WeChat to obtain practical help from a close friend in China. Her friendship with the homeland peer started from being desk mates while attending the same middle school in China. Penny detailed how she contacted her middle school desk mate to help her grandmother that,

“I have been very close to my desk mate ever since we became friends in the middle school. I contacted him for help whenever something happened to my families in China. The seniors in my family were left behind in China and they were not good at using the internet to buy goods. For example, my grandmother suddenly became very sick and started urinary incontinence recently. My other family members did
not know where to buy diapers for my grandmother. I used WeChat to contact my desk mate and ask him to help buy special diapers designed for elderly people online and send them to my grandmother.” (Penny, F 25 NZ)

The close friendship between the participant and her desk mate has not been disrupted as a result of her migration to New Zealand. In her interview, Penny suggested that she was very keen to keep her close connection with her middle school desk mate after leaving China. She lost her desk mate’s contact information at first but managed to reconnect with him after searching from alternative sources. Her desk mate was the only contact with whom the young migrant has kept in touch and continuously communicated for the past eleven years. The distant communication pairs have adopted Chinese internet platforms i.e. QQ and WeChat to main the friendship and to interact with each other after being separated by the physical distance. The uninterrupted close tie and the continuous communications enabled the young Chinese migrant to mobilise her homeland friendship relationship, accessing the needed instrumental help transnationally. Consequently, the WeChat communications with the homeland close tie helped to solve the urgent problems that the young migrant’s families came across in China. Similarly, another male participant Victor (M 28 PR) highlighted the importance of homeland close ties in obtaining transnational instrumental help post-migration. He suggested that,

“I still had a number of relatives living in China. When needed, I talked to my close friends via WeChat to ask them to do me favour, helping my relatives sort out urgent problems. My friends and I were both grownups. We were very close to each other despite that I have moved away from China for eleven years. So, I could reach them for practical help.” (Victor, M 28 PR)
Although being separated by the physical distance, young Chinese migrants were able to request practical help from homeland close ties with the facility of the internet and digital communication technologies. Specifically, using the mobile instant messaging WeChat allowed young Chinese migrants to convey their needs efficiently and accurately to the homeland peers. The specific needs could be explained in the forms of texts and images and be communicated through real-time conversations. The technical features of WeChat afforded Chinese migrant youth to maintain their strong ties and mobilise them to obtain instrumental help in the home country.

In addition, the homeland close ties offered instrumental support to young Chinese migrants, which exerted a positive impact on improving the quality of life of migrant youth and their families in New Zealand. For instance, the female participant Sally provided an example of how her friends in China helped buying goods for her father in New Zealand that,

“My friends in China and I spent less time talking to each other via QQ in recent years since we both started working full time. Despite that, I sent messages to them when I needed for practical help from them. Sometimes, my dad needed to buy specific goods from China. I used QQ to send the details of the products to my close friends in China. They helped me to make the purchase and post the products to me.”

(Sally, F 27 PR)

The use of QQ and WeChat increased young Chinese migrants’ communication capability, enabling them to connect to the associates who possessed the resources they needed regardless of physical location. On the one hand, Chinese migrant youth proactively
communicated their urgent needs with pre-existing close ties via Chinese instant messaging platforms, seeking instrumental support transnationally so as to help solve senior family members’ problems in the home country. On the other hand, they used the two instant messaging services to request and obtain practical help from their well-maintained homeland close ties, which consequently benefited their quality of life in the host country.

In the context of New Zealand, young Chinese migrants primarily relied on mobile phone calls and text messages to communicate their needs of instrumental support with local Chinese friends. They perceived the two relatively old-fashioned communication paths more efficient than the internet-mediated paths for acquiring practical help from those who lived in the same geographical location. Notably, some young Chinese migrants indicated that they used WeChat to ask for small favours from family members in daily life. For instance, the female participant Ellen (F 24 PR) often used WeChat to contact her parents and sisters who lived with her in Auckland to check what was missing on the shopping list when doing grocery shopping alone.

5.4 Discussion

In prior research, young people have been largely perceived as passive recipients of social capital, inheriting the resources from their families and kinships. Little attention has been paid on young people’s agency in generating social capital outside the family setting. In the context of migration, the migrant youth moved away with their parents, leaving all pre-established social connections in the home country. Migrant parents started to forge new social connections and exchange resources with local contacts in the host country. As a consequence, the social capital that migrant youth were able to obtain from immediate families was too little to satisfy their needs. To address the unsatisfied needs, they had to
search for alternative paths to request and acquire social capital outside the family setting. Therefore, this research seeks to investigate how Chinese migrant youth form social networks so as to access needed resources with the facility of the internet.

Online communication mainly facilitates migrant youth to acquire resources from their own social network, enabling them to gain more autonomy and to be less dependent on immediate families. The internet-enabled resources acquisition is vital to migrant youth especially when the migrant parents are unable to offer sufficient, appropriate support in a new, unfamiliar sociocultural environment. These bilingual migrant youth utilise specific social affordances of each media in different ways so as to access the wanted resources possessed by particular social networks regardless of location. The resources are beneficial to strengthening migrant youth’s bicultural competence which leads to a better transition to the host society.

The longer migrant youth stay in NZ, the less they rely on local Chinese online forum for information about the host society. With the proliferation of Chinese social media, migrant youth have more channels to access information about the homeland. Subscribing news feed produced by homeland state media, influential media outlets and organisations on Weibo and WeChat in-app Moments becomes a new crucial way to acquire the latest news about mainland China. In addition, following homeland peers on the above two platforms, allowing migrant youth to understand China from the perspective of homeland peers. The way that migrant youth utilise host country based (international) platforms for local information acquisition has not changed too much. The emerging trend regarding information acquisition is that migrant youth actively find available media channels to
locate the needed information. Migrant youth become passive consumers of information from news content producers rather than from informal interactions with social contacts.

The length of residence in NZ and contextual cues (sociocultural relational) influence the acquisition of emotional support from homeland and co-ethnic peers. The reason for requesting emotional support from homeland close friends has changed as migrant youth live longer in the host country. The purpose has not changed, simply looking for comfort from those who know their personalities better. With the increase of smart phone ownership, migrant youth prefer MIM than IM to reach the target contact(s), initiating a real-time communication for comfort. The total of social capital is increased as migrant youth are capable to acquire resources from their dispersed social networks in different locations. For example, the young migrants can turn to distant communicators for emotional support when no local contact is available or appropriate in this regard.

It is inappropriate to single out other types of media in the examination of the role of SNS use in acquiring emotional support. In other words, migrant youth may not acquire emotional support from associates through the single use of SNS. However, SNS allows migrant youth to broadcast their request for support mildly to a wide range of audiences. It is of great importance especially when the migrant youth have not determined whom to ask for the supportive responses. Two possible consequences of requesting for emotional support on SNS are as follows. Firstly, the migrant youth receive sufficient responses to their request directly on the site, which satisfies migrant youth’s needs on the emotional level. Secondly, migrant youth may initially get a brief response from specific audiences. The response signals respondents’ concern about the migrant youth or further interests for more details about what has happened to the migrant youth. Such initial response obtained
on the site encourages migrant youth to take another communication path to approach the respondents for a private conversation. In this circumstance, the migrant youth are found to be more likely to use IM for an intimate conversation. The follow-up IM communication assists the migrant youth to express themselves in more accurate details to the specific audience. The migrant youth can expect more meaningful responses with greater intensity throughout the IM conversation. The consequence is that migrant youth interprets the IM responses as understanding, validating and caring which significantly satisfies their emotional needs.

The migrant youth’s SNS use pattern showed significant differences in the development of local non-Chinese networks in New Zealand. In their early arrival to New Zealand, the Chinese migrant youth had the desire and felt the challenge to fit into the new sociocultural environment of the host country. In the school context, the demand to fit in stimulated migrant youth to find suitable ways on and offline to approach and cultivate friendship with new schoolmates, especially the local ones. Not surprisingly, the migrant youth made their media choice by primarily looking at what was the most preferred site among the local peers. Facebook served as the major site through which the migrant youth attempted to connect and interact with their local schoolmates and interest group members encountered offline. Within the New Zealand context, the technical affordances of the selected site were perceived not as important as the networked contacts in affecting migrant youth’s media choice. The symbolic meaning of choosing Facebook was considered to be more crucial than its actual use to the migrant youth. They regarded Facebook as an identifier which signalled the membership of their local peer group. Becoming a Facebook user fulfilled the migrant youth’s individual need to create a sense of connectedness with the unacquainted schoolmates. Migrant youth’s Facebook use pattern developed in association with their
exploration of sense of belonging to the new peer network in New Zealand. They spent
most of their time reading the contents created or shared by their Facebook friends, i.e.
schoolmates in New Zealand. In other words, the primary interest of the migrant youth was
observing the after-school life of their schoolmates and their interactions with others not
exclusive to the mutual friends on the site. By doing so, the accessible social information
on Facebook helped migrant youth to know better about the social and cultural life of their
local schoolmates.

As the observation continued, migrant youth’s Facebook use pattern developed into two
different sub-patterns. Some migrant youth perceived to share commons with local peers
in various aspects which have not been found in offline interactions. For example, the
young migrant and her local schoolmates both loved animals and had interest in joining in
local organisation to protect animals from being abused. These migrant youth were found
to have increased desire to strengthen their relationship with local peers and were more
willing to belong to the new peer network formed in the host society. The high need to
belong encouraged these migrant youth to engage in more directed communication with
local peers on Facebook, including comment and Like. With the increase of directed
communication, the young Chinese migrants felt much closer with local peers than before.
They perceived their local peers to offer them with more informational resources.
Chapter 6: Enacting the Social Capital Acquisition

The social capital theoretical framework of this study encompasses three dimensions, namely, social network, resources and social interactions. The previous two chapters illuminate how the Chinese migrant youth use a range of internet platforms to navigate their social networks and acquire resources transnationally and locally. Specifically, chapter four takes a media multiplexity perspective to illustrate young Chinese migrants’ different tiers of internet use and its impacts on their social network formation and maintenance post-migration. Chapter five further explains how Chinese migrant youth’s use of particular technological features influences their acquisition of different types of resources.

The present chapter investigates the way in which young Chinese migrants express themselves and interact with different networks of contacts online. It helps understand how migrant youth’s specific online communication behaviours contribute to different social capital outcomes. In this research, self-disclosure is the primary means that facilitates social relationship development. This research examines Chinese migrant youth’s self-disclosures across different types of online platforms. It aims to illustrate the crucial role that self-disclosure plays in both maintaining migrant youth’s homeland ties and strengthening their relationship with local contacts in the host society.

6.1 IM Disclosure and Intimacy

In this study, the Chinese migrant youth disclosed their emotions, thoughts and mundane life through different internet platforms, including instant messaging and social network sites. With all available means, the migrant youth were able to disclose themselves and
share their personal life in different manners. The disclosure content varied in terms of its depth and breadth. Some young Chinese migrants expressed their intimate feelings via instant messaging whereas others used SNS-enabled private messages to disclose themselves at a high level of intimacy. Some migrant youth favoured China-based platforms, which allowed the disclosure content to be easily seen by both local Chinese contacts and friends in the homeland. Others adopted both Chinese and global social network sites in order to moderately share their everyday life with the entire personal networks regardless of location and ethnicity.

Self-disclosure was essential to sustaining migrant youth’s intimate social relationships. This section detailed the characteristics of young Chinese migrants’ self-disclosing behaviours on China-based internet platforms in particular. It also listed some of the key reasons for these migrant youth’s relatively lower engagement in disclosing themselves on the global platform, i.e. Facebook. In this section, it also compared the differences of the disclosure content which Chinese migrant youth generated to their homeland network and local co-ethnic network. The reasons and consequences of their different self-disclosure were also discussed in detail.

6.1.1 IM Disclosures and Private Interactions

Chinese migrant youth consciously made use of instant messaging (IM) services for emotional disclosure (i.e. revealing personal feelings, thoughts and opinions). Findings from interviews showed that the migrant youth were willing to disclose their perceptions and feelings of the post-migration life experiences in private conversations. China-based (computer-based) instant messaging QQ and mobile instant messaging (or social messaging application) WeChat were the primary means which facilitates the migrant youth to privately disclose their intimate feelings and personal opinions. The communication
partners i.e. disclosure recipients were primarily the young migrants’ homeland friends. The migrant youth disclosed emotions in different manners on computer-based instant messaging and mobile instant messaging (or mobile-based social messaging applications).

First, Chinese migrant youth favoured IM-based one-to-one communication, aiming to disclose emotions to specific individual contact in China. Findings show that thirteen out of the total thirty-five Chinese migrant youth interviewees used QQ to express their intimate feelings to a small number of homeland close friends. Such emotional disclosure frequently happened in the early years when the migrant youth started adapting to the host society. The disclosure content was largely text-based, covering migrant youth’s certain salient episodes in daily life and more importantly their immediate feelings. As introduced in the first chapter, the young research participants immigrated to New Zealand at the age of thirteen to seventeen, continuing their formal education in the secondary school. As a student, the migrant youth spent most of the day at school, facing alone the unfamiliar New Zealand school culture. Meantime, their connection with the prior school life in China was almost cut off as a result of the migration movement. The migrant youth were very likely to lose the social connections formed at school in China while confronting the challenge of cultivating new ones in New Zealand. In this situation, the internet use lent the migrant youth a great opportunity to maintain the online connection with homeland school peers. Despite that, such internet-supported communication relationship could be weakened over time due to the lack of actual social interaction. To stimulate social interaction, the migrant youth actively initiated conversations with homeland friends by self-disclosing their emotions.
In the context of instant messaging, the emotional disclosure took place when the young migrants and their homeland friends were simultaneously online. For instance, Danny (M, 25, NZ) immigrated to New Zealand at the age of fifteen, entering an Auckland-based secondary school from year ten. He used QQ as the major communication tool to stay connected with his homeland peers after leaving China. When asking Danny about how he managed to keep interacting with homeland school peers via QQ, he began with a short answer that “(I) talk about myself and what has happened to me in New Zealand (with them)”. In other words, self-disclosure effectively helped open up the conversation between the distant communication partners. Danny’s personal feeling of studying in New Zealand secondary school centred in his disclosure to homeland peers. The participant further emphasised that,

“Everything is new to me. My new classmates are all local Kiwis. I know none of them. Honestly, the pressure of studying here (in New Zealand) is big at the beginning. Sometimes, I failed a very important exam. I would talk through the stressful feeling with my close friends in China when we were both on QQ. They kindly comforted me with warm and encouraging words. After that, we just continued chatting something else.” (Danny, 25, NZ)

Self-disclosure played an important role in complementing contextual cues, which promoted social interactions and mutual understanding between communication pairs. The shared context underlying communications diminished as the migrant youth separated away from homeland peers. The migrant youth started a new school experience, making effort to perform well in academics after transferring to the new school. It consequently reduced the common topics on which the migrant youth could communicate with homeland
friends. In addition, the contextual cues were crucial to building mutual understanding between the two sides throughout their interactions. In Danny’s case, being a student in New Zealand was so different from the way that he was accustomed to in China. The migrant youth needed to study according to New Zealand national curriculum and to adapt to the schooling system of the host country. The transformation caused great pressure to the newly arrived migrant youth. Unfortunately, the prior close friends in China did not have the chance to experience all the changes happened to the migrant youth post-migration. The homeland peers could hardly understand the meaning and the feeling of migrant youth’s post-migration transformations due to their insufficient knowledge of the new context where migrant youth situated. The little availability of contextual cues easily caused homeland communicators to be less active or lose interest in responding to the migrant youth in online communications. Insufficient contextual cues negatively affected the continuation of social interactions, hence weakened the intimate relationships that migrant youth have built pre-migration. As Danny’s last two sentences indicated, engaging in self-disclosure effectively made up the loss of communication context, which drew homeland communicators into the dialogue initiated by the migrant youth. With the increased knowledge of the student life in New Zealand, the homeland communicators were able to better understand migrant youth’s adaptation experiences and pressure.

6.1.2 Emotional Disclosures and Intimacy

In addition, self-disclosure contributed to the maintenance and development of intimacy between communicators. First, the disclosure depth was a key indicator which was applied to assess the intimacy level in a social relationship. Emotional disclosure referred to a

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34 In this thesis, the social relationships that Chinese migrant youth have built with anonymous others online were excluded from the analysis. Previous studies showed that internet users chose to disclose more about their emotions to strangers in online communications when they failed to do so in the offline setting (ref.). The phenomenon that Chinese migrant youth start a social relationship online is likely to lead to different social capital outcomes, which deserves a separate piece of paper to investigate.
more intimate level of disclosure whereas the type of descriptive disclosure emphasised the facts and demographic information about the discloser. Regarding emotional disclosure, the personal feelings and opinions that migrant youth voluntarily expressed were perceived to reflect their desires to be authentic and honest in the relationship with specific communicators (Derlega et al, 2008). The emotional disclosures also demonstrated that the migrant youth (the discloser) were willing to show the “innermost aspects of the self” to the communication partners (Derlega et al, 2008). With offering authenticity, honesty and the inner self in communications, the act of self-disclosing represented migrant youth’s willingness and enabled them to maintain or develop greater intimacy with the target contacts.

As discussed earlier, the migrant youth might invest less time and energy to interact with homeland friends because of lacking shared communication context. The decreased social interactions were likely to increase the emotional distance and lower the feeling of intimacy between the distant communication pairs. As a result, young Chinese migrants’ relational bond with homeland close friends could be weakened over time. This study found that the online emotional disclosure specifically helped strengthen the intimacy between Chinese migrant youth and their pre-existed close friends in China. Technologically, the use of instant messaging QQ effectively encouraged the migrant youth to express personal feelings and opinions to homeland close friends.

Findings based on interviews showed that migrant youth perceived instant messaging as a reliable means for emotional disclosures. One male interviewee Jack (M, 28, NZ) who immigrated to New Zealand at the age of fourteen, accounted for his using QQ to communicate stress with his two close friends in China. He said that,
“I chose QQ because it (QQ) gave me more privacy in communications. Using QQ allowed me to tell my stressful feelings to my homeland friends in the manner of one-to-one communication. I felt very secure to do so (emotional disclosures) via instant messaging (i.e. QQ). No other people expect for my close friends could receive my messages and know the study pressure I experienced here (New Zealand).” (Jack, M, NZ)

The participant’s accounts showed that the migrant youth was very cautious in selecting the communication platform for emotional disclosures. The primary reason for using instant messaging QQ was that it had advantages in creating a private communication space for self-disclosing intimate feelings. Specifically, instant messaging allowed exchanging point-to-point messages, thus enabling the migrant youth to engage in one-to-one communications. As shown in Jack’s interview accounts, the young Chinese migrant strongly opposed to openly talk about his study pressure. Notably, the IM-facilitated one-to-one communications effectively helped reduce the public awareness which impeded the migrant youth from disclosing his stresses. Some other migrant youth also pointed out that the public awareness did raise their concern about emotional disclosures in online communications. Another male participant Danny (M, 25, NZ) explained that,

“I wouldn’t share the stress-like feelings on social network sites. All my friends, colleagues and the acquaintances could see it (the emotional disclosures) if I did so. I didn’t want to show my pressure and weakness to every one of my social network. So I chose QQ (instant messaging). I could use it (QQ) to complain to a few of close friends in private conversations.” (Danny, M, NZ)
According to Danny’s explanations, it was evident that instant messaging outperformed social network sites to be the primary means for emotional disclosures. The participant showed his concern in disclosing emotional feelings on social network sites. Danny’s accounts demonstrated that social network sites enabled him to form online connections with a wide range of contacts. However, the migrant youth’s privacy concern increased as the scale of disclosure recipients expanded on social network sites. The public awareness on social network sites reduced the migrant youth’s tendency to disclose his pressure and weakness in interactions. In contrast, the disclosure recipients were allowed to limit to specific individuals in IM communications, which enabled the migrant youth to obtain more private awareness than public awareness. The heightened private awareness increased the migrant youth’s sense of security, making them feel less inhibited in revealing the stressful feelings in IM communications. Therefore, the migrant youth perceived instant messaging as a better option for emotional disclosures.

6.1.3 Group Communications and Emotional Disclosures

Compared to individual chats on instant messaging, the group communications increased as a result of young Chinese migrants’ extensive use of mobile instant messaging. Particularly, the Chinese migrant youth became more active in using WeChat group chats with homeland close friends. Subsequently in WeChat communications, a new pattern of online self-disclosure emerged among the Chinese migrant youth. This research found that the WeChat use promoted migrant youth to disclose their emotions to multiple contacts simultaneously. Lydia (F, 24, PR), a female interviewee living in Wellington, shared her experiences of using WeChat for emotional expressions. She said that,
“My two homeland close friends and I created a chat group on WeChat so as to contact each other. Within the chat group, I was able to easily express my immediate feelings to both of them at the same time. And I could get their responses in our group conversations. It felt like returning to the past when I shared my secrets with them in person.” (Lydia, F, PR)

This young migrant participant immigrated to New Zealand with her mom at sixteen. She has resided in Wellington for more than eight years. In her accounts, Lydia stressed the merits of WeChat use for having group conversations with two of her close friends in China. In IM communications, Chinese migrant youth were more willing to disclose emotions to individual contacts. The emotional disclosures helped them maintain the intimacy with a specific homeland friend. In comparison, the MIM i.e. WeChat allowed one-to-many disclosures within a closed group of specific communicators. In Lydia’s case, a closed chat group has been created to serve the migrant youth and her two homeland friends for a three-way communication. Within the closed chat group, WeChat use increased the migrant youth’s sense of security, which promoted her to show the inner self to the group communicators. In other words, the feature of defining closed chat groups effectively helped reduce the public awareness, making the migrant youth feel less concerned about sharing their authentic feelings. The MIM (WeChat) use increased migrant youth’s interests in disclosing emotions and maintaining the strong tie with homeland close friends over time.

For Chinese migrant youth, their featured use of instant messaging (QQ) and mobile instant messaging (WeChat) both contributed to the homeland strong-tie network maintenance. Despite that, the research findings showed that a gradual decrease of IM disclosures occurred whereas the MIM-based emotional disclosures have significantly increased over
time. The two possible reasons for this emerging trend are listed as below. The first reason lies in young Chinese migrants’ extensive use of smartphones and the easy access to mobile internet. The nearly ubiquitous internet access fundamentally transformed the migrant youth’s preferences and use habits of the computer-based instant messaging (QQ) and mobile-based instant messaging (WeChat).

Secondly, findings based on interviews showed that the time and place for migrant youth to use computer-based instant messaging were very limited. The young migrants primarily used their home computer to access QQ. In order to communicate with homeland contacts, the young migrants needed to wait until late night when the homeland communicators could get on QQ. The restrictions to accessing computer-based instant messaging made the migrant youth feel less motivated to disclose immediate feelings to their homeland friends. In contrast, the migrant youth carried their mobile devices everywhere and the ubiquitous internet access enabled the migrant youth to connect with their social networks all the time. Consequently, the MIM use was more likely to meet the young migrants’ real-time demands of disclosing personal feelings to targeted network of contacts. In addition, it increased the possibility that migrant youth could receive rapid responses from the disclosure recipients in MIM communications. The quick responses from communication partners had a positive effect on migrant youth’s further emotional disclosures. Hence, the MIM-enabled social interactions played a positive role in accelerating migrant youth’s perception of intimacy with homeland networks.

35 New Zealand is five hours ahead of China in the period of daylight saving. In the rest of the year, the time difference between the two countries is four hours.
6.1.4 Why Not Disclose to Local Contacts

Notably, young Chinese migrants’ emotional disclosures to homeland networks had negative impacts on the development of a close relationship with local contacts. An existing research suggested that the depth of online self-disclosures was positively associated with the feelings of interdependence between the communication partners (Yum and Hara, 2005). In the interview with a Wellington-based interviewee Nina (F, 20, PR), the participant suggested that she particularly set up a WeChat group in order to interact with childhood friends in the homeland. Nina further commented on her WeChat emotional disclosures that, “Although I immigrated to New Zealand, I wanted to share my joy and sorrow with my childhood friends forever.” When interviewing the participant Danny regarding IM disclosures, he used to say, “I felt that I would keep the habit of complaining to them (the homeland close friends)”. The Chinese migrant youth used instant messaging services to continue the routine of disclosing emotions to homeland close friends. The continuous emotional disclosures were likely to increase young migrants’ dependence on the disclosure recipients, i.e. the homeland close friends. Previous studies suggested that disclosing to pre-existent close friends was likely to cause people to restrict self-disclosure with other potential communicators. Young Chinese migrants’ reliance on homeland close friends might lead to a decrease of emotional disclosures to their local contacts. The lack of emotional disclosures negatively influenced Chinese migrant youth in fostering an intimate relationship with their local contacts.

Aside from the homeland network, the local contacts’ responses had a negative impact on promoting migrant youth’s further emotional disclosures on other occasions. In the interview with Lydia, the participant detailed her reactions to the responses received from the local friends. Lydia reflected that,
“I used to tell my local close friends that I regularly gave some money to my mom when I got my salary. They couldn’t understand my behaviour. My local friends argued that ‘you received the income for your work and there’s no reason to share the income with your mom’. Honestly, their words made me feel uncomfortable. I couldn’t continue the conversation on this topic anymore.” (Lydia, F, PR)

The responses from the young migrant’s local close friends significantly weakened her willingness to continue the emotional disclosures. The participant had no intention to give any explanations of her behaviour to her local friends in their conversations. Moreover, she chose not to disclose the authentic feelings to her local friends after hearing their responses. In contrast, the young migrant talked through the whole thing with her homeland close friends in their WeChat group conversations. Lydia explained for her behaviour that,

“My local friends believed that the parent financially had no relationship with the child who was eighteen. However, giving parents money represented filial piety in the Chinese culture. I expressed my feelings and my opinions about the dispute to my homeland close friends when we chatted via WeChat. And they had no problem understanding me. Sometimes, I felt that I’d better contact my homeland friends when I really wanted to express my opinions.” (Lydia, F, PR)

Lydia’s accounts showed that the cultural differences in interpreting the child-parent relationship made her local friends unable to appropriately understand her behaviour. As a consequence, the misunderstanding discouraged the young migrant from continuing the emotional disclosures to local networks. The migrant youth honestly expressed her
authentic opinions to her close friends in China via WeChat. In contrast to her local friends, Lydia’s homeland close friends’ responses allowed her to feel understood. Similar to Lydia, another male interviewee Jack (M, 28, NZ) preferred to disclose his stressful feelings of studying in New Zealand to homeland close friends in IM (QQ) communications. When I asked him about the reasons for not revealing his study pressure to local friends, Jack explained that,

“Although my local friends and I studied together, I felt that they would never understand the study pressure that I experienced. I used to complain to them about my stress, but their reactions made me feel very bad. It felt like that I was a very weak person in their eyes. That’s why I didn’t like to disclose my thoughts and feelings to the local friends despite that we met each other (in person) very often.”

(Jack, M, NZ)

From Jack’s perspective, his local friends did not show sufficient understanding to him in their responses to his emotional disclosures. On the contrary, the participant emphasised that his homeland friends’ responses allowed him to feel cared and supported. The accounts of both Lydia and Jack indicated that the homeland close friends’ responses psychologically and emotionally fulfilled the migrant youth’s needs. The satisfying responses raised the young migrant’s strong willingness to engage in WeChat group communications so as to express personal feelings and opinions to the close friends in China. More importantly, being authentic and honest in disclosing emotions and opinions helped migrant youth strengthen the intimacy with the homeland close friends. In comparison, the inappropriate reactions led to Chinese migrant youth’s decreased willingness for emotional disclosures with the local friends. It negatively affected the
migrant youth and their local friends to develop mutual understanding to each other. The emotional distance between migrant youth and their local friends was likely to be widened, resulting in the weakening of their friendship ties.

### 6.1.5 Intimate Disclosures and Trust

The Chinese migrant youth have also formed strong ties with a small group of co-ethnic friends in New Zealand. However, some Chinese migrant youth were less willing to disclose emotions to co-ethnic close friends rather than homeland close friends. Aside from intimacy, this research found that the emotional disclosures were positively associated with migrant youth’s perception of trust\(^{36}\) in their social contacts in the home and host country. For instance, Jane (F, 27, NZ), who immigrated to New Zealand with her parents at fifteen, concerned about disclosing her emotions to co-ethnic friends in Wellington. She said that,

> “I felt inappropriate to tell the (local) Chinese close friends about my dislike of a co-ethnic acquaintance who also lived in Wellington. They could easily find out the person whom I dislike even if I hid that person’s identity. The Chinese community in Wellington was so small that the person that I disliked might be closely related to my local Chinese friends. I feared that exposing the dislike feeling might harm my interactions with local Chinese friends in the future.” (Jane, F, NZ)

Jane’s accounts showed that she feared that her emotional disclosures were very likely to harm her relationship with local Chinese close friends. The fear that the young Chinese migrant felt caused her unwilling to disclose the dislike feelings to co-located ethnic Chinese friends. The participant believed that concealing her feelings from local Chinese friends.

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\(^{36}\) Here, trust refers to the personal trust between individuals. The social trust between communities in a given society is not analysed.
close friends was a safe way to avoid any negative consequences on their friendship and future interactions. Another Auckland-based participant Nelly (F, 22, NZ) echoed with Jane in this respect. Nelly perceived that it was not safe to share personal opinions of an ethnic Chinese with local contacts including her close friends. She expressed the concern that the disclosure contents might be leaked to a third party, which posed a potential threat to her within her small co-ethnic social circle in Auckland. Existing research on self-disclosure suggested that it provided a basis for the discloser to assess whether or not the communication partner was trustworthy. The initial disclosure and the subsequent responses together helped the migrant youth infer how much they trusted in their local Chinese friends. Without the disclosures, the two participants were unable to assess co-ethnic close friends’ responses in their interactions. Concealing themselves impeded the migrant youth from generating increased trust in their co-ethnic close friends. It consequently affected the relationship development and maintenance between Chinese migrant youth and their co-ethnic friends.

Findings based on the interviews suggested that young Chinese migrants perceived to be equally intimate with both homeland close friends and co-ethnic close friends in the host society. They each used WeChat to privately disclose the dislike feelings and personal opinions to their close friends in China. In addition, the two participants pointed out that the homeland disclosure recipients’ reactions allowed them to feel understood and supported. The self-disclosures and the reactions caused the young migrants to infer that the homeland close friends were increasingly trustworthy. Previous studies on trust suggested that it was an important means of “responding to uncertainty” in the social interactions between individuals (Tonkiss, 2004). The level of trust had an impact on how much the uncertainty could be reduced in social interactions, which consequently affected
the social capital acquisition. To the young migrants like Jane, the increased trust promoted them to continue disclosing emotions to homeland close friends despite of uncertainties and risks. It also enacted further social interactions between the distant communication pairs, enabling the migrant youth to acquire emotional support through their online interactions.

For some other migrant youth, they were more likely to disclose emotions to co-ethnic close friends. Precisely, these young Chinese migrants tended to disclose their personal opinions and feelings to co-located Chinese friends through face-to-face communications. The face-to-face disclosures essentially accelerated the level of trust that migrant youth offered to their local Chinese strong-tie network. This research found that two factors affected these young Chinese migrants’ decision in choosing co-ethnic friends as the disclosure recipients. Locality was the primary factor which stimulated migrant youth to communicate with co-ethnic friends about their intimate feelings. Findings based on the interviews suggested that IM disclosures have not substituted for face-to-face disclosures in co-located communications. The migrant youth perceived IM disclosures as an effective communication strategy to maintain their strong ties in China. Despite that, they did not apply the same strategy for the development of close relationship with co-ethnic contacts in New Zealand. The geographical priority allowed the migrant youth to share their feelings with co-ethnic friends in person. As a male interviewee Victor (M, 28, PR) stated, “My (Chinese) close friend and I both lived in Auckland. I preferred to ask him out for a chat when I felt stressful.” Additionally, in face-to-face communications, multiple contextual and nonverbal cues helped migrant youth better express their emotions to co-ethnic friends. For instance, the eye contact and the body language effectively facilitated the migrant youth to convey their thoughts and emotions to their communicators in in-person meetings. The
young Chinese migrants mainly used instant messaging services (QQ and WeChat) for the purpose of arranging time and place to meet their co-ethnic close friends in person.

In addition to locality, ethnicity and the sociocultural contexts significantly influenced the quality of the responses given by migrant youth’s local Chinese close friends. The response contents were particularly affected by the above two factors. The common ethnic background allowed the co-ethnic communicators to think and feel from the migrant youth’s perspective, thus enabling appropriate responses to the disclosure contents. In addition, the co-ethnic contacts shared similar migration experiences with the Chinese migrant youth. Both the migrant youth and their co-ethnic friends kept their homeland culture and adapted to the social and cultural norms of the host society. Compared to the homeland and local contacts, the common transitional life experiences assisted the co-ethnic communicators to properly interpret young migrants’ self-disclosures. Specifically, the sociocultural transformations enabled the co-ethnic communicators to grasp the underlying meanings of migrant youth’s disclosures in each and every sociocultural context. The better co-ethnic contacts comprehended the disclosure contents, the more matching responses they could offer to the migrant youth. The appropriate responses that met Chinese migrant youth’s needs helped increase their perceived trust in the co-ethnic communicators, contributing to migrant youth’s co-ethnic strong-tie network maintenance.

### 6.2 Social Network Sites and Mundane Disclosures

The disclosure of mundane life and personal interests on social network sites served as an invitation to Chinese migrant youth’s weak-tie network, calling for their interactions. In SNS communications, the diversified expressions played a positive role in encouraging both the migrant youth disclosers and their SNS contacts (recipients) to engage with each
other. In co-located interactions, the Chinese migrant youth adopted two strategies to balance the benefits and risks of self-disclosing on social network sites. Some participants preferred to employ segmented privacy settings so as to manage the audiences whereas others chose to tailor the disclosure contents for the entire network on the site. The Chinese migrant youth applied the second strategy to their homeland network in SNS disclosures. Overall, the SNS disclosures had a positive impact on maintaining Chinese migrant youth’s weak-tie networks in the home and host country. As the communication technologies advanced, the young Chinese migrants developed new self-disclosing practices in their online interactions with homeland contacts.

6.2.1 Mundane Disclosures and Sense of Being Connected

Previous discussions in Chapter four show that internet use helped create a deterritorialised social space for the migrant youth to interact with both distant and local contacts. Specifically, the social network site use has profoundly encouraged young Chinese migrants to self-disclose their mundane life in the host society to their homeland contacts. The participant Olivia (F, 27, NZ) talked about her experiences in using the Chinese social network site Renren for sharing her life in Auckland with homeland contacts. She said that,

“Most of my homeland friends on Renren were my primary and secondary school classmates in China. We spent time studying and playing with each other all the time before I immigrate to New Zealand. I put my personal photos onto the site Renren\(^{37}\) on purpose. In doing so, a majority of my homeland friends were able to know about my life in New Zealand by looking at the photos I posted (onto Renren). They often sent me comments when I posted new photos onto the site. I felt great

\(^{37}\) Renren is a Chinese social network site which assists migrant youth to maintain homeland connections and some of the co-ethnic connections.
that I could still have some interactions with my homeland classmates (via Renren).”

(Olivia, F, NZ)

As we could see, the social network site Renren enabled the participant to mange her connections with two of her pre-formed homeland networks on a single site. The two networks included Olivia’s primary school classmate network and secondary school classmate network. Technically, the broadcast characteristic of Renren allowed the participant to share her personal life with both of the two homeland networks. In other words, the young migrant could simultaneously broadcast her mundane life in the host country to all of her primary school classmates and secondary school classmates by posting onto Renren.

As the migrant youth left the home country, the chances that they had to have face-to-face interactions with homeland friends got rare. The migration move led to distinct differences in the living context between migrant youth and their homeland network. The differences caused difficulties for homeland contacts to understand the thoughts and behaviours of the migrant youth. The unfamiliarity of New Zealand was also likely to reduce the homeland communicators’ interest to continue the interactions with the migrant youth in the online realm. The decrease of social interactions might weaken the connection between young Chinese migrants and their homeland contacts. Notably, the self-disclosures on Renren served as an invitation to the homeland contacts, calling for their interactions.

From the discloser’s perspective, the social network site Renren promoted the young migrant to present her migrant life in multiple forms, including photos and texts. For example, Olivia posted her personal photos on Renren, which vividly disclosed her migrant
life in New Zealand. The diversified disclosure contents were also positively associated with recipients’ responses. This research found that the photo posts were more advantageous to elicit responses from the weak-tie networks compared to disclosures in pure text. The visual cues embedded in the photo posts enabled the recipients to better interpret the emotions of the discloser. In Olivia’s case, her homeland classmates were more likely to “read” the migrant youth’s emotions through the photo posts, thus raising their interests in responding to Olivia’s disclosures on Renren.

The Renren disclosures opened up an opportunity for the distant communicators to interact with each other on the site. From the disclosure recipients’ perspective, the act of responding to the photo posts represented the homeland contacts’ interests in the migrant youth’s disclosures. The recipients’ comments encouraged the migrant youth to reply with further disclosures. In the texts of replies, the migrant youth wrote that,

“The place was called Muriwai Beach where I took those photos. I went there with several university classmates to see those yellow birds (gannets) during the study break. It was a great fun. Come to visit me and we could go to the beach together. I miss you.” (Olivia, F, NZ)

In Olivia’s further disclosures, she gave the homeland audiences with more details related to the photo posts. The young migrant depicted her short trip to Muriwai beach to her homeland classmates. Within her replies, Olivia briefly introduced the place where she went, the purpose of the trip and the people who travelled with her. The detailed information was crucial to the interactions between the migrant youth and her homeland contacts. Specifically, the information complemented rich contextual and relational cues.
for the homeland communicators, allowing them to have some insight into the migrant youth’s post-migration life. The provided cues helped the homeland contacts to familiarise with the physical and social contexts in which the migrant youth situated. The disclosures further motivated the homeland communicators to continuously engage with the young migrant under the photo posts. Therefore, in Renren communications, the self-disclosures effectively increased the interactions between Chinese migrant youth and the homeland network, strengthening their weak-tie connection.

In SNS communications, homeland recipients’ comments were the most effective type of responses, which significantly increased migrant youth’s willingness to continue interacting with the distant communicators. Interestingly, research findings showed that the homeland contacts’ passive consumption of disclosure contents have not discouraged the migrant youth from continuing the self-disclosures on social network sites. A female interviewee Helen (F, 23, NZ) stated that, “Sometimes, I got no comments from my friends in China. Despite that, it felt like I was connected with them as long as I kept posting on Renren.” The migrant youth discloser perceived that the act of self-disclosing was more important and meaningful than the contents of her disclosures on the site Renren. Specifically, it was the self-disclosing behaviour that enabled the young Chinese migrant to maintain a sense of being connected with her homeland contacts. Therefore, SNS disclosures as an effective communication strategy helped Chinese migrant youth to sustain their connections with a large number of weak-tie contacts in China.

6.2.2 Balance the Benefits and Risks of Facebook Disclosures

The expansion of disclosure recipients on social network sites increased migrant youth’s privacy concern, which led to two different disclosure preferences. Some migrant youth employed segmented privacy settings to control the access to the disclosure contents. In
other words, the migrant youth sought to manage the risks of self-disclosing on social network sites. Regarding to the potential risks, the Auckland-based interviewee Danny (M, 25, NZ) reflected that,

“It’s so risky to share every aspects of my life to a mix of contacts on the social network site Facebook. For example, some of my senior colleagues might feel uncomfortable to see or even dislike the funny photos of me. Actually, those photos were supposed to be shared with my friends.” (Danny, M, NZ)

Previous studies suggested that social network sites enabled the users to form online connections with both close friends and acquaintances. Danny’s accounts showed that the young Chinese migrant adopted Facebook to connect with offline networks which were different in tie strength. In the Facebook use context, the Chinese migrant youth had a very diverse network on the site, including their secondary school peers, university fellow students, colleagues, clients and acquaintances. Once being connected on the site, all types of migrant youth’s social connections were labelled as their Facebook friends. The complexity of social networks on Facebook led to context collapse, which increased the migrant youth’s privacy concern.

The downside of the broad audience on Facebook was that it lowered the young migrant’s willingness to self-disclose on the site. The young migrant perceived that disclosing personal opinions and the private life to all the Facebook-connected contacts was perceived as inappropriate and full of risks. The participant feared that his work colleagues might make judgements and form a bad impression on him according to the disclosure content i.e. the funny photos of him. Consequently, the improper disclosure was very likely to harm
the social relationship that migrant youth built up with specific individuals, such as his co-worker relationship. Therefore, restricting the disclosure audiences was crucial to reducing the risks of self-disclosing on Facebook, which was highly relevant to migrant youth’s weak-tie network maintenance in the host society.

Research findings suggested that the Chinese migrant youth, who shared similar concerns with Danny, chose to categorise their Facebook contacts into different subgroups. These young migrants gave each of their Facebook contacts a specific label according to personal needs or tie strengths. They further manually divided all the Facebook contacts into different subgroups according to the pre-defined labels. They could choose not to share with the entire networks when the disclosure contents included the information that was not appropriate to specific individuals. In other words, the disclosure contents would not be distributed to unintended audiences. Only a specific subgroup of Facebook contacts was allowed to receive the updates from the migrant youth. For example, the migrant youth suggested that they preferred to group the school peers under the labels including high school friends and university friends. Hence, they were able to publish specific contents which were suitable to the target group of school peers. Grouping disclosure recipients allowed the migrant youth to gain more control of privacy on social network sites. This strategy was helpful to raise the migrant youth’s willingness to self-disclose on the social network site, enabling them to effectively acquire certain resources from a specific network of contacts.

However, in SNS communication context, the control over disclosure recipients hindered migrant youth from acquiring resources and support from weak-tie networks. For example, it reduced the opportunity that migrant youth could receive novel information which was
crucial to help migrant youth resolve practical problems. The novel information, such as new ideas and job offers, were mostly likely to be derived from the weak-tie network, such as prior colleagues and acquaintances.

Some other migrant youth tailored the disclosure contents, making the contents suitable to be distributed to the entire network on the social network site. Tailoring the disclosure contents was the most adopted strategy among Chinese migrant youth in their SNS communications. For instance, the Auckland-based interviewee Helen (F, 23, NZ) started to frequently use Facebook when approaching high school graduation. In the interview with Helen, she reflected her thoughts on Facebook disclosures and its impacts on network maintenance. The participant said that,

“I liked taking photos while travelling. And I often picked up some interesting ones and posted them onto Facebook. So, my colleagues could see my photos in their news feed. I thought that the photos could help my colleagues to know more about me outside the office.” (Helen, F, NZ)

According to Helen’s interview accounts, the young Chinese migrant posted personal travelling photos with the purpose of accelerating her colleagues’ comprehensive understanding of her outside the work setting. When asking about her attitudes towards disclosing emotions and personal opinions on Facebook, Helen replied that,

“I added my clients and some acquaintances as my Facebook friends. My colleagues and the rest of people were mixed on my Facebook friend list. I felt that it’s improper to reveal my personal feelings to such a mix of networks on the site. It’s
much safer to share travelling photos than to express personal feelings on Facebook.”
(Helen, F, NZ)

With respect to weak ties, the participant added colleagues, clients and acquaintances to her Facebook contact list. The participant’s Facebook contacts consisted of local-born Kiwis, co-ethnics and immigrants from a third country. The migrant youth primarily shared beautiful photos and popular video clips on Facebook, which were appropriate to be seen by all their Facebook connections, especially the weak-tie contacts. The young Chinese migrant perceived her Facebook self-disclosures as an investment to maintaining the connections with co-located weak-tie contacts. The Facebook disclosures demonstrated the participant’s willingness and efforts in accelerating local weak-tie networks’ understanding of her. The SNS disclosures opened up the opportunity for co-located contacts to collect information about the migrant youth. Migrant youth shared their daily life, personal interests through texts, photos and videos on the social network site. The contents were prone to present the positive experiences of the migrant youth disclosers. Based on the disclosure contents, the co-located contacts were able to explore common interests with the migrant youth, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the migrant youth. Hence, the Chinese migrant youth benefited from Facebook disclosures on weak tie maintenance.

Notably, the Chinese migrant youth’s appropriating of their Facebook disclosures had a negative impact on their social capital acquisition. The tailoring of the contents was very likely to cause an increased passive consumption of migrant youth’s Facebook disclosures. It led to a decrease of responses to migrant youth’s disclosure contents. Facebook disclosures gradually lost efficacy in promoting social interactions, which negatively affected migrant youth to obtain social capital from their Facebook connections.
6.3 Discussion

Chinese migrant youth disclosed their private information and personal feelings to targeted audiences via different communication media. It resulted in differences in the depth and breadth of their disclosures towards different audiences respectively. The disclosure depth and breadth were associated with the development of mutual understanding, which was crucial to maintaining trust and intimacy. Young migrants engaged with social contacts across networks through different forms of online activities, such as commenting and replying on social network sites.

The communication media and disclosure recipients’ responses both affected Chinese migrant youth’s online self-disclosures. With all communication media ready to use, the migrant youth were able to disclose themselves and share their personal life according to their personal needs. Some migrant youth used computer-based instant messaging (QQ) whereas others adopted mobile instant messaging (WeChat) to disclose to homeland close friends. The former who favoured IM-based one-to-one communication, tended to disclose emotions to specific individual contact in the homeland. The latter were willing to disclose to a small group of homeland close friends via WeChat group communication. IM self-disclosure played a crucial role in supplementing contextual cues, which promoted social interactions and mutual understanding between communication pairs. In addition, IM self-disclosure helped to maintain the intimacy between migrant youth and homeland communicators. Research findings suggested that IM disclosures decreased whereas the MIM-based emotional disclosures increased over time. The first reason was that young Chinese migrants extensively used smartphones and easily accessed to the mobile internet. The second reason was that the time and place for migrant youth to use computer-based instant messaging were very limited.
Research findings showed that some young Chinese migrants tended to disclose their personal opinions and feelings to local Chinese friends through face-to-face communications. Two factors affected these young Chinese migrants’ decision in disclosing to co-ethnic friends. Firstly, locality was the primary factor that stimulated migrant youth to communicate with co-ethnic friends about their intimate feelings. Secondly, ethnicity and the sociocultural contexts significantly influenced the disclosure responses given by migrant youth’s local Chinese close friends.

Mundane life disclosures on social network sites acted as an invitation to Chinese migrant youth’s weak-tie network, calling for their interactions. The China-based Renren promoted young migrants to present her migrant life in multiple forms, including photos and texts. However, the expansion of disclosure recipients on social network sites increased migrant youth’s privacy concern. Some migrant youth managed disclosure audiences so as to control the access to the disclosure contents. The main reason that caused the migrant youth to disclose their personal information to others was their expectation of being understood and cared for. They feared to be perceived as a weak person by the local network. They were afraid of being misunderstood. These migrant youth felt concerned about self-disclosing on social network sites. They attempted to minimise the uncertainty in their social relationships with local network contacts. Concealing themselves on social network sites enabled them to avoid judgements from others, especially those who came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some other migrant youth tailored the disclosure contents, making the contents proper to be seen by the entire network on the social network site. The voluntary self-disclosing activities showed migrant youth’s willingness to be vulnerable to communication partners, keeping their privacy boundary open to the
disclosure recipients. Their actual behaviours of exposing personal information were crucial to developing an increased intimacy and trust between the migrant youth and their social networks.

The research suggested that the SNS use was more influential than the users’ predisposition of self-disclosure in strengthening their relationship with network associates. First, SNS promoted users to disclose themselves on the site by offering a variety of ways including status updates, commenting and private messages. The site also allowed users to self-disclose in different forms, such as texts, images and videos. All the above-mentioned affordances had a positive impact on encouraging and facilitating the users to self-disclose on SNS, which consequently affected their social relationship development. Second, whether the users perceived SNS as a suitable place for self-disclosing or not affected their social relationship development in the SNS context. Regarding the individuals who took SNS as a suitable place for self-disclosure, the research could examine their SNS use to understand how the way in which the individual used SNS affected their self-disclosure to diverse audiences, which consequently influenced their social relationship development.

The mechanism that causes the positive effects of SNS use (internet use) on migrant youth’s social capital acquisition is the enhanced (emotional) self-disclosures through SNS /the internet. The factor which affects migrant youth’s social relationship development is their SNS use i.e. online self-disclosures rather than their predisposition towards self-disclosure. The reason is that both the migrant youth with much and little tendency to disclose themselves in the offline context are likely to reveal their personal information and personal feelings in the online realm. The lack of social cues (e.g. visual, verbal cues, gestures, peripheral contexts) helps to reduce young migrants’ privacy concern while revealing
themselves to communication partners online. The migrant youth who feel reluctant to self-disclose to others offline may be willing to talk about themselves online. Therefore, examining the impacts that migrant youth’s SNS use exert on their online self-disclosure contributes to the understanding of their social relationship development in the context of internet communication. As to the self-disclosure, it presents young migrants’ willingness to forge links with the recipients (communication partners). The revealing of personal information and emotions demonstrate the trust that migrant youth offer to disclosure recipients who are allowed to see the different aspects of their migrant life including the vulnerable side. The migrant youth are likely to have different views towards the responses from communication partners. The trust on communication partners and the social relationship can be reinforced when migrant youth perceive partners’ responses as positive.

Research on transnational migrant families’ Facebook use suggested that the posts of and activities involved with homeland family members shown in migrants’ News Feed gave the migrants access to their families’ life in the home country. Consuming the information in News Feed constructed an ambient co-presence between the migrants and their homeland family members. The ambient co-presence not only enhanced migrants’ sense of being connected with homeland ties but also influenced the way in which migrants interacted with these homeland ties. In their research, the migrants got concerned and anxious when they found their family members not update Facebook status as usual. Consequently, the concern and anxiety drove the migrants to approach their families by other means i.e. instant messaging (Skype) for private conversations. In other words, the “passive consumption” on Facebook may not directly affected how migrants maintained homeland ties. Such type of Facebook use did influence the way in which migrants navigated the media landscape for close relationship maintenance. The interaction of multiple relevant
communication media (i.e. SNS and IM) affected Chinese migrant youth’s close tie maintenance in the transnational context. The SNS-enabled ambient co-presence and SNS interactions led to decreased IM communication between Chinese migrant youth and their homeland close ties. Prior to SNS use, Chinese migrant youth predominantly employed instant messaging to maintain the connection with homeland close friends. They invested a considerable amount of time in having one-to-one conversations with close friends in China on a regular basis – once a week. The frequency and intensity of their IM communication changed due to their increasing use of social network sites. The lack of mutual understanding of the changing social and cultural environments on each side made it hard for the distant communicators to find common topics to talk about, consequently losing interests to keep the established habit of IM communication with homeland pairs. In IM communications, the distant pairs needed to fully engage in the direct conversations. In comparison, SNS offered various social cues and different forms of interactions which encouraged migrant youth to engage with homeland close contacts. The social cues available in News Feed created a comfortable communication context, assisting the migrant youth to express their own communication interests and identify the life events and specific topics that their close friends experienced and were potentially willing to talk about. The rich social cues promoted the migrant youth to be proactive in engaging with close ties in the home country on the site. Even if there was no active engagement, passively consuming the information on SNS helped construct an ambient co-presence between the distant contacts, creating a sense of being connected to each other. Either active engagement or passive consumption on the site reinforced migrant youth’s perception/feeling that SNS was more suitable than IM to maintain homeland close ties over time. SNS increased the possibility that migrant youth continued communicating with those distant close friends who have not experienced the transformation of sociocultural environment in person. The
continuous communication was fundamental to sustaining the close relationship at distance. However, the way how Chinese migrant youth utilised the internet for strong tie maintenance across distance has significantly changed with the emergence of social network sites. In this research, SNS replaced IM to become the primary communication tool to help young Chinese migrants stay connected with homeland close ties in the later stage of migration. Meanwhile, IM played a supplementary role in facilitating the migrant youth to have in-depth one-to-one conversations with close friends according to the personal needs.

The SNS use particularly passive consumption behaviours did reshape the media multiplexity in the communications between Chinese migrant youth and their homeland ties, especially those close ones. The young Chinese migrants adopted new media channels (in addition to the one used pre-migration) to connect with homeland close friends. The newly adopted SNS exerted a greater impact on homeland close tie maintenance in the case that young Chinese migrants became less engaged in pre-existing media platform. Notably, the way in which Chinese migrant youth used the SNS (adopted post-migration) may lead to two opposite outcomes. First, the strength of homeland close ties would increase when young migrants actively engaged in directed communications (i.e. comment, private message, and Like) with homeland contacts.

In comparison, the ties would grow less close when migrant youth mainly passively viewed and read the social news broadcasted by homeland close contacts on the site. On the bright side, receiving the social information and mundane details about homeland contacts in a passive manner allowed migrant youth to feel being part of the homeland friend’s life, thus preserving the sense of being connected between the distant ties. However, the homeland
ties had no idea whether the migrant youth have seen the posts or not. In other words, the homeland contacts would not receive any notifications from the site that their posts were read by the migrant youth. As the recipient, migrant youth’s viewing of the posted stories was one-sided behaviour rather than other bidirectional forms of SNS interactions, such as comment. Therefore, passive consumption was less effective than directed communication in increasing the closeness between migrant youth and their homeland contacts.

Young Chinese migrants made reactions specifically to the activities that exposed the positive emotions of the content generators. Liking the contents and leaving a short comment were two major types of reactions that the Chinese migrant youth have done. Both of the two above activities have explicitly shown a moderate level of migrant youth’s care to their network associates i.e. the content generators. By saying a moderate level of care, it meant that the migrant youth did not feel uncomfortable or unsatisfied when their peers sent no reply back to them. Specifically, these young migrants attempted to use the Like action to implicitly inform the peer audiences of their attention to the posted contents. In other words, the Facebook interaction has successfully reinforced young Chinese migrants’ will to sustain the connections with their local acquaintance network. Despite that, the Facebook use has not been found to significantly raise Chinese migrant youth’s disposition to use their local social network as a resource for forming the sense of belonging to the host country.

On the contrary, young migrants’ negative attitudes to what they found out about the acquaintance contacts on Facebook decreased the frequency of their social interactions on the site. The decline of Facebook interaction impeded migrant youth to further develop intimate relationships with local contacts. As a consequence, young migrants were less
likely to request practical help, financial assistance and emotional support from the local social network. The above-mentioned types of resources were predominantly attainable from the social networks of high intimacy. Apart from resources acquisition, young Chinese migrants’ decreasing engagement in Facebook interaction weakened their willingness to maintain the local social network in the long run.

My research findings showed that Facebook use helped Chinese migrant youth to forge social connections across ethnic groups in their early years of migration to New Zealand. As to the motivation of using Facebook, the migrant youth’s interview accounts indicated that they perceive Facebook as an essential tool to network with offline acquainted local contacts. Using Facebook has become part of Chinese migrant youth’s adaptation to the new life in the host society. Moreover, the migrant youth felt socially excluded from the majority of their local contacts when they do not have a Facebook account. In other words, the Chinese migrant youth perceived using Facebook as a prerequisite to make friends with local peers. The local-wide popular social media Facebook played a pragmatic role in promoting the migrant youth to get along and forge online connections with new social contacts. To the Chinese migrant youth, Facebook was a virtual place for social networking rather than somewhere for entertaining, relaxing or fulfilling personal interests.
Chapter Seven: The Networked 1.5 Generation Chinese migrants

This thesis has been undertaken to examine the social capital building of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand with specific focus on the internet use effects. Social capital in this research consists of social network, resources and support as well as social interactions which enact social capital acquisition. The researched internet platforms include Chinese-language platforms and global platforms, which facilitate young Chinese migrants to communicate with contacts across distance and ethnicity. The 1.5 generation Chinese migrants refer to the Chinese youth who immigrated from mainland China to New Zealand aged between thirteen and seventeen and have lived in New Zealand for over three years. Methodologically, this research has collected and analysed the interview accounts and user-generated online accounts of young Chinese migrants, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their migration experiences, media preferences, internet use habits and perceptions of social capital acquisition.

As discussed in Chapter Two, this research took the transnational perspective to illustrate the social capital development of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand. The migration trajectory of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants made them a unique research subject to study. Specifically, these Chinese migrant youth are born and have spent part of their adolescence in mainland China. The lived experiences in China allow them to be fluent in Chinese, to be familiar with Chinese culture and to foster friendships in the homeland. The pre-migration friendship plays a crucial role in connecting 1.5 generation Chinese migrants to the home country. Meanwhile, they have spent the rest of their...
adolescence and early adulthood in New Zealand. As a result, these migrant youth have experienced and completed their secondary school education and tertiary education in the host country. The school education enhances Chinese migrant youth’s English language skills and enriches their knowledge of New Zealand culture. More importantly, it provides the social environment where Chinese migrant youth are able to meet and regularly interact with new friends in the host society. Therefore, this thesis situates the investigation of young Chinese migrants’ social capital building in a transnational context. By doing so, it allows me to understand how Chinese migrant youth manage their social networks dispersed in both the home and host country.

Furthermore, this research employs the media multiplexity theory to illuminate the relationship between young Chinese migrants’ internet use practices and their social capital acquisition. Prior media research has extensively examined the role of ethnic media in connecting migrants to the homeland and the local Chinese community in the host society. With the fast-growing Chinese digital communication technologies, the homeland online media has created a deterritorialised social space for young Chinese migrants to continuously connect and interact with families and friends at distance. Meanwhile, it has gradually become the major choice for migrant netizens to communicate and socialise with co-ethnic contacts in the host country. Thus, this research takes the China-based internet platforms into account, examining young Chinese migrants’ combined use of homeland media, ethnic media and global media within the online context. The technical affordances of specific internet platforms cannot be overlooked as they affect young Chinese migrants’ social relationships and social interactions with close and weak ties in different ways.
My research findings show that making the most use of the internet and digital communication technologies significantly enhances Chinese migrant youth’s sociability, which is perceived as key to relational maintenance and resource acquisition in social capital research. In the online context, young Chinese migrants are able to utilise a range of internet platforms to maintain the dispersed social connections and mobilise them to acquire needed resources and support. Engaging in both instant messaging and social network site communications effectively helps strengthen young Chinese migrants’ relationships with close ties regardless of location. The conscious use of social network sites plays an important role in maintaining the weak ties which the migrant youth have built up with in both China and New Zealand. Therefore, I argue that the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand proactively and strategically use both Chinese-language and international internet platforms to navigate their personal networks and mobilise them to acquire desired resources and support across distance and ethnicity. Specific questions have been answered through the analysis of Chinese migrant youth’s media use practices manifested on different types of internet platforms.

In this final chapter, I synthesise the empirical findings to make theoretical arguments about the relationship between young Chinese migrants’ internet use practices and their social capital development. Then I proceed to discuss the implications of my research findings and how this research contributes to a better understanding of Chinese migrant youth’s social capital acquisition in an internet-connected transnational context. Limitations of this study and directions for future research on Chinese migrant youth and their internet use are pointed out in the end.
7.1 Research Findings

In this research, Chinese migrant youth were able to interact with spatially dispersed social contacts with the facility of the internet and advanced communication technologies. The social space with which migrants engaged every day could no longer be restricted by the national boundaries. The media landscape of the migrant youth was expanded and transformed in concomitant with their migration process. Instead of exclusively focusing on the localised media use practices, this study has taken a transnational perspective to examine young Chinese migrants’ internet use and its implications on their social capital development. My findings suggested that within the online social space, young Chinese migrants’ communication activities turned out to be both transnational and local at the same time. By engaging in various online communication activities, they were able to acquire and accumulate social capital across distance and ethnicity.

7.1.1 Homeland Ties Sustained across China-based Internet Platforms

The young Chinese migrants have made the most use of homeland online media – China-based internet platforms – to sustain their connections with pre-existing social ties in China. In this instance, the China-based internet platforms outweighed their global-wide popular counterparts in facilitating the transnational communication activities of mainland Chinese migrants in New Zealand. The migrant participants in my research had access to the internet and digital technologies at the age of nine on average. Prior to migration to New Zealand, they have formed the habits of chatting with schoolmates through QQ, i.e. the nation-wide popular instant messaging in China. The continuous use of China-based internet platforms enabled migrant youth to stay connected and converse with distant communicators. The Chinese instant messaging QQ and mobile social media application WeChat both benefited the transnational communicators the most by allowing real-time conversations. The
synchronous form of interactions helped weaken the negative effects that physical separation has made on young Chinese migrants’ homeland tie maintenance. The transmission of images and voice messages through QQ and WeChat increased the virtual co-presence of distant communicators in each other’s life, which helped strengthen their closeness over time. Hence, engaging in real-time communications via homeland platforms contributed to maintaining young Chinese migrants’ strong ties with families and friends left behind in China.

Compared to real-time conversations, the homeland social media (i.e. Renren, Weibo and WeChat Moments) facilitated asynchronous interactions brought more convenience to young Chinese migrants and their homeland friends who lived in different time zones. In this instance, the transnational communicators needed not to concern too much about negotiating time with each other for communication. Research findings suggested that the rich contextual and relational cues available on Chinese social media facilitated transnational communicators to sustain their connections with less efforts and encouraged them to interact with each other regardless of location. If time suited, young Chinese migrants were willing to utilise other communication channels i.e. QQ or WeChat to pick up the unfinished conversations with closely-tied homeland contacts. Notably, it was the strong-tie relationships that motivated young Chinese migrants to adopt multiple internet platforms to connect with a small number of homeland contacts. Therefore, these intimate transnational communicators were able to interact with each other across platforms. Contrary to the Chinese counterparts, major global social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) were unable to serve young Chinese migrants in maintaining homeland ties as their services were banned in mainland China. The inaccessibility of international internet platforms weakened the willingness of communicators from both sides to use them for interactions.
Furthermore, the homeland connections sustained by China-based platforms enabled young Chinese migrants to access desired information resources and emotional support across distance. Research results indicated that the Chinese migrant youth consciously and proactively engaged in online communications with homeland contacts so as to acquire the information which they conceived as relevant and reliable. The first-hand information from homeland contacts was mainly concerning the changing life condition, professional development and career planning in mainland China. On the one hand, young Chinese migrants obtained needed information by consciously paying close attention to homeland peers’ SNS updates (i.e. Renren updates) and IM group chats (i.e. QQ group chats) regarding the above-mentioned three categories. This type of information served as a guide leading Chinese migrant youth to catch up with mainland Chinese youth’s thinking of professional development and future career planning. On the other hand, they proactively initiated private conversations with close-tie homeland friends via the Chinese IM QQ, requesting specific information and personal opinions concerning the above three issues. In this instance, the information was perceived of great value because of the nature and the source of the information. Specifically, the information that young Chinese migrants received was the lived experiences of their homeland ties. It was tailor-made from those who shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds and common histories in China. Chinese migrant youth believed that the lived experiences of friends outperformed the ‘one size fits all’ type of information they obtained from other channels, such as search engines and official sources. In addition to information resources, young Chinese migrants were able to reach homeland communicators for emotional support via Chinese instant messaging and mobile social media application. The homeland contacts offered constant support in forms of long text messages, a series of voice messages, real-time voice calls to Chinese migrant
youth. Despite that it was delivered in mediated forms, the participants reported that the emotional support from close ties in China was crucial to smoothing their adaptation to the host society, especially in the psychological aspect.

7.1.2 Strategic Use of Chinese-language Internet Platforms for Co-ethnic Network Expansion

Situated in the New Zealand context, young Chinese migrants have taken the most advantages of Chinese-language internet platforms to expand their co-ethnic networks. Specifically, the local ethnic online forum served as an entry point for young Chinese migrants, facilitating them to look for ethnic Chinese friends who shared similarities in geographic location or personal interests. An exchange of contact information took place when young Chinese migrants met other forum users with whom they had interest to build up connections. The Chinese instant messaging QQ was selected to substitute the ethnic online forum, serving as the primary channel for young Chinese migrants to interact with newly tied co-ethnic friends. Being connected through QQ enabled young Chinese migrants to interact with co-ethnic friends in various forms, such as real-time conversations and file sharing. In addition, it assisted the communication pairs to arrange meet-ups and organise offline activities, which was crucial to strengthening their ties developed in the emerging stage. In this research, the local ethnic forum which served the whole Chinese community provided the technical means for young Chinese migrants to activate weak ties with other formerly unconnected co-ethnic forum users (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Their interactions did not solely take place on the ethnic online forum. Rather, the migrant youth preferred China-based instant messaging to local Chinese forum to network and communicate with those initially technically connected co-ethnic fellows.
In addition to ethnic online forum, specific technical features of Chinese IM QQ made direct impacts on the co-ethnic network development of young Chinese migrants. The interview findings showed that Chinese migrant youth proactively utilised the built-in search function of QQ to look for geo-location-based chat groups. For example, participants from Auckland reported that they have spent a substantial amount of time searching for QQ chat groups which were Auckland-based or North Shore-based in the early years of their migration. On the one hand, the search feature of QQ facilitated young Chinese migrants to quickly find ethnic Chinese QQ users living in the same area of Auckland. It provided opportunities for the migrant youth to participate in offline activities organised by other group members, consequently helping them to network with other Chinese migrants living in the same neighbourhood. Moreover, joining in the location-based QQ chat groups allowed young Chinese migrants to access the information resources of other group members. The information contained announcements from the local board, the opening of new restaurants and tips for living a convenient life in Auckland etc.

On the other hand, the same preference to using China-based QQ signalled that Chinese migrant youth shared the similarity with potential co-ethnic friends in the original place where they both came from, i.e. mainland China. In other words, the Chinese IM QQ enabled these young migrants to easily forge links with other Chinese migrants who shared similar migration backgrounds. Engaging in QQ group communications enacted the circulation of cultural and practical information between old settlers and new comers, thus accelerating young Chinese migrants’ adaptation to the host society, especially in the sociocultural aspect. The QQ-facilitated information acquisition was particularly crucial to Chinese migrant youth at the time when they had limited sources of information and were unfamiliar with alternative channels to acquire desired information. Despite of its critical
role in obtaining information, this research found that the use of QQ chat groups did not help to transform young Chinese migrants’ co-ethnic weak ties into strong ties. These migrant youth were not able to receive emotional support from those loosely-tied co-ethnic friends as a result of their participation in QQ group chats alone.

7.1.3 Building Social Capital across Ethnicity on International Internet Platforms

To engage with other ethnic groups in New Zealand, young Chinese migrants primarily relied on international internet platforms, i.e. MSN and Facebook, which were widely accepted as two major platforms in New Zealanders’ social life at different times. The two platforms played a similar role as the local Chinese forum in laying the groundwork for connectivity between Chinese migrant youth and non-Chinese others. For example, young Chinese migrants consciously joined in specific Facebook groups which were created for the courses they took at universities. Those Facebook groups were set up by course tutors or class representatives for broadcasting announcements and creating a space for students to have informal discussions on coursework. The group members were students who took the same course as young Chinese migrants did in that year. Despite formerly unknown to each other, The Facebook groups enabled Chinese migrant youth to connect to a network of ties that were “technically possible but not yet activated socially” (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Another key reason motivating young Chinese migrants to use MSN and Facebook was that they perceived MSN and Facebook cultures as crucial parts of local youth culture in New Zealand. The interview findings suggested that the MSN and Facebook accounts were seen as identity markers which signalled Chinese migrant youth’s membership of local peer groups. These young migrants sought to use MSN and Facebook to engage with local peers, allowing them to generate a feeling of being accepted in the host society and to cultivate a sense of belonging towards their local peer networks. In addition, both platforms
helped to create a safe and comfortable social space for young Chinese migrants to explore potentials in developing friendships with local peers across ethnicity. In addition, being a member of Facebook groups enabled Chinese migrant youth to access their classmates’ resources i.e. information on the courses they took together. The interview findings showed that these young migrants perceived the acquired information of great importance to their academic performance at universities.

Interestingly, these young migrants had no intention to connect with non-Chinese classmates through other communication channels. They preferred to discuss assignments and socialise with non-Chinese classmates solely on Facebook. In comparison, Chinese migrant youth were willing to supplement Chinese instant messaging QQ as an additional or alternative channel to connect and interact with ethnic Chinese classmates. Within the online context, the ways in which young Chinese migrants chose to build up connections with non-Chinese peers and co-ethnic peers had social implications to their local social network development in New Zealand. Making the choice of solely relying on Facebook to forge links with peers from other ethnic groups demonstrated young Chinese migrants’ intentions of sustaining the weak ties with non-Chinese peers. Chinese migrant youth’s attempts to enhance the friendships with co-ethnic classmates were explicit to recognise from their media use, i.e. employing multiple channels i.e. Facebook and QQ to maintain their co-ethnic connections. Moreover, engaging with each other on both platforms was conducive to increasing the strength of ties with co-ethnic peers.

Research findings also indicated that young Chinese migrants brought their pre-existing local networks onto Facebook. The connections consisted of these migrant youth’s secondary school classmates, classmates at universities and work colleagues whom they
got to know in New Zealand. In this instance, young Chinese migrants regularly went onto the site to catch up with the news happened to their local networks of friends and workmates. According to the interviews, Chinese migrant youth showed more interest in interacting with local contacts when their Facebook posts were filled with positive spirit. They wrote short complimentary comments to the posts in which they were interested or simply liked the posts to show their endorsement. More often than not in this research, young Chinese migrants preferred to passively browse their Facebook Newsfeed consisting of updates of all local connections across ethnicity. This research found that the three types of interactions including commenting, liking and passive browsing all effectively helped maintain Chinese migrant youth’s weak ties with their pre-existing local networks in the host country. As to the strong ties, the participants reported that they preferred face-to-face meetings to Facebook interactions to strengthen their connections with close local friends. Facebook interactions only played a supplementary role in their strong-tie relationship maintenance in New Zealand context.

Aside from interactive activities, Chinese migrant youth occasionally disclosed feelings of depression and stress on Facebook. They deliberately expressed the negative feelings in Chinese on Facebook, a primary English-language social network site. By doing so, young Chinese migrants were able to vent negative emotions and hide them from non-Chinese associates at the same time. Without translation tools or asking for explanations, the non-Chinese contacts were unable to comprehend the meaning of the contents that the migrant youth posted. Notably, they did not disclose the vulnerable side of themselves on Renren – Facebook’s Chinese counterpart – as their loosely-connected homeland friends were able to see the disclosures. The reason underlying their hiding behaviours lay in migrant youth’s lack of confidence in the willingness and capability of their non-Chinese and homeland
contacts to accurately understand their stress and depression. On the one hand, both the non-Chinese and homeland contacts with whom young Chinese migrants used social network sites i.e. Facebook and Renren to connect were perceived as weakly-tied associates. On the other hand, the two groups of friends shared no similarities in the transitional life that Chinese migrant youth have experienced in this particular research. Hence, young Chinese migrants had little confidence in the willingness and ability of the weakly-tied non-Chinese and homeland friends to interpret their emotions, especially the negative ones. In this instance, it was the co-ethnic network who were allowed to see and were capable of understand the emotional self-disclosures of Chinese migrant youth. The way of revealing negative personal feelings on social network sites affected young Chinese migrants’ acquisition of emotional support. Specifically, the emotional disclosures on Facebook helped to elicit responses from the co-ethnic contacts, which was conducive to meeting Chinese migrant youth’s emotional needs. However, it hindered non-Chinese contacts from engaging in the Facebook conversations initiated by young Chinese migrants’ self-disclosing of personal emotions. As a consequence, Chinese migrant youth were unlikely to receive emotional support from associates of other ethnic groups on Facebook.

In this research, the New Zealand Chinese migrant youth who were originally from mainland China proactively and strategically utilised various internet platforms to build up their social capital. Transnationally, young Chinese migrants have kept their habitual use of China-based instant messaging so as to maintain the ties with families and friends left behind in China. With the emergence of multiple Chinese social media along their migration process, the migrant youth have made the most use of various types of homeland internet platforms to strengthen the close ties with intimate friends in the country of origin. They used (mobile) instant messaging and social network site to complement each other,
ensuring that they would not miss anything happened to the homeland strong ties and made
the time to interact with friends at distance. Thus, young Chinese migrants’ relationships
with close ties in China remained strong as a result of their continuous efforts in engaging
in transnational communications on the internet. Locally, they consciously employed both
Chinese-language platforms and international platforms to expand local social networks
and to navigate their social relationship development within and outside the Chinese
community in New Zealand. The China-based instant messaging, the local Chinese online
forum and the international social network site all served as an entry point for Chinese
migrant youth to expand their co-ethnic network in New Zealand. Ultimately, they chose
to use China-based instant messaging QQ and mobile social media application WeChat to
strengthen the newly-built co-ethnic connections. What was different was that, young
Chinese migrants preferred to use one single platform to maintain their relationships with
local peers from other ethnic groups. The chosen platform referred to the international
instant messaging MSN in migrant youth’s early migration. It has been replaced by the
global social network site Facebook which they started to frequent since 2007.

Furthermore, the internet use enhanced young Chinese migrants’ agency in requesting and
acquiring desired resources and support from their transnational and local social
connections. They skilfully utilised the technical features of specific internet platforms to
obtain the resources which could satisfy their personal demands. In addition, engaging in
both self-disclosing and interactive activities online enacted the relationship maintenance
and the strengthening of ties, consequently allowing Chinese migrant youth to access the
resources possessed by their networked associates. Sustaining the connections with
homeland friends by communicating via China-based platforms has increased young
Chinese migrants’ sense of belonging towards their homeland peer network over time.
These friends at distance have provided great emotional support through IM-facilitated real-time conversations, voice messages and audio calls, which was essential to assisting the migrant youth to psychologically settle down in the host society. Situated in two different societies, the homeland peers continuously made an impact on young Chinese migrants’ decision making on their professional development and career planning. As previously illustrated, the use of homeland platforms also benefited these migrant youth in developing their local Chinese peer network in New Zealand. Compared to the heavy use of China-based platforms, young Chinese migrants invested relatively less time and energy to participate in Facebook interactions. Hence, the international platform Facebook could merely serve to maintain the migrant youth’s connections with a large number of weakly-tied non-Chinese peers in the host society. Despite that, the Facebook use played a positive role in stimulating young Chinese migrants to foster a sense of belonging towards their local peer network. In addition, it enabled the migrant youth to access information resources owned by their local peers who joined in the same Facebook groups. The information obtained and the informal discussions in which young Chinese migrants have participated both exerted positive impacts on their academic performance.

In their adolescence, the migratory move of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants was not voluntary but forced by their parents’ decisions. By the end of this research, these young migrants approached their mid or late twenties and felt concerned about their future. They were about to make or rethink their decisions in staying in or leaving New Zealand to pursue the future career. The advanced transportation and digital communication technologies have liberated young Chinese migrants from geographical location in forming social networks and accumulating resources. The social capital that Chinese migrant youth have developed in both China and New Zealand affected their formation of sense of belonging
towards the two places. It influenced these young migrants’ future planning on where to pursue their career and live a life. The social networks and resources which young Chinese migrants have accumulated transnationally and locally would also play a crucial role in their resettlement in China or development in New Zealand.

7.2 Contributions and Implications

This research provides original contributions to the understanding of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants’ internet use and social capital building in a transnational context. Previously, young Chinese migrants have largely been seen as beneficiaries of their parents’ social capital, resulting in an inadequate understanding of their agency in acquiring social capital. Centring on the Chinese migrant youth, I am able to reveal their perceptions of social capital and their ability in generating social capital within the online context.

Prior to migration, the migrant parents used to play an authority role in passing on cultural heritage and social norms to the migrant youth in their socialisation process. As new arrivals, Chinese migrant youth and their parents are on the same page, learning the social and cultural norms practiced by New Zealanders from the very beginning. Hence, the social capital that Chinese migrant youth demand for their fit in the host society is basically beyond the capacity of their parents. The young Chinese migrants need to exploit their full potentials to build up social capital with all means available in their life. As technological innovations advance our society, the internet empowers young Chinese migrants to exert their agency in building social networks and obtaining resources to a greater extent. My research argues that the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants strategically navigate their personal networks and proactively accumulate social capital by employing both Chinese-language media and global media within the online context. Specifically, the internet use
habits that young Chinese migrants have formed pre-migration are essential to understanding their post-migration media preferences and to mapping their social network development. Young Chinese migrants’ dependence on China-based platforms does not decrease along with their leaving away from China. Instead, it increases as a result of their needs of transnational communication and co-ethnic networking in the host country. The continuous use of homeland online media not only effectively strengthens young Chinese migrants’ pre-existing ties in China but also expands their co-ethnic networks in New Zealand.

To fully comprehend their social capital building across distance and ethnicity, the interactions between young Chinese migrants’ use of China-based and international online platforms must be taken into account. Empirically, the qualitative data collected from Chinese migrant youth’s interview accounts and online user-generated contents is critical to examining their internet use across platforms. By analysing the two sets of data, this research argues that young Chinese migrants’ use of China-based media and international media mutually impacts each other, which causes the interplay of their transnational and local social relationship development. To be specific, the way in which Chinese migrant youth engage in homeland media communications significantly affects how they perceive the role of international platforms in managing social relationships and the actual use of these platforms for acquiring social capital. Young Chinese migrants navigate the large part of their personal networks – homeland ties and co-ethnic ties – with the facility of China-based internet platforms. As the major demand in relational maintenance being satisfied, these young migrants perceive international platforms as a supplementary tool for managing the small part of their network which primarily consists of the non-Chinese peers and colleagues in New Zealand. Despite the supplementary role, international platforms are
seen as an indispensable and irreplaceable channel for forging new links and maintain social relationships in the host society.

With the time of residence gets longer in New Zealand, young Chinese migrants’ use of international platforms gradually influences how they disclose themselves and react to their associates on China-based internet platforms in turn. The research findings indicate that Chinese migrant youth use international platforms to observe the life of their local peers and colleagues. They consciously absorb the knowledge of Kiwi lifestyle, cultural and social norms manifested in the personal thoughts and experiences shared by the local contacts online. Further, young Chinese migrants practise the online norms learnt from their international platform use on China-based platforms, sharing aspects of their personal life in the way as their local contacts in New Zealand do online.

Theoretically, Putnam’s social capital framework has been largely adopted in research of ethnic minorities, aiming to provide insights into their civic engagement and the social cohesion of a multi-ethnic society. His theoretical framework takes a local perspective to analyse the social capital of minority groups within the national boundary. The transnational dynamics resulting from the internet connectivity were therefore excluded from the research agenda. Moreover, it dedicates to addressing the implications of social capital on the societal level, which is not conductive to drawing a full picture of the social capital development of individual young Chinese migrants. This research employs Pierre Bourdieu’s social capital concept to study how young Chinese migrants address their own demands for social networking and resource acquisition at the individual level. The application of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework allows me to situate the research of young Chinese migrants’ social capital building in a transnational context. It incorporates Chinese
migrant youth’s voices into the study of their social capital, which has been largely ignored by prior research based on the adult-oriented preoccupations about young people’s needs and their agency in social capital formation. The sociability concept in Bourdieu’s social capital theory facilitates me to illustrate how the internet use enhances young Chinese migrants’ ability to maintain their social relationships and mobilise them to obtain desired resources and support in both China and New Zealand. Consequently, this research enriches our knowledge of Chinese migrant youth’s adaptation to the New Zealand society and their relationship with the homeland from a social capital perspective.

This research has conducted a thorough investigation of young Chinese migrants’ internet use across platforms and their perceptions of social capital development across distance and ethnicity. The findings of this study have three implications for government policies and practices of the host country. First, as shown in Chapter Five, Chinese migrant youth have great demand for information about New Zealand cultural and social norms especially when they cannot rely on their parents and lack of channels for acquiring such information resources. Hence, providing information resources for the newly-arrived migrant youth is critical to smoothing their adaptation to New Zealand society at the sociocultural level. Among all available means, making the most use of China-based internet platforms can efficiently reach young Chinese migrants, thus effectively meeting their information needs. Moreover, presenting Kiwi culture and local norms in the form of personal stories of old settlers can be convincing and relatable to Chinese migrant youth. Second, my research findings suggest that a key reason that drives young Chinese migrants to use ethnic Chinese media is to expand their co-ethnic network, which enables them to request and obtain practical information and help to solve problems encountered in daily life. The problems to be addressed range from local public transport information, part-time and full-time job
search to visa application for family members. Therefore, cooperating with local Chinese media is conductive to providing relevant information which instrumentally helps the young migrants to improve their life in New Zealand. Third, my research findings also highlight the high perceived importance of international internet platforms to Chinese migrant youth’s cross-ethnicity relationship development in the host country. Thus, greater efforts are needed to exploit the full potentials of international internet platforms to increase the possibilities for young Chinese migrants to engage with local residents with different ethnic backgrounds but common interests. The increase of social interactions between ethnic groups helps improve mutual understanding between migrant minorities and the majority of local population in the multi-ethnic society of New Zealand. In addition, it enacts young Chinese migrants to create more local social connections, which exerts a positive impact on increasing their sense of belonging towards New Zealand.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research has taken a transnational angle to explore the social capital development of 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand. Investigating their homeland tie maintenance is an essential part of the research project. I have specifically examined the role of China-based internet platforms in sustaining young Chinese migrants’ ties with their families and friends left behind in China. From the interviews, I noticed that the impacts of social interactions on Chinese migrant youth’s homeland tie maintenance were not confined to the online context. Half of the interviewees visited their families in China at least once a year. Their frequent travel back to China made it possible for these migrant youth to interact with homeland friends in person. The majority of my research participants emphasised that arranging face-to-face meetups with homeland peers was one of the key reasons that drove them to engage with distant communications on the internet. In other words, Chinese
migrant youth’s online and offline interactions with homeland contacts were likely to impact each other. Together, they jointly influenced how young Chinese migrants maintained their homeland social ties. When designing the interview schedule, I did not set particular questions to cover their online and offline interactions with homeland contacts and how they used the internet to communicate with friends in New Zealand. Future work is needed to fully understand the implications of social interactions to Chinese migrant youth’s homeland tie maintenance in both on and offline contexts. The design of an interview schedule or survey questions in future empirical research should take the interplay between young Chinese migrants’ online and offline interactions with homeland ties into account.

Near the end of my data collection, the China-based mobile instant messaging WeChat gradually transformed to a mobile social media application with supplementing various new features. The newly-added features included Official Accounts for one-to-many communications, WeChat Store for e-commerce and WeChat Pay for mobile payment. The relationship between a WeChat Official Account and its subscribers was asymmetrical. The subscribers were able to comment on the contents published by the WeChat Official Account they followed. According to its specific needs, the Official Account made a selection of comments visible to the public. As the research progressed, I was aware of the increasing use of Official Accounts among young Chinese migrants and its potential impacts on their information acquisition. By subscribing to WeChat Official Accounts, Chinese migrant youth were able to receive news and information about China from a variety of sources within one platform. The information sources consisted of homeland media outlets, government agencies, businesses and organisations.
Take the Tianjin explosions in August 2015 as an example, WeChat enabled young Chinese migrants to immediately access the latest news and relevant information about the disaster taking place in China. They largely relied on the WeChat Official Accounts for updates about the explosions. The Official Accounts that young Chinese migrants subscribed varied from major China state media, leading media outlets, key opinion leaders to independent journalists based in mainland China. Each of them provided information about the explosions from different angles to Chinese migrant youth, thus allowing them to gain a relatively comprehensive view of the huge disaster. Furthermore, all the available information not only helped increase these young migrants’ knowledge of the environmental safety in China but also raised their concern about the living environment of the home country. In addition, Chinese migrant youth shared news articles of the explosions with comments on the WeChat Moments – a built-in social network site feature of WeChat. Both the homeland contacts and co-ethnic contacts were able to see migrant youth’s posts on their newsfeed of Moments. The disclosure of personal thoughts on the explosions thus created a communication context for young Chinese migrants to exchange ideas on their concern with families and friends in China and New Zealand. Both the acquired information and the feedback from personal connections were very likely to influence Chinese migrant youth’s perceptions of the home country, the sense of belonging towards China and the future plans for return migration.

Moreover, the ethnic Chinese media took advantages of the Official Accounts feature to distribute New Zealand news to WeChat users across the globe including its primary audiences i.e. Chinese migrants in New Zealand. For example, the ethnic Chinese online media SKYKIWI distributed a series of articles on a local headline through its WeChat Official Account that a Kiwi mother (Lucy Knight) who risked her life to protect an elderly
Chinese migrant from snatch and attack in Auckland in September 2014. Their articles aroused huge attention from both local Chinese migrants and return migrants living in China. The young Chinese migrants shared SKYKIWI’s articles on their Moments, showing their gratitude to the Kiwi mother and their pride for living in New Zealand where the Kiwi mother came from. In addition, following up with SKYKIWI’s news updates on WeChat promoted Chinese migrant youth to donate for Mrs Knight and to help look after her children. The ethnic Chinese media and the China-based platform together made a positive impact on encouraging young Chinese migrants to engage with local affairs in New Zealand. The social engagements helped increase the mutual understanding between young Chinese migrants and the local residents of the host country, which contributed to developing their sense of belonging towards New Zealand.

As previously explained, young Chinese migrants could use one single mobile application WeChat to obtain all sorts of information and the latest news about both the home and host country. The information that Chinese migrant youth acquired via WeChat played a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of two countries, thus affecting their fluid sense of belonging towards the two places. In this particular research, the WeChat Official Accounts feature emerged at the end of the data collection process; I was not able to gather sufficient empirical evidence to systematically analyse and prove the impacts of this particular feature on young Chinese migrants. Further studies need to be carried out in order to collect data on Chinese migrant youth’s perceptions and use practices of WeChat Official Accounts. It helps deepen our understanding of the influences that the leading China-based internet platform WeChat exerts on these young migrants’ relationship with China and New Zealand.
This research set three years of living in New Zealand as the threshold for recruiting interview participants. In this instance, some young Chinese migrants who had stayed in New Zealand for a relatively short period of time had limited experiences in using international online platforms, such as Facebook. The research findings showed that Chinese migrant youth consciously used Facebook as an efficient tool to manage their weakly-tied local non-Chinese network in New Zealand. However, it is still unclear about the potential impacts that young Chinese migrants’ length of residence in New Zealand has on their Facebook use practices. A longitudinal study needs to be carried out to achieve a better understanding of Chinese migrant youth’s habitual use of Facebook over time. In addition, China state media, mainland Chinese businesses and ethnic Chinese media all have started to employ Facebook to reach overseas Chinese populations including young Chinese migrants in recent years. Future research should be undertaken to explore how the Chinese migrant youth perceive and consume the contents provided by the abovementioned sources on Facebook. Further investigation into the differences between young Chinese migrants’ using China-based platforms and international platforms to obtain China news is also recommended. By doing so, it helps improve our understanding of young Chinese migrants’ changing relationships with both the home and host country.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

The internet use liberates the 1.5 generation Chinese migrants in New Zealand from the constraints of geographical location to building up their social capital. By employing a variety of internet platforms, Chinese migrant youth are able to navigate their personal networks transnationally and locally. Building connections with a selected number of homeland contacts via different types of China-based internet platforms strengthens these young migrants’ close ties left behind in China. The strategic use of both Chinese-language
and international internet platforms fulfils young Chinese migrants’ needs of expanding social networks within and outside the Chinese community in the host country. Deliberately using social network sites to connect with a large number of schoolmates, colleagues and acquaintances reduces the social cost for Chinese migrant youth to maintain their weak ties in both home and host country. More importantly, the internet enhances young Chinese migrants’ communication capability of maintaining social relationships and mobilising them to acquire desired resources and support across distance and ethnicity.

At different stages of migration, the social capital that Chinese migrant youth have acquired from both strong ties and weak ties contributes to their psychological and sociocultural adaptations to the host society. In addition, it plays a crucial role in shaping young Chinese migrants’ perceptions of China and New Zealand, which affects the long-lasting ongoing process of negotiating their relationships with the home and host country. Further, the social networks they have built up and the resources they have accumulated in the two places influence how Chinese migrant youth plan for their career development. They also significantly affect the decision-making for return migration or re-location among these young adult migrants who do not have a say in their migratory move to New Zealand.
Bibliography


Vitak, Jessica and Nicole B. Ellison. 2012. "'there's a Network Out there You might as Well Tap': Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook." *New Media and Society* 15 (2): 245-255.


Appendix I: Interview Schedule

Section I: Demographic Information

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Age at arrival in New Zealand:
4. Duration of residence in New Zealand:
5. Citizenship/Visa status:
6. Current status:
   - Study/Work/Others
   - Education status:

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When (Age range)  
Where (PRC/NZ/Others)

Note: Current status refers to TVET student, tertiary student (including Undergraduate, Honours, Postgraduate, Master, Doctorate)

-Work status:

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</table>
Section II: Internet Platforms and Social Network Building

1. What internet services do you often use every day? What do you use them for?

2. Generally, how do you distribute your time spent online into each form of services?

3. Is your preference to the services different from that before you came to New Zealand?

4. Do you use internet to contact your families/relatives, friends in China? If yes, how do you contact them? Are you satisfied with the online contact?

5. How did you start your friendship here in New Zealand?
   a. Through families, neighbours, schoolmates, colleges, or others?
   b. From PRC, ethnic Chinese, Asia, or people from other ethnic groups?

6. Do you and your friends in New Zealand contact each other online? How and how often?

7. How important do you think the interaction you conduct online with people contribute to your social network building?

8. Do you often use e-mail to contact people? If so, in what condition do you use it the most, with whom?

9. Are you a very active commentator in terms of using online forums? Have you ever conducted a personal contact with other users from the same online forums?

10. Have you ever sent a friend request to someone you just met, or have you ever added people as your friends on the recommend list provided by the Social Networking Sites (SNS) you use? Do you still keep contact with them? How frequent?

11. Do you still use Instant Messaging (IM) services or do you more prefer to use the IM functions inside SNS? Which is your case? Why?

12. How many SNS accounts do you have? Do you use all of them very frequently? How frequent and why?
Section III: Internet Use and Resource Acquisition

1. When came across difficulties, have you ever turned to advice, support or help from your networks online or by contacting that person online? How often?

2. Does interacting with people online enable you to get more information which
   a. you are interested in;
   b. helps you engage in the group/community activities;
   c. is helpful to fit into the host society;
   d. you concern a lot in China;
   e. others.

3. By interacting with people online, have you ever received/offered any material or monetary support from/to others? If yes, who these people do you refer to? Do you trust them?

4. Do you feel comfortable to talk about personal issues with people online? Who do you often prefer to talk with? How often? Does it change a lot after you came to New Zealand?

5. Do you feel more involved in the communities/groups when you provide/acquire more resources through contacting other members online? Can you name some of the communities/groups?

Section IV: Online Disclosures and Social Interactions

1. What social services do you frequently use on the internet?
   a. Status updating, sharing/forwarding information/photos;
   b. Blogging;
   c. Posting/commenting under threads on online forums or group/community public pages;
   d. Mini-blogging/tweeting;
2. Do you think it/they facilitate your interaction with others both online and offline? If yes, would you like to explain how it works and give me some examples?

3. Are you more likely to participate in the community activities offline by joining their sites online and interacting with community members? What forms of sites in general, online forums, formal websites, public pages inside social networking sites?

4. Regardless of homeland internet, for what reasons, do you often use ethnic online forums, Facebook, Twitter or other local/worldwide popular social media? How frequent?

5. In terms of SNS, how many groups did you join in, how many public (public figures included) did you like? What types are they? Did you add other members of the groups as your friends individually?
## Appendix II: Interviewee Profile

### Interviewees in Auckland

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**Interviewees in Wellington**

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<td>11</td>
<td>Year 11-13; Undergraduate/MA</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>NZ Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Year 11-13; Undergraduate</td>
<td></td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Year 12-13; Undergraduate</td>
<td>Registered pharmacist</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Year 10-13</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
(Interview Participants)

Project title: 1.5 Generation Chinese Migrant Youth in New Zealand: Internet Use and Social Capital
Researcher: Xiaoting Liu

I am a PhD student from The School of Asian Studies within the University of Auckland. I would like to invite you to participate in my PhD project entitled “1.5 Generation Chinese Migrant Youth in New Zealand: Internet Use and Social Capital”. My research is co-funded by the University of Auckland and the China Scholarship Council.

This project aims to examine how the internet impacts the social capital formation and development of 1.5 generation Chinese migrant youth in New Zealand. Social Capital formation and development here refers to the process, in which the migrant youth build up social networks, exchange resources and interact with people under the cross-cultural context. This interview will be conducted with 40 Chinese young migrant adults (age 18 to 28) who migrated from mainland China during their adolescence (age 13 to 17), and have been living in New Zealand for 3 years or more. Your participation would involve an interview in which I will ask you about how you use internet in your daily life, your social networks, and offline social participation.

The interview will last about 1 to 1.5 hours, and it will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. Interviews will be conducted at a place that is mutually agreeable to both of us. It could be in public places such as a café, or in the participants’ home. You can choose to use Chinese or English for the interview. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason. All the interviews will be conducted, transcribed and translated by myself to help protect your confidentiality. You are free to withdraw the information you provided up to two weeks after the interview. Should you wish to have a copy of your transcript and/or a summary of the research findings, I’d like to give them/it to you on your request. You have a chance to amend factual errors on the transcript. All the material generated from the interviews will be securely stored for 6 years, after which it will be destroyed. During this time, all digital audio data will be stored on the department
office computer (with password access only) and the hardcopies will be kept in a locked
cabinet separate from participants’ Consent Forms in the office of School of Asian Studies
at the University of Auckland.

The interview data will be used in my PhD thesis and future publications. Despite that, any
information from your interview used in publications will not identify you as its source.
You will be given a pseudonym or a unique code, and all information which may identify
you will be removed.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. To appreciate your support for my project,
a $ 20 supermarket voucher will be given for your time and/or travel. If you have any
further questions about this research, please contact me or my supervisors, or the head of
my school.

Contact Details:
The student:
Xiaoting Liu
Address: Room 418, Arts 2 Building
18 Symonds Street
School of Asian Studies
University of Auckland
Phone: +64 09 373 7599 ext 85399
Email: xliu833@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Principal Investigator:
Professor Manying Ip
Address: Room 434, Arts 2 Building
18 Symonds Street
School of Asian Studies
University of Auckland
Phone: +64 09 373 7599 ext 87531
Email: my.ip@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School of Asian Studies:
Dr Hilary Chung
Address: Room 437, Arts 2 Building
18 Symonds Street
School of Asian Studies
University of Auckland
Phone: +64 09 373 7599 ext 84603
Email: h.chung@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of
Auckland Human Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice
Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373 7599 ext. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON ...... FOR (3) YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 8656
Appendix IV: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM  
(Interview Participants)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

**Project title:** 1.5 Generation Chinese Migrant Youth in New Zealand: Internet Use and Social Capital

**Researcher:** Xiaoting Liu

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded.
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions during the interview without giving a reason.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to two weeks after the interview.
- I understand that the interview will be conducted, transcribed and translated by Xiaoting Liu. Only her supervisors will have access to the data, helping to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees. The transcript will be offered for amendment of factual errors on my request.
- I understand that my participation in this research will be kept confidential and the information I provide will be reported or published in a way that will not identify me as the source.
- I understand that all the data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I wish/ do not wish to have a copy of the transcript of the interview recording.
- I wish/ do not wish to receive a copy of the summary of research findings.
- IF you would like to receive a Summary of the Findings, please add your email address here.
Email: ________________________________
Name: ________________________________
Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON …… FOR (3) YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 8656
Appendix V: Advertisements

(English)

Research Participant Recruitment in Auckland

- Are you migrants from mainland China?
- Did you immigrate to New Zealand when you were 13 to 17 years old?
- Are you over 18 but under 30 years old?
- Have you lived in New Zealand over 3 years?
- Do you immigrate with your families and hold the PR visa or NZ citizenship now?

If YES, I invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview with me. During the interview, we will work together to explore your internet use and how it influences your social capital building.

All it takes is about an-hour interview at a place (in Auckland) that is mutually agreeable to both of us. After the interview, there will be a $20 supermarket voucher for your input into this project. I appreciate your support to my PhD research and if you have any question, please feel free to contact me.

Contact Details:
The researcher: Xiaoting Liu
PhD candidate
School of Asian Studies
The University of Auckland
Address: Room 418, Level 4, Arts 2 Building
18 Symonds Street, Auckland 1010
Phone: +64 09 373 7599 ext 85399
Email: xliu833@aucklanduni.ac.nz
QQ: 554078102 (Please specify ‘PhD interview’ and your location – Auckland)
WeChat ID: ifapple347 (Please specify ‘PhD interview’ and your location – Auckland)

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPATION ETHICS COMMITTEE ON …… FOR (3) YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 8656
奥克兰大学博士生诚征研究访谈对象 (奥克兰地区)

- 你是来自中国大陆的移民吗？
- 你是在 13-17 岁之间移民到新西兰的吗？
- 你現在是介于 18-30 岁之间的青年吗？
- 你在新西兰居住超过 3 年了吗？
- 你是与家人一同移民新西兰且现在持有 PR visa 或 NZ citizenship 吗？

如果是，我诚挚地邀请你接受我的访谈，和我进行面对面的交流。访谈主要围绕受访者的日常网络应用展开，旨在增进对网络与中国青年移民的社会资本构建这一主题的理解。

访谈时长约 1 小时，地点为奥克兰。具体时间、地点可进一步沟通协商。为感谢参与者的支持与贡献，每位受访者将会在访谈结束后获赠一张价值 $20 的超市代金券。非常感谢你对我博士课题研究的真诚帮助。如有任何疑问，请联系我。

联系方式:
刘晓婷 
奥克兰大学亚洲研究系博士生
地址： Room 418, Level 4, Arts 2 Building 
18 Symonds Street, Auckland 1010
电话： +64 09 373 7599 ext 85399
电子邮件： xliu833@aucklanduni.ac.nz
QQ： 554078102 (请注明 ‘PhD 访谈’ 及所在城市-奥克兰)
微信： (WeChat ID) ifapple347 (请注明 ‘PhD 访谈’ 及所在城市-奥克兰)

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPATION ETHICS COMMITTEE ON …… FOR (3) YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 8656
Research Participant Recruitment in Wellington

- Are you migrants from mainland China?
- Did you immigrate to New Zealand when you were 13 to 17 years old?
- Are you over 18 but under 28 years old?
- Have you lived in New Zealand over 3 years?

If YES, I invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview with me. During the interview, we will work together to explore your internet use and how it influences your social capital building.

All it takes is about an-hour interview at a place (in Wellington) that is mutually agreeable to both of us. After the interview, there will be a $20 supermarket voucher for your input into this project. I appreciate your support to my PhD research and if you have any question, please feel free to contact me.

Contact Details:
The researcher:
Xiaoting Liu
PhD student
School of Asian Studies
The University of Auckland
Address: Room 418, Level 4, Arts 2 Building
18 Symonds Street, Auckland 1010
Phone: +64 09 373 7599 ext 85399
Email: xliu833@aucklanduni.ac.nz
QQ: 554078102 (Please specify ‘PhD interview’ and your location – Wellington)
WeChat ID: ifapple347 (Please specify ‘PhD interview’ and your location – Wellington)

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPATION ETHICS COMMITTEE ON ….. FOR (3) YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 8656
奥克兰大学博士生诚征研究访谈对象（惠灵顿地区）

● 你是来自中国大陆的移民吗？
● 你是在 13-17 岁之间移民到新西兰的吗？
● 你现在是介于 18-28 岁之间的青年吗？
● 你在新西兰居住超过三年了吗？

如果是，我诚挚地邀请你接受我的访谈，和我进行面对面的交流。访谈主要围绕受访者的日常网络应用展开，旨在增进对网络与中国青年移民的社会资本构建这一主题的理解。

访谈时长约 1 小时，地点为惠灵顿。具体时间、地点可进一步沟通协商。为感谢参与者对本研究的支持与贡献，每位受访者将会在访谈结束后获赠一张价值$20 的超市代金券。非常感谢你对我博士课题研究的真诚帮助。如有任何疑问，请联系我。

联系方式：
刘晓婷
奥克兰大学亚洲研究系博士生
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