COMMUNICATION AS THE INTERSECTION OF THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF THE 2018 EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL

Edited by Maria Francesca Murru, Fausto Colombo, Laura Peja, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Risto Kunelius, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Leif Kramp, Nico Carpentier

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2 and Section 3), Joel Filipe (Section 4), Alvaro Pinot (Abstracts).

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Tradition and the digital: A study of dating attitudes among Australia-based Chinese dating app users

Xu Chen

Abstract

Dating practices in contemporary China are still driven in many ways by Chinese courtship traditions, such as parental involvement and male privilege. While new technologies are often seen as forces for cultural innovation, the role of dating apps in reconfiguring dating practices has received little attention in Chinese contexts, despite the rapid rise of these technologies in China. This situation stands in contrast to the levels of attention paid to dating apps and their role in transforming intimate cultures in Western contexts. Accordingly, drawing on data from 23 interviews from an ongoing project about Australia-based Chinese people's engagement with the dating apps Tinder and Tantan, this paper examines young Chinese people's current attitudes towards dating and marriage. It looks, in particular, at how such attitudes appear to shape and be shaped by the use of dating applications. While it shows that dating apps have the potential to reconfigure young Chinese people's attitudes to dating, I argue that the role of dating apps in this process mainly functions as reinforcement and acceleration, without fundamentally changing users' dating attitudes.

1. Introduction

In September 2012, Tinder launched in the Apple App Store, and within a week, it had attracted 1,000 users (News.com, 2014). Today, Tinder has become the premier mainstream dating app for the heterosexual market (Duguay, 2017), with users in 196 countries (Dredge, 2014). Because of Chinese government censorship—colloquially known as the 'Great Firewall of China'—it is difficult to access Tinder in mainland China. As is the case with other categories of social media, this situation has created opportunities for local entrepreneurs to develop similar apps that are more suited to the Chinese market. Two years after Tinder's release, Tantan, its Chinese equivalent, was released in China in August 2014. According to Trustdata (2017), the number of monthly active users on Tantan had reached 3.4 million by September 2017. In explaining his motivation for developing Tantan, CEO and co-founder of Tantan, Yu Wang (2016), has claimed that, in China many young people come by themselves to large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai to seek better job opportunities, but they lack the time and opportunity to meet people of the opposite sex[1]. This situation is compounded by the fact that, while Western dating culture has typically revolved around parties, nightclubs and bars, China does not have such traditions. Additionally, as Yu Wang has also indicated, before the advent of Chinese dating apps, the online alternatives in China were strongly oriented either to marriage (e.g. Baihe.com) or to sex (e.g. Momo in its early stage), even though the latter is much more stigmatized in China than in the West. As a result, Chinese young people have faced particular social-cultural obstacles in making friends when they arrive in a new place. Tantan was therefore designed for young people aged 18 to 35 to help them connect with strangers, both for romantic relationships and friendships. Compared with Tinder, Tantan is a relatively new and developing dating app. When Tantan first launched in the app store, it was reported in the press to be a carbon copy of Tinder, as it simply drew on the swipe right or left model from Tinder without any additional innovations. However, after two years' development, Tantan added some new functions, making it more fit for Chinese users, such as *Moments* (*pengyou quan*) and *Secret crush* (*niming anlian biaobai*).[2] These devel-

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1   Yu Wang's statement indicates that Tantan's targeted users are heterosexuals, although there would undoubtedly be a (growing) proportion of these young people who would be seeking partners of the same sex, or both.

2   *Moments* and *Secret crush* are two features embedded in Tantan. *Moments* operates in a similar way to Facebook's timeline where users are able to post their updates and browse others' posts. *Secret crush* enables users to show their affection for someone without saying it directly. In order to use it you need to have your lover's contact on your phone, and Tantan will send her/him a message "Someone around you has a crush on you and wants to invite you to Tantan." She/he would not know who employs Tantan to send out this message.

opments are in keeping with Williams' (1974) statement that technology is always shaped socially and culturally.

Although Tantan's target market is mainland China, there are many Chinese users of the app in Australia. Australia is an immigrant society, and by 30 June 2017, Chinese immigrants accounted for 2.5% of Australia's total population, which makes Chinese immigrants the second largest sub-group of Australian immigrants, closely following those from the United Kingdom (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Outside the *Great Firewall of China*, Chinese people in Australia have more options if they want to use mobile dating apps. For instance, they have access both to Tinder and Tantan.

The study of dating apps is very much in its infancy and existing research primarily focuses on two issues. One is the affordances of dating apps (Duguay, 2017) and another is users' engagement patterns (see, for example, Ward, 2016; Timmermans and De Caluwé, 2017). Most of this work has been conducted in the Western context. There are plenty of studies looking at the role of online dating technologies in reconfiguring intimacy (Enguix & Gómez-Narváez, 2018; Haywood, 2018; Rochadiat, Tong & Novak, 2018), for instance, on Instagram and Grindr, intimacies can be reconfigured when some users post private selfies in relatively public spaces (Enguix & Gómez-Narváez, 2018), while such studies in the Chinese context are relatively few (Chen, Davies & Elliott, 2002). This is even less the case when it comes to examining the role of dating apps in this reconfiguration (Chan, 2018), despite the rapid rise of these technologies in China in terms of application development and use.

Given that the number of Chinese immigrants in Australia has grown exponentially and that mobile dating apps have also gained popularity in China in recent years, this paper examines the role of dating app use in reconfiguring users' dating attitudes in this particular context. While detailing these complexities in cross-cultural uses of dating apps, this paper also provides us with a lens to better understand the interplay between new technologies and cultural innovation in more general contexts.

2. Chinese dating culture revisited: From arranged marriage to pluralistic values

Arranged marriage (fumubaoban) by parents has been a dominant form of courtship in Chinese society for centuries, and it still exists in certain rural areas in China. In traditional Chinese culture, it is widely believed that only a marriage that

is completely arranged by parents can be socially acceptable. The bride and groom may not even have the chance to see each other before the wedding day (Moore, 1998). Some parents made binding child betrothal agreements (wawaqin) for their children, and in some cases such an agreement has been made even before children are born (Wolf & Huang, 1980). In such marriage arrangements, people have no say in their own marriage, and in this patrilocal pattern, the bride has been seen more as a new member of the family than as a partner of the groom (Whyte, 1992). In his book, *Chinese Family and Kinship*, Baker (1979) points out that traditional Chinese society had a patrilineal kinship system, in which the husband's most important role in the family is to have male heirs to continue the ancestral line and the family name. Thus, the purpose of marriage was not so much to serve the interests of the couple, but to carry on the family line.

Arranged marriage customs were exposed to increasing criticism in the early decades of the 20th century, with reformers denouncing Confucian family norms that emerged with the May 4th Movement of 1919. While the growth of wage labour and the spread of Western ideas in China began to influence young people in their choice of partner from this period onwards (Lang, 1946; Levy, 1949), it was not until 1950, the year after the foundation of the PRC (People's Republic of China), that arranged marriages were legally abolished by the Marriage Law of the PRC. The Marriage Law aimed to put an end to traditional arranged marriages in favour of free choice unions. Alongside the new marriage law, the government also adopted other measures, such as launching a nationwide propaganda campaign (Xu & Whyte, 1990), to help abolish traditional marriage customs. Nevertheless, most parents still wished to exert their influence when it came to their children's choice of marriage partner (Yan, 2003), especially in rural areas (Xia & Zhou, 2003). Since 1978, the government headed by Deng Xiaoping began to carry out a series of reform policies, bringing unprecedented changes to Chinese society. As a consequence, the practice of dating started to emerge in China (Whyte, 1992; Xu, 1997; Xia & Zhou, 2003; Yan, 2003; Luo, 2008). Young people were gaining more mobility and independence than ever before (Xia & Zhou, 2003; Luo, 2008) and Western values and ideas regarding dating culture began to spread widely in China as a result of large-scale Westernization (Xia & Zhou, 2003; Yan, 2003).

China's cultural roots are sufficiently deep, however, to ensure that cultural change occurs very slowly (Moore, 1998). Thus, in present-day China, traditional and modern values and ideas co-exist, and this exerts an influence on Chinese people's dating practices. As a result, on the one hand, typical Chinese dating is often described as implicit (Moore, 1998), male dominated (Chen, Davies & Elliott, 2002; Luo, 2008; Luo & Sun, 2015), parental involved (Luo, 2008; de Seta

& Zhang, 2015) and marriage-oriented (Tang & Zuo, 2000; Xia & Zhou, 2003; Schultz & Lavenda, 2014). On the other hand, new values in dating practice have been observed in contemporary China, such as openness about sex (Farrer, 2014), and freedom of love (Wang, 2017).

3. Digital dating technologies and the potential to disrupt the tradition

The internet has always been regarded as a resource to meet people's romantic wishes and requirements, and, as such, dating applications exist that cater for a wide range of different demographic and sexual orientation groups (Egan, 2000). The traditional definition of online dating focuses on a person's use of online dating websites to find a potential partner and tends to exclude other online platforms, such as general SNSs (Social Networking Servies) and online forums (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008; Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Specher, 2012) and the answer to the second question (superiority. Online dating practices are often associated with stigma and considered unsafe, and users have, at times, been characterised as desperate people (Anderson, 2005; Whitty & Carr, 2006). Mediated dating practices, however, have carried a certain stigma since well before the advent of online dating. In America, for example, personal ads for romance placed in newspapers or magazines were also largely stigmatized as an early iteration of mediated dating (Finkel *et al.*, 2012) and the answer to the second question (superiority). The ubiquitous use of the Internet and Web 2.0 in our daily lives has demonstrated that online social experience is not inherently unsafe (Degim & Johnson, 2015), but the affordable cost of online dating services and the decreased social stigma associated with online dating due to their widespread take-up, has meant that online dating has developed rapidly from margin to mainstream and been embraced by many people (St John, 2002; Sautter, Tippett & Morgan, 2010). In 2015, it was reported that 15% of American adults had had experience of using dating services (Smith, 2016). While media coverage tends to portray online dating services as adopted by those who are 'looking for love, or sex' (Feuer, 2015), Couch and Liamputtong (2008) have studied individuals' motivations for using online dating websites. They have discovered that online daters engage in such practices for a wide range of reasons, including: seeking a soul mate, casual sex, fun, relaxation, boredom, meeting new people and facing up to new personal circumstances. Although online daters may have multiple motivations and even though technologies are by no means deterministic in terms of cultural innovation, some research has shown the potential of online dating technology for disrupting or counteracting tradition. For example, a study about the use of online dating websites among Muslim Amer-

ican women has revealed that the adoption of these technologies provides them with greater opportunities for partner selection and more control over courtship management. This may in turn have a transformative effect on traditional Muslim courtship practices that have hitherto highly restricted Muslim women's autonomy (Rochadiat, Tong & Novak, 2018).

Parallels could be found in China in terms of the situation of online dating. With the ubiquitous use of the internet in daily lives, it has become increasingly more common for Chinese young people to meet their first romantic partners on-line (Xia & Zhou, 2003). Moreover, in China online dating has tended to have a marked impact on dating culture from the very beginning. For instance, a study on an early online Chinese dating game called 'Raising Men for Fun' has argued that this game reverses traditional Chinese gender roles, as women in this game are dominant, or so-called 'masters'. This may indeed signify that online interpersonal relationship building is beginning to emerge as a powerful force for cultural change (Chen, Davies & Elliott, 2002). This force can also be seen on a flirting app Momo, where there is *a aimei* (erotic and ambiguous) flirting atmosphere, providing a 'safe haven' for users to escape peer pressure and the family narratives surrounding re-lationships in the 'real world' (Luo & Sun, 2015). On the other hand, how much of the cultural change seen online can actually be translated into real life (offline) in China remains a complex issue. This can be seen in Liu's (2016) study showing the transformation of Momo and its dominant, advertised use in recent years. Initially emerging as "*a genius tool for getting laid (Yuepao Shenqi)*", Momo was a "*rad-ical*" social media platform largely inconsistent with the "*conservative-leaning sexual culture of Chinese society*" (p. 562). Hence, while it succeeded in attracting hundreds of millions of users, it faced pressure from the Chinese government and society at large. As a profit-making enterprise first and foremost, Momo showed no interest in challenging government policies or in attempting to reshape mainstream values in China. It thus launched a sustained 'sanitising project' to rebuild itself as an app for making friends based on common interests.

The dearth of dating app studies in the Chinese context has been shown in the generally available literature, let alone in the context of Australian Chinese diaspora. Given the unique features of Chinese culture, and the potential of cultural transformation shaped by the adoption of dating apps, this paper explores the role of dating apps in helping young Chinese people negotiate their dating attitudes.

4. Methods

This paper draws upon data collected in 23 interviews carried out in the course of an ongoing PhD project that explores and contrasts the engagement with Tinder and Tantan by the Chinese diaspora in Australia. Before interviewing participants, I did some ethnographic observations on these two apps to get a general sense of how they functioned. However, given the special features of Tinder and Tantan, namely that users are not able to communicate with each other unless there is a mutual like between them, and mindful of ethical considerations, in this phase, my aim of platform observations was mainly to understand the affordances of Tinder and Tantan without observing users' practices directly.

In October 2017, I began to recruit participants through advertisements distributed in WeChat and Facebook groups as well as using these two dating apps (Blackwell, Birnholtz & Abbott, 2015; Ward, 2016). A snowball strategy was also used to encourage participants to inform their networks and to assist in this recruiting. The criteria for selecting my participants were that they identified themselves as part of the Australian Chinese diaspora, and whether they had used Tinder and/or Tantan at least once in the last three months. The age of my participants ranged from 21 to 31, with 11 males and 12 females. Interviews lasted from 26 minutes to one hour and 47 minutes. Before scheduling each interview, participants were offered the option of speaking either in English or Chinese, and the result was that all but one interview was conducted in Chinese. Interviews were transcribed, and the Chinese ones were translated into English. Using NVivo 12 I employed the thematic coding method (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to analyze all interview data. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect individuals' privacy.

5. Findings

Many studies focusing on Tinder have explored users' motivations and identified multiple motivations such as looking for romantic partners, seeking casual sex, releasing pressure and so forth, and given the similarities of Tantan's digital infrastructure to that of Tinder, all my participants' motivations for using Tinder and/or Tantan fall into one of these categories summarized by previous researchers (Ward, 2016; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). However, as the situation of my participants (membership of the Australian Chinese diaspora) is unique compared to those in previous studies, I have identified two main motivations for using Tinder and/or Tantan among my participants: (1) using Tinder in order to learn more about local culture and (2) using Tantan for emotional support.

This echoes my participants' perception of user base on these apps that in Australia predominant users on Tinder are white people, while predominant users on Tantan are Chinese people. But it should be noted that, although they may believe that interacting with white people on Tinder is helpful for learning about local (in this case Australian) culture, it is not necessarily true that all white users on Tinder in Australia are local.

Despite the fact that the time spent by my participants in Australia varied from 3 months to 32 years, all of them perceived Australia to be a Western society. As such, they, as ethnic Chinese or Asians, clearly felt that their cultural background in relationship to dating was different from the mainstream dating culture in Australia. This perception is in line with previous studies about Chinese and Western dating, whereby Chinese dating culture is viewed as being relatively conservative and Western dating culture is seen as relatively open (Le Espiritu, 2001; Tong, 2003; Luo, 2008). More specifically, when discussing dating culture or their experiences on dating apps, participants tended to single out the following three categories or topics: attitudes toward sex, intergenerational relationships and gender relations. This parallels themes examined in a piece of research that has studied Chinese American young people's dating culture (Luo, 2008). In the sections that follow I will examine the role of dating apps in helping reconfigure participants' dating attitudes by discussing each of these three themes in turn.

6.   Rethinking attitudes towards sex

Location-Based Services (LBS) are an important affordance of Tinder and Tantan, and this feature encourages users to meet other users within their immediate neighbourhoods. Moreover, such an affordance may create a sense of what Hjorth (2013) refers to as 'mobile intimacy' for all users of this service, which helps explain why these apps are often labelled as hook-up apps, since this affordance can be used by users for facilitating casual sex. For instance, Momo, as the first mobile social media equipped with LBS in China, it quickly became, in its early stages, a well-known hook-up app (Liu, 2016). While only one of my participants said he uses Tinder and Tantan just for casual sex, all of them said they had been aware that the app they were using had a reputation of being a hook-up app. Thus, no matter what their purpose in using these apps is, many of them, especially Tinder users, suggested that sex is a topic that cannot be avoided when communicating with their matches on these apps. For example, Lucy, 25, who comes from Taiwan, described her feelings when discussing sexual topics with one of her matches on Tinder in the following terms:Chinese people don't talk about this. How could it be possible for

Chinese to talk about your performance in bed! That guy didn't mean how good he is (in bed), he just said he discussed with his friends about Asian girls' performance in bed. I felt it is very funny. As I am a Chinese girl myself, I thought: really?

Although many of my participants told me that they are not conservative about dating, which is contrary to stereotypical depictions of Chinese people, it is still not common practice, as pointed out by my respondent, for Chinese people to discuss sex openly, especially between males and females. Hannah, 21, from Hongkong, also got a shock when she got involved in such online discussions on Tinder:

> I knew this from a guy on Tinder. He was looking for casual sex, and I just asked thoughtlessly: do you have a partner? He said yes. I was like what, (then) why are you still hooking up? And he said both he and his partner look for hooking up (chances) respectively. I was like shit! This was the first time I knew someone who is in an open relationship. There was a time when I told myself that I could accept this, but when I first came across this, my immediate response was like shit, this kind of thing does exist! I can accept it, but I will not do it.

Tinder and Tantan are able to provide my participants with the kind of space to rethink about their attitudes towards sex, and in some cases, they could get this simply by looking at other users' profiles. Dan, 27, who said he did not get many matches on Tinder, said he had learned some English words on Tinder:

> …You will find users with impure motives who will write many impure sentences, and there are many repeated words. On Facebook you will never learn this, some words you will never see in other places…

His statement also shows the implicit ways in which Chinese culture talks about sex. The word 'impure' in the above context is a literal translation of the Chinese word 'buchun', and in this context, it exclusively refers to 'sexual', but he used 'impure' instead, probably because he did not feel comfortable saying 'sexual' in Chinese directly in front of me. Helen, 21, who had only used Tantan, said *"all guys on Tantan are looking for sex"*, and she recalled those sexual expressions she had seen on male users' profiles on Tantan:

> …For example, they wrote "came here to do some meaningful stuff", "applause for sex", or "action movies" and things like that. Or directly "wanna hook up?"

7. Undermining parental authority during courtship

Parental involvement, as I have already mentioned, is a distinct part of Chinese dating due to the long history of arranged marriage. Harry, 32, who was born and grew up in Australia, felt uncomfortable about the pressure his parents put on his marriage:

> …From a family point of view, Chinese, I guess, especially for female … they would have opinion on who they should meet, and when they should get married, but Westerners have no... they don't care about it. They give their kids full freedom and they don't think I need to get married by 30 or something … And I feel, here I personally relate to Westerners, like my mother sometimes I can feel she gave some slight pressure on me. Like say, you know, try to introduce some girls, but because I grew up here, I really push against pressure, because I'm like, you know I want to be independent…

At Harry's age, the pressure would be bigger if he were living in China. Chinese young people will face all kinds of pressures from family and friends to get married when they reach a certain age, and the anxieties about getting married are reflected in several dating shows on Chinese television, such as *If You Are the One*. Unlike *If You Are the One* — which some commentators have argued actually reinforces traditional norms around parental involvement in their children's partnership (de Seta & Zhang, 2015), the adoption of dating apps by Chinese users clearly undermines parental control over courtship, especially when sons or daughters are living in Australia, which generally means that they are physically distant from their family. Lisa, 26, who met her fiancé on Tinder and recently had her parents visit her in Australia, decided never to tell her mother the truth about how she met her fiancé: "*I never thought about using dating apps when I was in China, because I think in China you have to use them in a sneaky way, and my mother will never understand if she knows I use dating apps.*" Lisa worked out a solution that allowed her to be autonomous without offending her mother.

Ray, 26, on the other hand, who is from Beijing and found a girlfriend via Tantan in Australia, was facing a more complex situation. He said that, when it comes to dating, his family does not care so much who he dates, as long as the girl is "*not very (sexually) open (luan)*", but in terms of marriage his family set the standards for his potential partner: "*…her family must have similar social status to us (men dang hu dui), e.g., her parents should be intellectuals, and they should be Beijing or Tianjin citizens*". The dilemma was that his girlfriend from Tantan is not what his parents expected, and he was quite uncertain about his parents' words:

> Now I think maybe this is reasonable. Before I really didn't like this, but now I am hesitat-
> ing. If I marry someone with a poor family, maybe the rest of my life will be very hard ...
> When I was back at home, I yearned for value systems outside China (guo wai), and wanted
> freedom of love, getting married because of love, but when I am abroad, I think maybe
> material situations are important if you want a long-term relationship.

8.   Reconfiguring gender relations

As a carryover from traditional Chinese patriarchal culture, Chinese men are en-
couraged to chase their ideal woman by all available means and are supposed to
be dominant in dating (Chen, Davies & Elliott, 2002; Luo, 2008). In contrast, in
Chinese culture women are expected to adopt the passive role in a relationship
(Luo, 2008, 2012). Given that both Tinder and Tantan have identified themselves
as dating apps targeting the heterosexual market (Wang, 2016; Duguay, 2017), it
is fair to say that male and female users' practices on these apps may potential-
ly configure or reconfigure gender dynamics. Interestingly, I located two relevant
dating app studies with seemingly two contrary arguments regarding how dating
apps may disrupt gender relations, be that reinforcing or disrupting the patriarchy.
Firstly, out of 15 interviews with young white straight male Tinder users, Hay-
wood (2018) found many of his informants have had the experience of groups
of friends crowding together around one Tinder user and all the time discussing,
joking or even humiliating female users. It was for this reason that Haywood bor-
rowed the concept of 'girl watching' arguing in this study that this constitutes an
objectification and commodification of women, thus forming and reinforcing new
forms of patriarchy during Tinder use. By contrast, Chan (2018) in his study of
Chinese dating apps, interviewed 19 Chinese female Tantan and/or Momo users
in Guangdong, concluding that dating apps have the potential to empower partic-
ipants and to disrupt patriarchy in three distinct ways: 1) increasing users' sexual
agency through providing them with the medium for exploring their sexual desires
2) objectifying male users through facilitating the 'feminine gaze' and 3) protect-
ing them from sexual harassment by offering them reporting mechanisms and op-
portunities on platforms.

Among my participants, all but one of them are dating app users who identify
as straight, and many of them have had similar experiences to those described
above. Tom, 25, whose Tantan profile was created by his male flatmates, provided
an example of a 'girl watching' experience. He said they produced this Tantan ac-
count because they have a female flatmate who *"brings a new man [she has] met
on Tantan back home every week"*, and they wanted to find this female flatmate's

Tantan profile so that they could make fun of her. So, after they had created this Tantan account on behalf of Tom, they kept swiping as a group once their female flatmate got back home. However, they did not succeed in ever getting to see their female flatmate's profile, but Tom said they did have a lot of laughs at the expense of other female users on Tantan: by commenting on girls' 'poor taste' in using filters on their photos or by expressing various profanities. Further evidence of how males objectify female users was provided by the fact that Harry carried out his 'girl watching' even when he was not physically together with his mates by taking advantage of Tinder's affordances:

> … if we find a really disgusting-looking girl (on Tinder), you know, like, (we will) send this screenshot, (I mean) share (this with each other). Because you know on Tinder there is a feature saying 'recommend to your friends'. Hahaha so I'll recommend a really ugly fat girl or if I know my friend likes black girl, I'll recommend to him.

In addition to this, I have some female participants who support the idea of the 'feminine gaze'. For example, Emma, 37, who comes from Taiwan and had only used Tinder, said she only paid attention to male users' faces (*kan lian*) when selecting potential matches. Lily, 23, who comes from Shanghai and had only used Tantan, also used the Chinese word *kan lian* to describe her main purpose on Tantan. Moreover, she said she was basically a lurker on Tantan since, for her, just viewing handsome guys was enough. Another example of the disruption of gender relations is not very relevant to dating app use. Lisa's fiancé, who she met on Tinder, is a Westerner, and Lisa said it is a very different experience compared with dating a Chinese guy when she was in China:

> …Like going Dutch, in China when I have dinner or watch a movie with guys, it is not possible to go Dutch. But as I have been overseas for so long, I've got used to this (…) I have never been very materialistic, but before, if someone, like my ex-boyfriend, gave me an expensive gift, I didn't feel uncomfortable, but now I will be very offended if someone buys me expensive gifts.

This coincides with Luo's (2008) study in which his participants also used the example of 'going Dutch' as a sign of gender equality. In Lisa's case, however, technology's influence on gender equality seems to be negligible, as this transformation is based on the experience of living in Western societies and dating a Western person. It is also possible that the Westerner was not necessarily met on Tinder or on other dating platforms. Moreover, it is not fair to assume all Chinese males are patriarchal on account of such cultural expectations, given that the study supporting Tinder reinforces patriarchy was conducted in the Western context. So

here I am not considering whether dating apps reinforce or disrupt traditional gender expectations but am merely pointing out that the issue of gender dynamics in this case is really complicated and that both technological determinism and cultural determinism are too simplistic to explain these complexities. As such, it is argued that the role of dating apps, in this case, is to provide more opportunities for the (re)configuration of gender relations among users, which is a complex process of negotiation rather than a unidirectional influence.

9. Discussion and conclusion

Contextualising the adoption of dating apps as media consumption among diasporas, this paper focuses on how the Chinese diaspora in Australia engages with a particular medium or platform (Tinder) in the host country, and with Tantan as *online homeland media* (Yin, 2015). It has shown that the affordances of these apps and socio-cultural contexts in Australia are two main forces that account for the renegotiation of my participants' dating attitudes.

Tinder and Tantan have very similar digital infrastructures and they have some identical communicative affordances compared with dating apps in general, such as locatability and *swipe logic* (David & Cambre, 2016). Moreover, as part of popular culture in modern societies, both Tinder and Tantan share a similar image in the mass media, namely that they are often depicted as hook-up apps, despite the fact that Tantan has gained more popularity than Tinder in China and vice versa in the West that Tinder is more popular than Tantan. Thus, in this sense both Tinder and Tantan have shaped my participants' experiences in a similar way. For example, mobile intimacy created by Tinder and Tantan encourages my participants to think that talking about intimate topics on these apps is a normal, accepted experience, although it can be a taboo in Chinese society with its conservative-leaning sexual culture (Pei, 2008). Therefore, Tinder and Tantan offer my participants opportunities to renegotiate their attitudes towards dating and associated cultures.

Social, cultural and material contexts do matter. Previous studies have shown the influence of broader contexts on social media users' online self-presentation (Takahashi, 2010; Chan, 2016; Dhoest & Szulc, 2016). In this study, many of my participants are only willing to use dating apps while they are in Australia, due to: 1) their perception of there being greater stigma attached to dating apps in China 2) their assumption that there are more liberal values towards dating in Australia and 3) the relative dearth of opportunities for meeting new people in a new environment. Cultures on Tinder and Tantan are also shaped by sociocultural

contexts. Tinder culture, as perceived by my participants, is more localised, or more Western as many of my participants do not distinguish Australia from other Western countries. For this reason, they often associate Tinder with Western dating culture, which can be casual and authentic on the upside and overly open on the downside. Tantan culture in Australia has a strong connection to its cultural base in China, and its user base in Australia is predominantly made up of ethnic Chinese, despite the fact that it is a geo-locative app. In China, Tantan, like other dating apps such as Momo, has always been portrayed by the mass media as "*a genius tool for getting laid (Yuepao Shenqi)*", and has been seen by scholars as being disruptive to the relatively conservative sexual culture in China (Liu, 2016; Chan, 2018). However, on the one hand, Tantan culture in Australia (as perceived by my participants) is indeed associated with 'openness' regarding dating and sexual culture. For instance, Tom asserted that "*Chinese girls using Tantan are overly open*" and Helen believed that "*all guys using Tantan are in it for hook-up*". On the other hand, Tantan culture has some Chinese characteristics compared to Tinder, such as greater emphasis on the platonic and less focus on the sexual. This supports previous research on Chinese online dating (Chin, 2011), for example both Ray and Dan mentioned that, using Tantan, they had made some genuine female friends, while they viewed girls on Tinder as being "*too sexually open*". Similarly, the main motivation for Chloe and Jade using Tantan is that they want to express their innermost feelings to strangers, as they think that by doing this, they could release pressure, but they would feel embarrassed if they vented similar intimate feelings to their close friends.

While dating apps do have a role in disrupting traditional norms, they mainly function as a means of acceleration and reinforcement. This is illustrated by Lisa's choice of image explaining the influence of Tinder on her: "*This is a chicken and egg question. You must be relatively open, then you will use them, and if you feel good you will continue using them, so it is a question of mutual influence. It is not so much that after using this my attitudes towards dating and marriage have changed, but maybe a little bit reinforces.*" Although this paper is not representative of attitudes throughout the Australian Chinese diaspora, it has attempted to elaborate the complexities relating to the adoption of dating apps and the negotiation of dating attitudes among my participants. Characteristically Chinese attitudes and the disruption of Chinese traditions have both been revealed in this process, and thus this paper has hopefully contributed to a better understanding of diasporic social media use by showing the mutual influences between technology and culture.

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Biography

Xu Chen is a PhD candidate in the Digital Media Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology. Xu's PhD project looks at how the Australian Chinese diaspora engage with dating apps Tinder and Tantan, with a focus on the interplay between digital platforms and diasporic identities.

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