Privacy on Social Networking Websites: Dilemma of Self-Expression and Self-Disclosure in China

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ABSTRACT

Since the popularization of the Internet in the late 1990s in China, it has been increasingly used as a tool of working, studying and socializing. At the same time, problems of online privacy disclosure have aroused people's wide concern (Zhang 2013). The main argument of this thesis is that along with the popularization of social networking sites and apps on computers and smart phones, it has blurred the boundary of online and offline society as well as that of private sphere and public sphere because of a shift of social relations constructing strategy from traditional face-to-face one to modern technological online method. Online privacy disclosure problem is no longer just an information disclosing issue to online strangers, but an issue causing serious damage to the construction of social relations with acquaintances in traditional offline society. As an extension and addition of the studies of privacy in China conducted by Fei Xiaotong (1998[1947]) and Yan Yunxiang (2006), this thesis targets teenage students of the High School Affiliated to Shandong University and college students of Shandong University in Jinan, Shandong Province in China. What are social networking websites users' attitudes on privacy online and offline? How do they balance the social networking onstage and the privacy protecting backstage? These questions would be analyzed on the basis of Goffman's theatrical performance theory.

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1. Introduction

Since the advent of the Internet in the late 1990s in China, it has been increasingly used as a tool for working, studying, communicating and entertainment (Zhang 2013). Especially after 2007, social network websites and apps have become more and more popular in mainland China. There are three main findings according to my field work: 1) social networking platforms have gradually blurred the boundary of online and offline society as well as that of private sphere and public sphere; 2) nowadays most of non-technological online privacy disclosure problems on social networking sites are caused by users' social networks rather than strangers' peek online; 3) social networking users tend to transform their way of establishing social relations and building up a social network from face-to-face interaction to interact on social networking platforms.

Most of interviwees regard social networking sites as a part of offline life and do not mind linking online intractions to their offline activities. In 19 interviews I did in total, 18 respondents stated that they interact with friends and family members on social networking sites everyday; 14 of them specifically pointed that they interact by means of sharing pictures and videos relate to their own life, such as selfies and landscape photography in a tour or around home. According to a 2013 study conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project and Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, forty percent of teenagers shared Facebook profiles with anyone rather than

restricting information to their "friends" (Purdy 2013). The American Magazine Consumer Reports also points out that half of social network users publish self-related information on social networking sites and the more time users spend online, the more information they will share with their online friends, and the more likely they will disclose private details (Wang 2014). From the statistic, social networking platforms are gradually eroding users' awareness of distinction of cyber society and traditional society.

Social networking sites not only blurred the boundary of cyber society and traditional society, but also blurred that of private sphere and public sphere, which is the main reason that most of non-technological online privacy disclosure problems on social networking sites are caused by users' social networks. People tend to hide some private information in public sphere or on frontstage but would like to share these private things in private sphere or on backstage according to Goffman, because they are all unwittingly doing a performance in society. For the same reason, social media users have a lower possibility to release private things on an opening social networking platform, such as Micro-Blog, but have a much higher possibility to release these kind of information on a platform that they feel safe. According to interviews, 18 of respondents thought that compare with Micro-Blog[1], WeChat[2] and Qzone[3] are safer

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[1] Because of the Chinese Great Firewall, social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram cannot be officially used in China. WeChat, Qzone and Micro-Blog are three of most popular social networking sites in mainland China. Micro-Blog is an opening social networking platform to all users, while WeChat and Qzone are totally and partly based on social network and relations in reality.

[2] WeChat is an instant messaging software, whose functions are similar to What's app, Line and Messenger in other countries all around the world, but also have a function of sharing pictures, videos and news like what Facebook has done. Therefore, WeChat is a combination of instant messaging and SNS. It is published in the spring of 2011 by Tencent Holdings Limited, which is the biggest Chinese social media company.

[3] Qzone (Chinese pinyin: QQ kongjian) is a social networking website created by Tencent Corporation in 2005,

because they think WeChat and Qzone are based on trusting relations of a social network in traditional society while only one respondent thought that Micro-Blog is safer because most of users do not know about the others' identities. 5 respondents mentioned that they do not add friends of WeChat and Qzone to Micro-Blog so that they could publish information to strangers online which would not like to be captured by friends and family in offline life. On WeChat and Qzone, users release private news or pictures relate to their life because they think these information could be controlled in a range of trusting people who already have a social relation with each other in offline society. However, by means of secondary diffusion of online information, such as sharing screenshot of a private comment, the information could be diffused to a wider range of audience and gradually out of control.

From the statistic we could also see a trend that people tend to use social networking platforms as a tool to constructe social relations in offline interactions rather than clearly cut the online and offline world into two realms. Up to June of 2016, the number of social networking sites users in China is 642 million, including users of three most popular social networking apps, WeChat, whose using rate is the highest 78.7%, Qzone for 67.4% and Micro-blog for 34.0% respectively[4]. As I discussed above, WeChat is a social networking apps totally based on social connections in traditional face-to-face society, as accounts of WeChat come from users' phone number,while Qzone is partly

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which offers users services such as writing blogs, keeping online diaries and sharing pictures with friends. By 2016, Qzone already had 653 million users in mainland China.

[4] Statistic resource: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) the 38th Chinese Internet Development Report (July, 2016).

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based on social relations in offline interactions, as accounts of Qzone could be searched both by Qzone ID and specific conditions. Therefore I could roughly conclude that most of social networking users (WeChat for 78.7 percent and Qzone for 67.4 percent of whole social networking users) would like to use social networking platforms as a tool to construct and maintain social relations in offline society.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in Western countries and WeChat, Qzone and Micro-Blog in China allow individuals to post personal information and photos to hundreds or even thousands of "friends" with a single click (Purdy 2013), but also bring people high risk of privacy disclosure which might cause damage to social relations in offline life. I focus on how private information of social networking websites users was disclosed and go further analyze a deeper reason casuing online privacy disclosure in the process of online interactions by using Goffman's theatrical performance theory.

As Goffman (1956) said in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, there is a theatrical performance existing in interactions of people, which means when an individual comes in contact with another person, he attempts to control or guide the impression that the other person will form of him, by means of altering his own setting, appearance and manner, and at the same time the person that the individual is interacting with attempts to form an impression of, and obtain information about, the individual. Because society is not homogeneous, people on the stage of life must act differently in different settings and in front of different groups of people.

However, there is a big difference between face-to-face interactions and online

interactions, because it is harder to tell who is watching the information that an individual post on social networking sites and interacting with them. Therefore, it is comprehensible for us to conclude the possibility of users share their daily life on social networking sites and build an ideal image in front of their friends and acquaintances. On the other hand, the failure of controlling information to different audience on the Internet may lead to collisions of interpersonal relationship. For example, a man takes a picture when eating with friends happily and he wants to post it on Facebook and share with friends, but at the same time one of his family members died in distant hometown, which requires him to behave sadly. Under this circumstance if he posts the picture on Facebook and captured by his relatives, his behavior may leave his relatives a very bad impression. The different of social network online and offline determines people must treat it in different ways.

Fei (1998 [1947]), Yan (2006), and other scholars have paid attention to issues of relations between privacy, personal space and social relationships in China, which refers that the notion of privacy, societal structure and social relations are always interplayed in Chinese society. Because of the complicity and ambiguity of Chinese social relation boundary, it is hard to define the boundary of privacy, which even worse when facing privacy problems on social networking websites. Fei (1998[1947]) used Pattern of Difference Sequence" (Chinese: chaxu geju) theory, which compares Chinese social networks to the homocentric sphere model, to analyze it, but he never conclusively defined what "privacy" is. Rather, he explained reasons why it is difficult to define the notion of privacy in China. In the 1980s, Yan (2006) conducted deeper

research about private life in rural China and he finds a shift of people's awareness of privacy and a relation of privacy and private space. However, there were few studies focusing on changes in the notion of privacy, especially with the advent of the Internet in modern China. Other scholars also emphasize the relationships between privacy and power (Habermas 1962), in public fields (Aries 1992), or within the family (Moore 1984). Modern researches on privacy varies from the right to privacy in legislation system (Purdy, 2016; Alderman, 1995; Strahilevitz, 2013[2010]), medical privacy (Nancy, 2015; Mercadal, 2017; Lowrance, 2013), family education rights and privacy (Pritchard, 2016), sexual rights of homosexual privacy (Wheeler, 2013; Zetter, 2016) to Internet privacy (Bernal, 2014; Cunnington, 2017; Erramilli, 2012; Derene, 2015; Friedewald, 2014) with the development of human rights on privacy protection.

Comparing with researches and topics working on privacy problems in countries outside China, the issue of online privacy in Chinese society contains two specificities. On the one hand, traditional Chinese society has a very changeable and complicated social relation rule which derives from a long historical and cultural background, leading to an extremely ambiguous notion of privacy with an elastic boundary. People in Chinese society tend to give different definition of privacy in front of different groups of people, which I conclude as three layers of privacy – basic information, secrets and core privacy. To strangers (especially online), privacy is basic information, while to family, friends and colleagues, privacy is secrets. Both basic information and secrets are flexible – these could be released under some circumstance or for some reason, but the boundary of core privacy is fixed – people would never like to release it.

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On the other hand, online social interactions on social media tend to let the elastic boundary of notion fixed, because pictures, videos or other information that users posted online tend to be equally captured by all users on social networking sites. According to Goffman (1956), people tend to perform different roles in front of different groups of people, and to do this, the performer should always be careful about who his/her audiences are. But on social networking sites, it is hard to control audiences comparing with that in face-to-face interaction. Even if the performer give a perfect performance online, he or she still faces a high risk of role broken by means of secondary diffusion of information. In this way, social media users' privacy was disclosed by their own social networks in offline interactions rather than by strangers' peek online. It is not only an issue of online privacy disclosure, but also a clash of an old traditional social interaction method with a new modern technological ways of social interaction.

In the second chapter I illustrate previous researches on privacy and social network in three perspectives: a discussion of private sphere and public sphere from Habermas (1962) and Yan (2006), which provide a conceptual basis for the analysis of the relation between social relations and online privacy; a historical transformation of privacy awareness in traditional Chinese society, which provides detailed studies on the relation of privacy, Chinese societal structure and social network; and a discussion of online privacy researches, which refers online privacy disclosure problems caused by polymerized online information. In the chapter three I introduce the methodological strategies I used in my field work, which is participant observation and ethnographic

interview. Chapter four is the main body of this thesis, mainly including three sections. The first two sections are oriented by Fei's theory about social network and social relationships in traditional Chinese society and Goffman's theatrical performance theory respectively, arguing the relation of more and more blurry boundaries of private sphere and public sphere online and offline and online privacy disclosure causation; the third section is an extension to privilege of online privacy protection drives from commercial factors. Chapter five is a conclusion of my research findings from field work, shortcomings of the research and an extension to future researches.

2. Theoretical Analysis of Relations between Privacy and Social Network

2.1 Public Sphere and Private Sphere

The concept of privacy cannot be analyzed without that of public. Habermas explained a generalized notion of public sphere as a process that people's discourse trends to reach an agreement by communicating, explaining and discussing, and finally forming a public opinion (Habermas, 1962). Other scholars argue that public fields are where relationships between privacy and power and functions of governments are emphasized (Aries 1989), while families function as boundaries between private and public fields (Moore 1984). In the last century, privacy appeared a characteristic of class in both eastern and western countries (Prost 1991) and only upper-class elites had the political and economic power to protect their private space from others' interference (Warren and Laslett 1977). Fei (1998 [1947]), Yan (2006), and other scholars have paid attention to issues of personal space and personal relationships in China. Yan (2006) finds a close connection between rights and space of privacy in social space and it has changed with the transition of space allocation in the past 60 years. In the past, most families in rural China were too poor to afford big houses which enable every member to have his own room or private space. In general, several family members shared a one-bedroom house so they slept in clothes to protect their most basic privacy – their body. It was hard to

protect one's privacy under this circumstance and therefore people had few secrets at that time. Later, following the improvement of living standards, people separated living rooms from bedrooms, so that they had private space, which is a material basis of privacy. Yan (2006) has illustrated this feature of privacy in his book: At that time landowners could break into farmers' houses without permits, and farmers had to greet them without complaint. In contrast, farmers should carefully follow the rules when they entered landowners' courtyard. Now in modern society most people have economic power and legitimate rights of protecting privacy from illegal methods and privacy as an equal right is entitled to every individual, but at the same time they are facing a bigger challenge of online privacy disclosure problem, which comes from a more complicated social relation construction in front of different groups of people, and as a return might bring people a more serious potential danger on social relationships.

2.2 Privacy in Traditional Chinese Society

People in ancient China had a public bias against the notion of private, which can be simply summarized by Guan and Liu (2009) that people regarded *private* as *selfish*, affecting people's opinions of privacy even in modern society. The notions of public and private firstly emerged during the period of Warring States (BC 475-BC 221) when traditional Confucianism associated public with an honorable social value and ethic, while the notion of privacy was regarded as the cause of wickedness (Liu, 2003). Therefore, although people had a desire and need of privacy, honorable upper-class elites never talked about it in public.

Around the founding period of the People's Republic of China, influenced by Mao Zedong (the first president of PRC) and Marxism's negative attitude towards private ownership, privacy was tagged with capitalism and anti-communism and a bias against privacy were enhanced in policies of Chinese Communist Party (Chen, 2005). The conflict between human's nature of desire of a privacy and dehumanized political suppression of privacy finally broke out in Chinese Cultural Revolution, when all private property and private relations were extremely forbidden. This acknowledged political mistake led to immeasurable damage of life and rights of individuals, but after attempting to correct this fatal political mistake with update of leader of PRC, the Party changed political strategy and released the Reform and Opening-up Policy, which is the basis of transformation of opinions of privacy in China (Chen, 2005).

Fei Xiaotong (1947[1992]) noted his previous ethnographic researches in his book, *From the Soil (Chinese pinyin: Xiangtu Zhongguo)*, in which Fei developed a conceptual framework for depicting the moral and ethical characteristics of Chinese traditional society. Contrast to social network of Western society, Chinese societal structure and social relationships are just like a concentric ripples of a pebble hitting water, and the more distant to the core of relation, the less personal information people would like to share with. Because Chinese social relations and societal structure are complicated, privacy as a very important part of social relations and interactions has a very ambiguous, blurry notion and an elasticated, changeable boundary in Chinese society. Both Yan (2006) and Fei's theory of social structure, social network and social space in rural China in the past 60 years offers an essential analysis on the notion of

privacy, but limited by their times, their ethnographic work did not contain discussions of online privacy on social media in modern China, as social networking sites and other social media spring up in China from 2008.

2.3 Privacy and Public on the Internet

Approximately from 2008 social media has been gradually developed in Chinese market and society, which create a new style of daily communication and interaction. At the same time, the Internet has blurred the boundaries between online and offline life, which put users' privacy in a risky situation. People are under the monitor of electronic technology, but they don't know whom they are watching or who is watching over them (Webster, 2002[1995]). So people are worried about the consistency of their performance in public and private occasion (Hu, 2008:161). In a traditional face-to-face interaction, a person shows different aspects of himself in front of different groups of people to maintain his social relationships. But on the Internet, all of users can be informed of this person's behaviors through the information he released on social networking sites (Raynes, Godie, 2010). Boyd (2008) refers this phenomenon to the Costs of Social Convergence, which means all information could be released and shared to social media users equally in spite of the relation between the releaser and audiences. The cost of social convergence by Boyd could also be understood by Goffman's social theory of self-presentation in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959).* People play different roles in daily life with different performance in front of different groups of people by means of changing his/her manner, behavior and speech (Lemert

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and Brnaman, 1997). But because of the high speed of information spread on social media, it is harder to make different "faces" on the Internet, which brings social media users high risk of breaking roles and privacy disclosing.

Social networking sites and apps offer users a stage to develop different relationships (Liu, 2010), and to reach this goal, some of them release their private information on purpose to draw attention from the public (Guo, 2013), which causes potential danger even to their offline life, such as cyberbullying and cybercrime (Akhgar, 2016). Privacy problems of social media can be divided into two categories: technological information disclosure and social information disclosure (Liu, 2012). In recent years, studies of cyber security in China focus on the former problem, which is caused by hacker technology (Li, 2013), and relevant online regulation (Tang, 2013). As for the latter, researchers have revealed this problem by collecting statistics from questionnaires (such as Raynes, Godie, and Boyd), but few of them use ethnographic methods and have an interpretative result. According to literatures and previous researches that illustrated above, although along with the development of techonologies, economics and the improvement of legislation, privacy protection has arouse people's widespread awareness in terms of work, study and life, it is facing a bigger chanllenge because of a more complicated and changeable social relation in modern Chinese society. Social media enable social media users to have a so-called online "privat" space but actually these online private space has blurred the boundary of public sphere and private sphere, as most of social media users tend to open their blogs to friends or strangers, sharing their online private spaces and interacting with the others. In such a new online space,

people could easily establish a new social relation with a single click and a short but good conversation, however, social media users are taking a high risk of failing to maintain an old social network and previous role of performance; online privacy disclosure is one of typical issues.

3. Methodology Strategies

This research project focuses on online private information that is unwittingly self-disclosed by users. In most cases users do not even know the picture, video or information about family, education, relation status that they post on social networking sites have led to potential danger to their privacy, until they were hurt by privacy disclosure. In order to explore differences of respondents' subjective judgment of the degree of online privacy protect and objective description of bystander, two methods were employed: the method of participant observation and the method of in-depth interviewing.

3.1. Semi-structured ethnography interviews

Considering the possibility of people's different attitudes of personal information online and offline, it makes no sense if I just do interviews online with net friends without a talk face to face. I did interviews with two groups of people in Jinan City, Shandong

Province in China: 1) teenagers in the Middle School Attached to Shandong University. As young students in China, their behaviors of using social networking sites are limited by parents, teachers and school, but on the one hand, adolescent psychological inversion because of the pressure from school and family may motivate teenagers to seek for more friends in cyber society and in traditional society, which lead to potential danger of privacy disclosure.

2) Young college students: comparing with teenagers, they have more chances and time to use social networking sites and apps, and they are more familiar with online life. Plus, young college students are going to enter workplaces and other different social fields, so they have an urge need to establish a good image in public and to develop a wide interpersonal relationship.

I did 19 interviews in total, including 10 interviews (7girls and 3 boys) with middle school students aged from 12 to 14 and 9 interviews (7 girls and 2 boys) with college students aged from 19 to 22 years old. Interviews were around 30 minutes to one hour, but the longest one is about two hours and a half with a middle school student.

3.2. Participant observation

I logged in my own social media account and entered some of my respondents' pages to see how much information I can attain from the content posted by them. Then I compared the result with interviews to see whether my respondents' online privacy-related behaviors are coincident with their attitudes on privacy protection. I got some cases from this observation, which is a main source of analysis of online privacy

disclosure reasons.

4. Ambiguous Social Relations, Blurry Ptivacy Boundaries, and Socializing Stretagy Transformation

4.1 Elastic Privacy Boundaries in Chinese Societal Structure and Social Relations

Problems of cyber security and personal information disclosure have potential danger to people's daily life. What's more worrying is that many users are short of awareness of privacy protecting, leading to information disclosure and causing damage to social relationship in offline society. There are also many people who are aware of the importance of privacy online, but for the most part, users do not realize that the private information they post online leads to privacy disclosure, not to mention applying it well to practice.

In my research, a girl in Licheng Middle School in Jinan City, Shandong Province had an awful experience about online privacy disclosure when she used her mother's smart phone browsing social networking websites. She forgot to log out so her mother saw an ambiguous dialogue between the girl and a boy on the girl's page, which made the mother angry. The mother rushed to her daughter's school and slapped her in front of students and teacher, hurting her self-esteem (fy01). She even did not know that it is

the information she put on her social networking websites leading to a privacy disclosure until her mother slapped her. There is also news from one of my respondents that young mothers in modern China would like to post their babies' pictures on WeChat, and this led to abductions. Bad guys showed picture to children and said "Come and Follow me. I'm your mother's friend. Look, I have your picture with your mother." Parents even did not realize that post photos of their babies has a potential danger of abduction because of private information disclosure until somebody else told them (fy05).

The potential danger of online privacy disclosure in China has a special and historical reason of social network in China, which is argued by Fei Xiaotog (1998[1947]) and Yan Yunxiang (2006) in their previous researches. According to Fei Xiaotong (1998[1947]), the division of private sphere and public sphere is largely influenced by social network in Chinese traditional society. He uses the concentric ripples of a pebble hitting water as an analogy for Chinese societal structure and social relationships. Kinship is the most basic and closed relation in social network, while friendship, colleagueship and strangers are placed on a comparatively distant position. Because of the flexibility of social network in Chinese society, the boundary of privacy varies from different relationships in social network. According to semi-structured ethnographic interviews, 15 out of 19 respondents think that "privacy is something that do not want to let the others know", four people regard privacy as a series of personal information, such as phone number, ID number and bank card pin code, one emphasized that private space is also an important part of privacy; in the first group of 15, when being asked a

question that who exactly "the others" and what the "something" are, 14 respondents mentioned that concrete content of privacy differs according to different objects under different context – to people whom they are familiar with, such as parents and friends, privacy is something relate to sentiment, while to strangers privacy is something relate to personal and property security, which is generally basic information like full name, address, phone number, pin code and so on.

The Internet as a technological innovation has drawn wide attention in the past few years. The respondents also have different notion of privacy in front of different groups of people online. To strangers online, privacy is basic personal information. Most of respondents expressed that they do not mind sharing anecdotes with net friends, talking about friendships, love experience, annoyances or other secrets, but none of them agreed to release personal information, such as real name, school, address, phone number, bank card number and identification card number. For them, as long as net friends on social networking platforms do not know about their basic personal information, those private things they poured out to strangers online are safe. This idea could be seen from the interview of a teenage boy below:

"I would never talk about my personal information or any information relate to my family or my life, such as my address, number, age, and so on. I only talk about my interests, my experience or my study. I think it is ok, as long as the person who I was talking to does not know who I am. I don't tell people about my life on social media because I am afraid some bad guys would take my information to cheat my family. I

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know a news about this kind of incident. A college student told his real name, his university and some information of his parents to a net friend, and about two weeks later the student's parents received a phone call from a man claimed himself to be a friend of that student, saying the student suffered a car accident and needed money. Luckily the student's parents gave a call to their son and his instructor immediately to affirm it, and found out it was a trap." (xc02)

In contrast to the notion of privacy to strangers online, to family and friends, privacy is something relate to sentiment and emotions. Basically when facing friends and parents, privacy is not basic personal information, as they are familiar with each other, but that does not mean people do not have privacy in the interaction with friends and family. For teenage students in the High School Affiliated to Shandong University, they do not like to mention annoyances in growth and relationship with other classmates, but rather discuss with friends or net friends on social networking websites. Some of teenage respondents even regard parents as the first and biggest threat of privacy in their growth, because most of them do not have mobile phone, ID card or bank card, but most of them do have some private articles at home, such as diary. Here is a reply of a teenage girl in the High School Affiliated to Shandong University when talking about the preservation of her diary,

"My mother always tries to peek my diary. For example, there was one day I was writing my diary in my room and left for a while, leaving my diary on my desk. When I

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returned to my room I saw my mom was there, watching my diary. Then she noticed me

and tried to pretend that she did nothing. So I asked her, 'did you peek my diary just

now?' and she said 'no'. I don't like her behavior. Actually I do not really mind her

looking at my diary, because I understand that is the way she cares about me. She wants

to know my ideas about life. But she took it too serious. Even if I just transcribe lyrics

on diary – maybe the lyric of a sad song – she would ask me, 'what happened to you?

Did you have conflicts with friends?'. That makes me feel uncomfortable." (fy02)

However, the elasticity of social network does not mean the boundary of privacy is
infinitely flexible – actually, according to respondents, the core privacy relates to body,
sexuality and gender – the boundary of core privacy is fixed. Based on the core privacy,
people would add some other items into their notion of privacy according to personal
experience and different context to protect themselves, and the addition part of privacy
is flexible. On social networking sites, basically, people would expand the boundary of
privacy and add some peripheral information, such as basic personal information.

All in all, the notion of privacy should be understood in three layers: basic information,
which is some personal information relate to self-identity; secrets, which could be
hidden or published, and even could be exchanged as a tool of social network
construction; core privacy, which is extremely private information and would never like
to be released in social interactions. I talked about people's different reaction to basic
information and core privacy in front of different groups of people in above paragraphs;
now I am going to discuss about the distinction of secrets and core privacy in following

paragraphs.

When talking about privacy, most of boys replied, "privacy is something you don't want to let the others know under any circumstances", while girls tend to have "something really could not be released under any circumstances but also have some secrets which you know could not be released but just cannot help to confide in friends." There was an obvious classification between privacy and secret according to interviews fy01 and fy02, and this was admitted by respondents in interviews fy04, fy05, fy06, fy07, fy10, fy13 and fy14 as well. Privacy should never be published, but secret is always shared for some purpose. Just as a middle school student in interview xxy01 said,

"It is a little bit paradoxical. On the one hand people want to hold it tightly and leave it in a protective jacket that you made for yourself; on the other hand, people have a desire and urge to pour out and confide." (xxy01)

Comparing to privacy, the disclosure of secret is less likely to cause damage to people's life, especially personal and property security, while the disclosure of privacy has a higher possibility to lead to great harm in terms of daily life and property. Two teenage girls in the High School Affiliated to Shandong University shared similar ideas on the distinction of secrets and core privacy:

"Comparing to privacy, the definition of secret is narrow, as privacy could also be defined from the perspective of legislation. For secret, it is normal in people's daily life

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to hear 'I only tell you my secret' or 'please preserve this secret for me'. Basically secret does not have a definite boundary between release and not release; it is kind of random. Anyway, although secret is so-called a private thing, the disclosure of secret would not cause serious damage to people's life and future, but the disclosure of privacy would." (fy04)

"Privacy is something very personal and just relate to the individual, but secret often involves other objects. Therefore, people do not need to expose their privacy proactively as long as the thing they want to hide did not break the law or would be harmful to the others, because these things people would not like to publish have nothing to do with the others. For example, personal diary is typically a private thing, and people do not have an obligation to share or submit their personal diaries with or to any people or organization. Students have the right to keep their personal diaries away from teachers and schools, children have the right to refuse parents' request of watching diaries. It is not a protest; it is a basic human right." (fy05)

Sometimes people would release their secrets on purpose out of some reason. A teenage boy in interview xc03 said to me, "if I like a girl in school, generally the fact that I like her is my secret and I should not tell the others, but actually I told this secret to my friends, pretending I did that unwittingly. Because I know this friend would diffuse this secret to the others. Then all of students would know that I like that girl. It is a warn to my potential rival in love. At the same time, I could observe the reaction of that girl to

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see whether she likes me as well."

"if I would like to tell something private which should not be published by me for some reason, I would find a proper person to diffuse this secret, pretending that I did not even realize my secret has been disclosed. This is what smart people would do." (xc03)

Moreover, secrets could also be exchanged as a tool for people to construct and maintain their social relation. According to Mauss's (1954[1925]) gift theory, the construction and maintenance of social relations are based on a principle of giving and reciprocating. He symbolically explains exchanging gifts as a process of setting up trusting relations and alliances. Exchanging secrets could also be explained in the same way – anyone who has got involved in the circle of secrets exchange is tightly connected with other members in this circle, but at the same time, refusal of exchanging secrets could be seen as a refusal of alliance, which, in other words, is a collapse of interpersonal relationship. Because of elasticity of social network in Chinese traditional society, individuals have different ideas on privacy, and it is hard to realize an equivalent secret exchange, which is a reason of conflicts in intimate relationship in China. In the interview fy02, a girl called Jiang shared her experience with her best friend that Jiang told her best friend her secrets but did not get an equivalent reciprocity. Jiang shared her secrets with her best friend as a way to show trust and sincere; therefore, Jiang thinks that as a reciprocity her friend should share secrets with her as well. But Jiang's friend has her own definition of privacy and she also has the right to protect her

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privacy. The thing is Jiang's friend did not treat Jiang and other friends in an equal way, which as I argued above, is because of specific elasticated relation of social network and boundary of notion in Chinese traditional society. Therefore, Jiang feels unfair and hurt.

4.2 Online Privacy Disclosure and Secondary Information Diffusion

Nowadays social media have become a very common social networking communicating media, which enables people construct their social network in offline society. But online social network and interpersonal relationship are not absolutely as same as social relations in offline society, because of the specific feature of information diffusion online, social media users' private information is always under a high risk of disclosing. According to Goffman's assumption of the self and social roles, each individual would be involved in more than one system or pattern and therefore, perform more than one role (Lemert and Branaman, 1997). The role-segregation is always be facilitated by audience-segregation, which enables people who figure in one of the individual's major role-sets do not figure in another, thereby allowing people to keep a balance in social relations. To do this, the individual must alter his/her own setting, appearance and manner, leading different audience to form different impressions of the individual. In the process of interactions with friends or net friends on social networking sites, users who want to share pictures or post news in daily life need to consider whether these content they want to post on social networking sites are proper to be captured by different groups of people, such as peers, colleagues, relatives and strangers,

as most of content they posted on social media has the possibility to be equally watched by all audience. The failure of controlling performance to different audience on the Internet may lead to collisions of interpersonal relationship, which can be called the cost of polymerized society. The different of social network online and offline determines people must treat it in different ways. Based on Goffman's theory, it is not difficult to find cases of online private information disclosed caused by polymerized information.

Zhu Lanxin is a middle school student in the High School Affiliated to Shandong University, who is the classmate of one of my respondents called Jiang. I noticed Zhu because of her interaction with Jiang on Jiang's Qzone[5] website, which is one of most popular social networking websites in China. As Zhu's Qzone page was open to all Qzone users, I successfully entered her personal online zone with my social media account and browsed her online diary, pictures and other information that she posted online, such as her real name, her appearance, age, school, class, family address and real names of the headteacher, the instructor, the monitor and the physical education representative; I even know about the relation among some students in her class, their midterm physics grades and latest class activities. The main reason of her online private information disclosure is the secondary diffusion of information on social media.

Social networking websites users release information, writing blogs and sharing pictures on their pages and social networking platforms, which is a process of primary

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[5] Qzone (Chinese pinyin: QQ kongjian) is a social networking website created by Tencent Corporation in 2005, which offers users services such as writing blogs, keeping online diaries and sharing pictures with friends. By 2016, Qzone already had 653 million users in mainland China.

diffusion, and during this process those posted content is expected to be watched by audiences who are friends of the releaser or somebody who has followed the releaser (whom could be called the releaser's target audience); after browsing the releaser's news, some audiences might like it and share it to their own pages, which is a process of secondary information diffusion, and during this process the audience who has shared the releaser's information became a secondary releaser and audiences of the secondary information diffusion are friends of the secondary releaser or anybody who has followed the secondary releaser, which might include people whom the original releaser would not like to, or did not expect to share with. Through sharing these posted content by audiences, the original releaser's information would gradually out of control and captured by numbers of strangers, which would lead to a potential danger of information disclosure. Users tend to post real personal private information and share their daily life on social networking sites when they believe that they could protect their personal information and privacy from disclosure by means of setting up accessing permission, but the secondary diffusion of information on social networking sites would make the information out of control and bring users a high risk of disclosing private information.

In the case of Zhu Lanxin, I browsed Zhu's Qzone and noticed that she shared a picture from one of her classmates, which is a photo of the monitor, Liu, of Zhu's class. In the original news, the photo releaser said the release of this picture was permitted by Liu, and at the same time the releaser took some measures to protect this picture, therefore I do not know the photo releaser's name either enter her/his Qzone page because it was

locked to strangers and I did not have the access permission. However, through Zhu's share, I still could browse this picture because Zhu did not take any measure to protect her information on Qzone and totally open to all Qzone users, and I even learned more information from Zhu's comment on the picture; that is why I know the monitor's real name is Liu.

Sight sharing is another kind of secondary diffusion, which happened by means of sharing the screenshot of private comments on social media. One of differences between social interaction and interpersonal relationship online and offline is that people could adjust their attitudes, behaviors and manners according to different relationships and context in the process of offline socializing interaction, while it could be harder for people to do the same thing on social networking websites, because all news that users updated online would equally be diffused to other users who have connections with the releaser as long as they have a browsing permission. Therefore, to help users group their online friends and guide posted information to a specific group, some social networking apps, such as WeChat, has launched a function of private comment, which means a social networking user could browse news feed and comments only when the browser is a friend of both the releaser and the commenter. For example, if a person shared a picture on WeChat and received two comments from two online friends individually, and these two commenters do not know each other online, these two commenters would neither see each other's comment to the picture nor can they browse the reply to each other.

However, the function of screenshot makes private comments visible when the releaser

or other social media users who could browse the private comment share the screenshot of comments on their own social networking pages. Because in the process of sharing screenshot of comments on social media, social networking users were not only sharing these interesting dialogues in comment area but also sharing their personal sights, and this shift of perspective may lead to privacy disclosure and conflicts between releasers of comment screenshot and commenters in the screenshot. One of my respondents, Zhang, who is a college student, shared an unpleased online interaction experience when a screenshot of his comments on one of his social networking friends was posted by another friend on WeChat:

"Most of online friends of both me and the friend whom I made comments on are our peers, and neither of us add seniorities on WeChat, such as our professors, the dean of department and our instructor in university, so I dare to make jokes in my friend's comment area – I know my jokes would not be seen by those seniorities. But another friend who was also a classmate in my department did add some professors and the instructor. He saved the screenshot of the dialogue and shared it on his own social media. This made me feel very embarrassed, because for me that student's behavior was like telling professors and the instructor that I do have some bad behaviors – I made bad jokes!"

The same thing also happened on Zhu's social networking pages. Zhu likes to post screenshot of private comments and dialogue on her social networking website, which

means sharing her sight to all visitors who could view her page. Therefore, Zhu's friends and classmates' information was released by Zhu, especially some dialogue she posted contains information about her classmates' grade in latest examination. Through sight sharing, social networking users self-disclose their private information to online strangers with a misconception that the information they published is safe. Moreover, for many social media users, basic personal information, such as full name, address, mobile phone number and birth date, is a part of important privacy when facing strangers online, and therefore most of them would be careful to avoid releasing this kind of information out of self-protection awareness, but this does not mean that they have a sensitive awareness of protecting other people's privacy as well. From the first two examples that illustrated details of private information disclosure on Zhu's social networking website, Zhu often mentioned her friends and classmates' personal information without taking any measure to protect other people's private information. That is to say, it makes no sense if individuals protect their online privacy separately. Even if an individual has a high awareness of protecting private information online, his/her private information might be released by his/her friends on social media as well. Nowadays social media users tend to transform the strategy of social relation establishment and maintainance − an old, traditional, face-to-face method of social relation construction and maintenance is gradually shifting to a new, modern, technological social interaction style with the development of social media and technological innovations in modern Chinese society. But online social network and interpersonal relationship are not absolutely as same as social relations in offline society,

because of the specific feature of information diffusion online, social media users' private information is always under a high risk of disclosing. During the process of transformation from traditional socializing strategies to a new socializing strategy based on social media, it is easier to build up new social connections, but harder to maintain existing social network. The problem of online privacy disclosure is one of the most typical issues. Moreover, the lack of awareness of online privacy disclosure might lead to cybercrime and cyberbully, as some basic personal information, such as family address, name, appearance and phone number could be found on some social users' social media. People in groups of different ages, classes and economic capabilities are facing different kinds of online privacy disclosure problems of in social networking interactions in different degrees, whose details would be illustrated and analyzed in following paragraphs.

4.3. Privilege of Commercialized Privacy Protection

As I discussed above, privacy protection on social media and social relations are interplayed by each other. Because of the complicacy and heterogeneity of social relations in Chinese modern society in terms of different groups of age, class, economic capability and so on, people in different social groups are facing different kinds of online privacy disclosure problems, which might cause damage in various aspects and to different degrees. Here I am going to focus on online privacy problems of social media users in different ages on the one hand, and online privacy protection behaviors of users who have a higher economic capability.

4.3.1. Comparison of Online Behavior of Teenage Students and College Students

A significant difference on social networking platforms choosing of teenage students and college students is that college students tend to use WeChat, while middle school students prefer to use Qzone. College students' social networking sites choosing is more utilitarianism than that of teenage students. For college students, WeChat is based on a realistic connection with family, friends, classmates and collogues, as most of WeChat accounts were registered by phone number. Most college students are about to become a member of society and they are under a pressure of finding jobs; therefore, they have an urge need to build up a good image by a theatrical performance in front of the web of social connections and circle on WeChat. For these young people, WeChat is a platform for them to build up connections with acquaintances and accumulate social capital. Comparing with micro-blog and Qzone, WeChat offers an online platform for users to interact with friends, colleagues and kinsmen in traditional society rather than just sharing daily life with net friends. Because of WeChat's specific feature, many users are less care about the protection of personal basic information on WeChat.

"All of my WeChat friends are my colleagues, friends, classmates and relatives, so I don't need to worry about privacy disclosing even if I post my pictures or share my location. That does not mean I could post everything or make any comments I want. Mostly I must pay much attention to my interaction on WeChat – I need to think about

whether my comments are proper, because everybody does not want to leave the others

a passive impression, right?" (fy14)

For WeChat users, most of them have a connection with their WeChat friends in offline society, so it has no need to hide their basic information as a basic trusting relation has been established. What they need to pay attention to is to protect their secrets and core privacy, and at the same time they need to be careful of their online behavior – they could not just release private, secret and maybe emotional news as they do on Qzone or micro-blog. Especially some college students who already have an internship or a job chance also have some colleagues and superiors on WeChat.

For teenage students, Qzone is the most popular social media. Qzone has a lot of functions, such as homepage, status, blog, background music, albums, personal profile, shared documents, friend visits, friend show, video show and games, and many third-party applications connected with Qzone. With these individualization functions, Qzone is customized to the individual member's own taste, which attracts many teenage users or even users at a younger age. Moreover, many teenage students think that Qzone is kind of like a private space where users can design the structure and select decorations, and at the same time they can save pictures and diaries in albums and files, communicating by visiting other user's Qzone and leaving comments. Teenage students generally regard Qzone as an entertainment app rather than a tool of social networking. Qzone offers them a platform to practice and imitate adults' social interaction and establish a cyber social network with an entertainment function.

Besides teenager's social media choosing, their attitudes towards social media, especially online interactions with strangers are largely influenced by parents and education in school. Generally speaking, their attitude toward strangers on social networking sites is vigilant and hostile, because most of their parents and teachers educate them that the Internet is dangerous and warn them not to talk with strangers.

"I would allow an adding request only after knowing his or her definite identification. My parents usually warn me not to talk with strangers online. I think they are right, but also a little bit rigid."（*xc02*）

"My parents often tell me there are many bad guys online, and they would mislead me, cheat me and cause damage to me." (xc03)

"I don't know whether it make sense to talk with strangers online. I just could not understand why people need to talk to somebody that you do not familiar with at all. When I talked with net friends I was always vigilant, because my mother taught me not to tell strangers my personal information, even it is just a name." (xc04)

From these interviews it is very obvious that parents of these teenage students are really alert to their children's online interactions with strangers and they regard net friends as an extremely dangerous group, because for parents and teachers of these teenage students, the first and most important mission of teenagers is to study, rather than

chatting with net friends. Parents' worry comes from a deeper social context – National Higher Education Entrance Examination (also translated as National Matriculation Examination, NCEE. Chinese pinyin: Gaokao), which is an annual academic examination held by Ministry of Education in the People's Republic of China. In this education system, every Chinese student need to work very hard to prepare for the examination from a very young age. Both students and parents are under a big pressure because it may be very hard to find a good job if a student is not graduate from a famous university. Therefore, parents and teachers of teenage students would not like to support students using social media frequently and chat with net friends.

The teenage students' online privacy attitudes and interactions are not only influenced by parents, teachers and the education system but also limited by material conditions and economic capabilities. According to studies of Prost (1991), before modern times, privacy is a privilege of the bourgeoisie, because only people who have enough political power and economic capability have the ability to protect their private sphere from the interference from the others. From the micro layer, individual also could not protect their privacy without specific material conditions and economic capability. For teenagers without a reliable and steady source of income, the protection of privacy is largely dependent on the support and assistance of their parents and family.

A girl called Yang mentioned in interview xxy02 that she does not have a private smartphone, because smartphones are not allowed to use in school. Therefore, she could only use Qzone or WeChat via parents' smartphones or computer at home. Since the computer was set password by her parents, it is very hard for her to use social

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networking platforms secretly. Limited by material condition and technical conditions, her social media using behaviors are always monitored by her parents.

Most of teenagers do not have their own private smartphone; therefore, many of them tend to use parents' mobile phone to use social networking apps. However, some of teenagers forgot to log out their social media account, and in this way their parents could enter their social networking pages and view children's browsing records, chatting records and news feed. In the interview fy01, as I mentioned in the first section of chapter four, a girl in Licheng No.2 High School encountered online privacy disclosure because of forgetting to log out her social media account after using on her mother's phone, and because her mother relentlessly exposed to the public, many students of her school and even of other schools also hear about this event.

As I discussed in the literature review, people's privacy protection is based on some material conditions, such as a private room, or a private mobile phone, so that people could ensconce their secrets and private things in a private space. From experience of the girl in Licheng Middle School, she simply regarded Qzone as a totally safe and private space so that she forgot that the key of her cyber space is not only in her own hands but also in her mother's. There are also some teenage students whose family is very rich and brought them private mobile phone, and for those teenagers, they think it is convenient to store their secrets and keep these secrets away from parents and the school, as all of them has set a phone password to protect their privacy.

4.3.2 VIP members and privilege of manipulating privacy

According to previous chapters, material conditions and economic capability are essential to privacy protection. People who hold more social wealth could pay for a privilege to protect their privacy. A private apartment or room, a private mobile phone are ways to store secrets and privacy, and at the same time, some specific functions of social media could also offer a privileged service to help social networking users protect their privacy. As I described above, to protect the privacy of social media users, social networking websites and apps have launched functions, such as the private comment on WeChat (which means a specific comment can only be seen by mutual friends) and access permission on Qzone (Qzone users can set up access permission to stop strangers entering and browsing). Qzone offers extra service to protect users' privacy – users could use the function of private comment as well as what they do on WeChat, checking the visiting guests even if the guest deleted his/her visiting trace, and enjoying a safer album protection, however, these services are not free – only after buying the "Canary Yellow Diamond" (name of VIP member of Qzone) can users access every service without paying extra. Moreover, some of services allow VIP members spy on other users' online privacy – VIP members could detect indications that they had been visited even if the visitor had deleted their visiting history and cookies; VIP members could also view "blocked visitors", which refers to those users who intended to visit but did not have an access permission. These services are very popular among youngers who have an abundant love experience. For example, a boy likes a girl and wants to know

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more about the girl, so he enters the girl's Qzone and browses content inside. After that perhaps the boy feels shy and does not want to let the girl know the fact that he has ever browsed her Qzone, so he deletes his visiting trace. But if the girl is a VIP member of Qzone, she would easily know the fact that the boy has ever visited her Qzone but deleted his visiting trace later just with a click. Or a boy and a girl broke up, but then the boy feels regretful and wants to know whether the girl also have attachment to him, so he could pay for VIP services and to view "blocked visitors" to see whether the girl has ever intended to view his Qzone or whether she visited but deleted tracing recording.

"Almost all of my classmates with an abundant love experience have opened 'Canary Yellow Diamond' VIP service. I guess it is a psychological struggle. Obviously, my friends and classmates who are single are not VIP members of Qzone, but almost all of those people who have emotional experiences did open that service for a long time. It is a little bit dramatic. It is fine if a boy views a girl's Qzone, but why does he delete it? Why does the boy deny his behavior? What does he intend to hide? That is why I dislike Qzone, because it seriously infringes users' personal privacy, and even sales users' privacy to make money. I went to a person's Qzone but I don't want to let the others know, so I delete access records. I have the right to protect my privacy. But if the person is a VIP, all I did for my privacy protection does not make sense." (fy04)

According to the interview fy04, social media users' online privacy protection is not only influenced by social networking issues but also affected by commercial factors.

Technology and social media software development companies utilize users' need of privacy protection and the curiosity on the others' privacy and secrets, and publish some extra paid services and attract users to buy their extra products, which is to say, driven by commercial interests, these companies sell normal users' privacy to the VIP members, causing damage to normal users' rights of online privacy protection.

5. Conclusions

Now we could come back to the title of my thesis, dilemma of self-expression and self-disclosure in China, and answer the question – why is it a dilemma? The dilemma on the one hand drives from a desire and a need of people in modern China to constantly establish new social relations and simultaneously maintain the existed social network in an efficient way to accelerate proceeding of social capital accumulation. To realize the accumulation of social relations, social networking users sacrifice part of private information and put their privacy on a high risky position, and even some users publish their secrets online to draw public attention. Just as I discussed in the first section of chapter four, secrets are always be ultilized and exchanged as a tool to establish and maintain social relations and to attain more social capital. Is this influenced by a market-oriented public idea and neo-liberalism? If privacy is one of most basic rights of human beings and criterion to be a human being, to what degree it would be given up in order to accumulate social relations as a part of social capital? There should be

more researches focusing on the "attention economy", or how people in modern society utilize social media to brand themselves as commodities.

On the other hand, however, this mechanism of self-presentation and self-brand do not always succeed. Because of difficulties of online information control, an online private space could easily be transferred to a public space both online and offline. The case of the girl in Licheng Middle School that I mentioned in the first section of chapter four is an example, and this blurry boundary of private sphere and public sphere online and offline is more highlighted in the case of celebrities' privacy disclosure. A young actress in mainland China called Zheng was found writing private blog on Micro-Blog, and on her private blog she showed an quite negative image comparing with her public positive image as a celebrity. This event arouse a heated debate – most audiences blamed Zheng and criticized that she should not cheat on the public and build up a positive image to gain a good social attention. For Zheng, what she regards as a private space – her private blog – was suddenly discovered and transferred to a public sphere, which directly led to a bad influence of her career.

Because social networking users have the need of accumulating social relations online, users must actively get involved in online interactions with acquaintances, and they could hardly avoid a secondary information diffusion by acquaintances, which is the main causation leading to the transfer from private sphere to public sphere and online privacy disclosure. Online social network is gradually linked to the offline social relations, which means the internet users' online interactions and behaviors are no longer just cybergames that are totally separate from the offline society, and these online

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social interactions and relations would conversely affect people's social life in offline society.

Drived from the transform of social relation construction strategy from face-to-face interaction in offline society to interact on social networking platforms, privacy protection is becoming controllable by means of extra paid VIP services. As I illustrated in the last section of chapter four, VIP members of Qzone have a privilege of using private comments (better privacy protection) and the others' deleted visiting trace (ability to peek the others' privacy). What is the deeper commercial factors behind this phenomenon? How does privacy influence by profit and market? Limited by time and energy, I only found one case that mentioned the relation of privacy and market. Therefore, although I would like to analyze and find more in terms of the relation of privacy and market and even neo-liberalism, I do not have enough empirical statistic to support it.

As Fei Xiaotong (1998[1947]) and Yan Yunxiang (2006) discussed, there is a very complicated, changeable societal structure and social connection in traditional Chinese society, and therefore, the notion of privacy in Chinese society often various in front of different groups of people, such as peers and seniorities, colleagues and superiors, friends and relatives, affected by class, age, gender, economic capability, political power and so on. Fei Xiaotong (1998[1947]) contributes to the notion of privacy in Chinese society but limited by his time, there is no discussion of online privacy in his work. Yan Yunxiang (2006) focuses on private life in rural China in the past 60 years, and he does not notice the influence of the Internet either. Therefore, this research

would be an addition of Fei and Yan's notion of privacy in modern China.

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