Understanding the "Phoenix Man" on the Internet

Tianya Online Forum and Sina Weibo as Examples

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Abstract

The term "phoenix man" is often used by the Internet users to describe the man who grew up in the rural areas but later studied or worked in the cities. The purpose of this research is to analyze how the "phoenix man" is understood by the online public and what social facts or implications reflected by this term. The research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative method: online observation and content analysis. Tianya online forum and Sina weibo are selected as the main research fields. Consanguinity and regionalism of rural China and the theory of individualization provide the basic theoretical framework for the whole paper. Results indicated that discussion on the "phoenix man" centered on the filial piety and their origins, which reflect huge urban-rural disparity in today's China.

Key words: the "phoenix man", rural, urban, consanguinity, regionalism, individualization, Internet

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

During the spring festival of 2016, a piece of news centered around a New Eve's dinner caused vehement discussions on the "phoenix man" (fenghuang nan). As the girl from Shanghai accompanied with her boyfriend went back his home, but could not stomach the shabby food, or according to the girl's words, "was altogether shocked" by the dinner served by her boyfriend's parents, she decided to break up with her boyfriend who was born in the deep countryside of Jiangxi Province (Zhou, 2016). Earlier, an online marriage-seeking advertisement posted by a rural man from Jinhua, Zhejiang Province as well brought forth Internet storm regarding the phenomena of "phoenix man". In the personal advertisement, the man listed a series of picky requirements for the future mate, including high academic degree, native and what was most intriguing was about the property deed. The marital home deed must be registered on his parents' names, if the partner would bought the house alone he could pay for the home appliances so as to add his parents' names on the deed. Besides, his older sister would come and live with them constantly. As his parents and sisters sacrificed a lot to finance his study and career, he hoped his future wife could accept these "reasonable" demands. Moreover, the future other half had better be the only child in her original family with a comparatively well-off economic background. And she must promise to give birth to a boy and inherited his surname. In addition to that, because he had to shoulder part of expenditure of his parents and sisters, he would not cost much for the bride price and the wedding ceremony, and so forth. While, this "phoenix man" titled by most netizens was later found to be simply an eminent university graduate who was later employed by a state-owned company with a CNY 8000 monthly payment (Bbs.tianya.cn, 2015).

The term "phoenix man" becomes de rigueur in China now, where it is usually used to indicate a man who grew up in the countryside but later attended a famous university or found a decent job and eventually resided in economic-developed metropolitan cities. Literally, a "phoenix man" came from traditional Chinese saying, "a golden phoenix that has flown out the deep countryside" or "a sparrow which flies up to tall branches becomes a phoenix", which both mean that a man of poor and inferior family background through his hard work and had eventually made a rise of his social status (Song and Hird, 2014). Last but not least, phoenix man is regarded as the pride of the whole family even the village, however, myriads of problems and conflicts emerge when it comes to the issue of marriage or date with a female urbanite. Should a girl marry a phoenix man? Will this kind of marriage have a happy ending? The alike debates on "phoenix man" have always been heat and fierce, especially on social media platforms, like Sina weibo (Chinese version of twitter), and Tianya online forums.

The Internet now has become an important site to conduct fieldwork for social scientists. Recent years with the rapid popularization of the new information communication technology (ICTs), the Internet becomes more and more central to daily life. According to CNNIC report (2015),the Internet penetration rate in China had reached 48.8%, the country had altogether 668 million Internet users, of whom 594 million were mobile Internet users, accounted for 88.9% of the total netizen population. The large amount of netizens and the convenient access to the Internet have made it to facilitate a public space where people can share, disseminate, discuss and communicate with. Therefore, when I browse posts and comments concerning "phoenix man", I have a strong sense of interesting to unearth the meanings hidden behind this buzzwords, as the creation and popularity of "phoenix man" should not be ill-founded but be interrelated with people's daily life actualities. Netizens' online perceptions and attitudes may reflect their life experiences in the offline multiple social settings. However, there is a shortage of academic research on "phoenix man", the related articles and coverages found are mostly simple descriptive accounts. Hence, this paper will concentrate on "phoenix man" and make a trial to explain it within its ad hoc context of today's China.

1.2 Aim and research questions

As aforementioned, there is a striking dearth of research on the phenomena of the "phoenix man", and those simple descriptive news reports cannot comprehensively depict the group of the "phoenix man". As Wimmer and Dominick (2006) proposed that media research on social new phenomenon has evolved definable steps, it departures from studying the medium itself to deeper discussion, from a micro level study on specific information accumulated about uses and users, to a macro level where social, psychological, and physical effects are investigated, at last, it ends at the concentration on the improvement of medium. Social media is no exception. Studying the "phoenix man" on social media cannot hover at the deductive description phase, viewed in this way, the purpose of the study intends to move research on the "phoenix man" from a descriptive level to a more theoretical level.

The research starts with exploring the understanding of "phoenix man" by Chinese Internet users, in this part, qualitative and quantitative analysis of online texts produced by the Internet users will be adopted to assist the research work. Afterwards, the paper will go further by uncovering social realities or changes related to "phoenix man". Thus, the whole paper will be guided by these two overarching research questions:

1. How do members of the online public comprehend the "phoenix man"?
2. What kind of social fact or social implications does "phoenix man" reflect?

1.3 Disposition

This research is intended to explore the "phoenix man" phenomenon on the Internet. It includes altogether six chapters. Chapter 1 briefly introduces the background of the research and the research questions that to be answered in this paper. Chapter 2 illustrates the methods employed in the research and the basic conditions of Sina weibo and Tianya online forum. Chapter 3 turns to the aspect of the theoretical framework, focusing on the consanguinity and regionalism of rural China, Becker's theory of individualization, and Yan's discussion on the individualization of Chinese society. Chapter 4 shifts perspective to the history background of the "phoenix man", traditional Confucian notions of "filial piety" and "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" with state policy of hukou system and One-child policy are elucidated to provide an overall sociopolitical context of the "phoenix man". Chapter 5 exploits the data obtained from content analysis and online observation to analyze how the Internet users understand the "phoenix man" and the social facts associated with this term. Chapter 6 makes a conclusion of the entire paper, and at the same time, it illustrates the limitation of the research.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1 Selections of social media platforms

China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released in Beijing the 36th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China. The Report shows that the population of Chinese netizens had reached 668 million by the end of June 2015, with an Internet penetration rate of 48.8% (CNNIC, 2015). Given China's huge population and compared with Internet penetrations rates in other countries, like Japan (90.9%) and the United States (88.2%) in 2015 (Internetlivestats.com, 2015), the scale of the Internet coverage remains limited in this country. However, the speed of development is still remarkable. Up to March 1995, China's total estimated Internet users were only 3000, despite China initiated reforms and open-up policy with its announced goal of modernization in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the development of the Internet was far lagging behind the economic development. Similar to other countries, the early stage of Internet networks was circumscribed to scholarly information exchanges, only researchers, scientists and faculty in the university had access to the Internet (Liu, 2011). But soon after, when China realized the significance of computer information and technology in facilitating the economic growth, it then in 1996 constructed the nationwide networks and encouraged the development of the Internet in commercial use (Liang and Lu, 2010). Hereafter, the country witnessed an exponential, impressive growth of the Internet. In 2008, the Chinese Internet users had risen to 253 million, for the first time, China surpassed the U.S., which was originally the country with the largest Internet population in the world (CNNIC, 2008). Although the growth of the scale of the Internet users now has entered a plateau, with a half-year increase of nearly 19 million (CNNIC, 2015), the influence of the Internet on people's daily life becomes more profound. China's Internet users currently spend 25.6 hours online per week per netizen, either on their laptop or on their mobile phones, while during these 25.6 hours, almost half of their time were on social media, a figure that continues to rise rapidly (Kantar, 2015).

As the main goal of this paper is to research how the Internet users understand the group of the "phoenix man", the analysis will focus on the online participants on the two selected social media platforms — Sina weibo and Tianya forum.

Sina weibo

China's Internet development accompanies with tight government control and regulation. The world's most two popular SNS websites are blocked by the "Great Firewall of China" (Liang and Lu, 2010). However, in recent years, the emerging micro-blog or weibo (literally, weibo in Chinese means micro-blog) has gradually become one of the most important social media

platforms for Chinese Internet users to express their ideas and feelings, share information, comment on their friends or other accounts, debate and network, etc. In spite of being regarded as the succedaneum of Twitter whose popularity is comparatively low in western countries. Like in the United States, merely 20% of the entire adult population use Twitter in 2015 (Duggan, 2015). While, in China, a much bigger proportion of Internet users are actively using weibo every day. According to the latest statistics report (CNNIC, 2015), in the first half of 2015, China's weibo users have reached 204 million, accounted for 30.6% of the whole Internet users. And Of all weibo users, Sina weibo users has constituted 70%, which means many a weibo user prefer to sign up for an account on the Sina weibo website (Ibid.). Although in the burgeoning period of weibo market, other web portal companies like NetEase, Sohu and Tencent follow suit and provide weibo service for the public as well, since 2013 they gradually reduce their investment in the weibo field as there is a growing trend of users turn to Sina weibo. So far, the position of Sina as the China's biggest operator in the domain of weibo has been established and consolidated. Additionally, because of its success, weibo now is widely used to identify with Sina weibo, which also justifies the reason why I choose it as the focus of this paper.

 Sina weibo's surge in popularity reveals the strong need of the public space where the mass can exchange opinions and obtain information. Moreover, thanks to the prevalent mobile Internet devices and diversified mobile Internet applications, people can make use of their fragmented time to go online anytime anywhere, by downloading a Sina weibo mobile application, users can share their messages instantly. Information on Sina weibo platform is produced in an unprecedented way and in an unprecedented rate, but also being so fragmented. Sina weibo has a 140 character limit (the word restriction is being considered to end in 2016), Unlike English words, a English letter is treated as a character, 140 character limit require terseness, Chinese characters are roughly equivalent to English words, 140 Chinese characters can be nearly a short paragraph that makes it possible to communicate relatively more information in a single weibo post than an English one (Benney, 2014). These diversified weibo posts often reflect competing values of modern Chinese society that are socially constructed and historically shaped that provide an ideal place to observe Internet users' attitudes and viewpoints.

Tianya Forum

BBS (bulletin board system) enjoys a high popularity among Chinese Internet users. Although the emergence and development of weibo tends to some extent has "dwarfed" BBS, it remains one of the most dynamic social spaces in today's China. Its many-to-many communication, anonymous, open access features make it a satisfying place for discussion and building online communities (Liu, 2011). By the end of June 2009, China BBS online community sites had reached on average 43.8 million unique visitors, almost half Internet users spent over four hours on BBS sites (Fu, 2009). According to CNNIC report, in 2015, there were approximately 119 million netizens regularly using BBS forum, the number is a little lower than last year when the whole population of BBS users was 129 million (CNNIC, 2016). Notwithstanding that the BBS is seemingly less

engaging than weibo, popular online forums like Tianya maintain a level of lively discussion on a wide range of topics. As Yang Guobin (2003) pointed out that online BBS forums had a profound impact on Chinese society. It not only fostered social relationships and created virtual communities, but also articulated social problems, prompted political engagement as well as challenged the traditional social and cultural ideologies.

Tianya online forum was launched in 1999, since its establishment, it has been being regarded as the most influential, vibrant and relatively diverse online discussion bulletin board in China. In addition to that, discussion and debates on Tianya online forum is often in accordance with personal experiences that closely related to daily life. Like any other online forum, Tianya online forum is comprised by dozens even hundreds of discussion boards, where a topic or a series of related topics are discussed. A discussion board consists of tens of thousands threads, which contain the initial post and any corresponding replies to it. Besides, the users can also create a new thread to start a conversation. Since lack of precise demographic information about the Tianya forum users, we may have to depend on the Tianya online forum itself, which collects the self-reported demographic information for the purpose of marketing. It is reported that in 2009, Most Tianya users aged from nineteen to thirteen-five years old. Estimated 90% of the users had a bachelor degree, around 23.3% users belonged to the middle and senior management of the company. The average monthly income was more than 3300 yuan, and compared with other forums, most Tianya users came from the economically prosperous areas (Static.tianya.cn, 2009). Similar to Sina weibo, a volume of available contents on Tianya forum offer a satisfying space for research observation and analysis.

No matter Tianya online forum or Sina weibo, western researches on the Internet in China focus either on the "technology of freedom" or the "the technology of control", for quite a long time, western mainstream discourses on the Chinese Internet is vastly different from how Internet is constructed within the context of China (Damm, 2007). The notion of the Internet as "technology of freedom" accentuates the liberating potential of the Internet, which is prevalently considered as a liberating force for democratization with regard to the authoritarian state and the long-time oppressed people. Albeit the discourse of the Internet later diverts from "liberation" to "control", western researchers shift to attention the role of the government that implement rigorous censorship and regulation, it turns out to be simply another version of the Internet as "technology of freedom" (Liu, 2011). The West are inclined to interpret every single action taken by the governmental authorities as a "crackdown" or as censorship, whereas these perceptions disregard the fact that most Chinese Internet users do not often employ the Internet in accordance with western political expectations of liberation and democratization, conversely, a considerable proportion of people support the Internet regulation of sensitive political issues and pornographic online content diffusion (Damm 2007, Lagerkvist, 2010, Liu 2011). As Damm (2007) rightly argued, the main group of Chinese netizens is the middle class, who has strong interests of personal and individual life rather the Internet political activism. The present use of the Internet is overwhelmingly apolitical, Internet is much more like a playground for leisure and

entertainment. To sum up, the political restraints are usually the primary focus of western discourse of Chinese Internet, but the overly concern over censorship and crackdown fails to incorporate the broader societal influence of the Internet on Chinese society. To comprehend a comprehensive and realistic picture of Chinese Internet, studies on social attitudes and opinions are far from adequate.

2.2 Research methods

One of the fundamental choices faced by the researcher is whether to use a qualitative approach, a quantitative research or an approach that uses mixed methods. Several research methods are introduced to conduct online research, such as focus groups, case studies, intensive interviews, structural network analysis and online ethnography (Kozinets, 2010, Wimmer and Dominick, 2009). According to Kozinets (2010), research method selection is connected to the nature and the scope of the research questions that you want to investigate, for research methods directly provide data and analysis capable of the research questions. Furthermore, reviewing research objectives and estimating the results for research questions are also a good start to find out whether a quantitative, a qualitative or the mixed approach should be adopted.

As the goal of this paper is to research the online discussion of the "phoenix man" and the societal implications reflected by this group of people. In order to have a balanced breadth and depth, I apply a mixed research method, online observation and content analysis, to obtain useful data for further fruitful outcome in response to the research questions.

Online observation

Entering the online culture and community diverges from face-to-face entrée. Kozinets (2010) defines online ethnography or netnography (in his own words), as a participant-observational research that "uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon" (p.60). Differs from the conventional ethnography that demand researchers to spend huge amount of time in a physically located ethnographic field site for studying the culture in a shared community. Online ethnography is conducted in an alternative way that based in online fieldwork, which relieves the ethnographers from the anxiety of omitting information during the writing and recording process. It offers greater flexibility due to the field sites are not restricted by geographical locations; the Internet is accessible whenever there is time, the data-collection period is less time-consuming; ethnographers are no longer having to share the same time frame with the participants. Besides, the anonymity optically afforded by the online medium can be regarded as the new distinct possibilities to liberate behaviours and ideas of people that not as easily offered by face-to-face interaction (Kozinets, 2010, Hine, 2000). Participant observation is a commonly used method ethnography. Paechter (2012:p.74-76) suggests that a researcher

should become a member of his/her observed online sites without intervening other participants' practices. Hence, the method of online observation is selected to serve up for the data collection.

I have a weibo account that I registered several years ago on Sina weibo platform, while the Tianya online forum is open to all visitors to read the posts without the requirement of registration. From October 2015 to January 2016, I visited the Sina weibo and the Tianya online forum four to five times a week to read the posts related to the "phoenix man". But during the observation process, I laid a stress on the Sina weibo platform. Firstly, in the textual analysis period (will be later discussed in detail), it is impossible for me to download the whole year's relevant microblogs like what I did for Tianya online forum. Additionally, in order to write a weibo longer than 140 characters, most weibo users choose to convert words into a picture that cannot be identified by the computer-assisted analysis software. Secondly, compared with Tianya forum users, weibo users are more likely to use emoticons in an ironical way. For example, the smiley face emoticon offered by Sina weibo, most netizens use it to show their unfriendly, disapproving or reluctant attitudes. Thirdly, Sina weibo's function like the weibo index and the weibo impression can provide some other general information about the "phenix man". Like via the weibo index, if you input the "phoenix man" in the search column you can get the information about which areas in China talk about the "phoenix man" most of the day (fig. 1), or through weibo impression function, you can get a picture of the most heated words concerned with the research words discussed by the Sina weibo users (fig. 2).

Figure1: Geographical distribution of the "phoenix man" discussion on the Sina weibo

Source: http://data.weibo.com/index
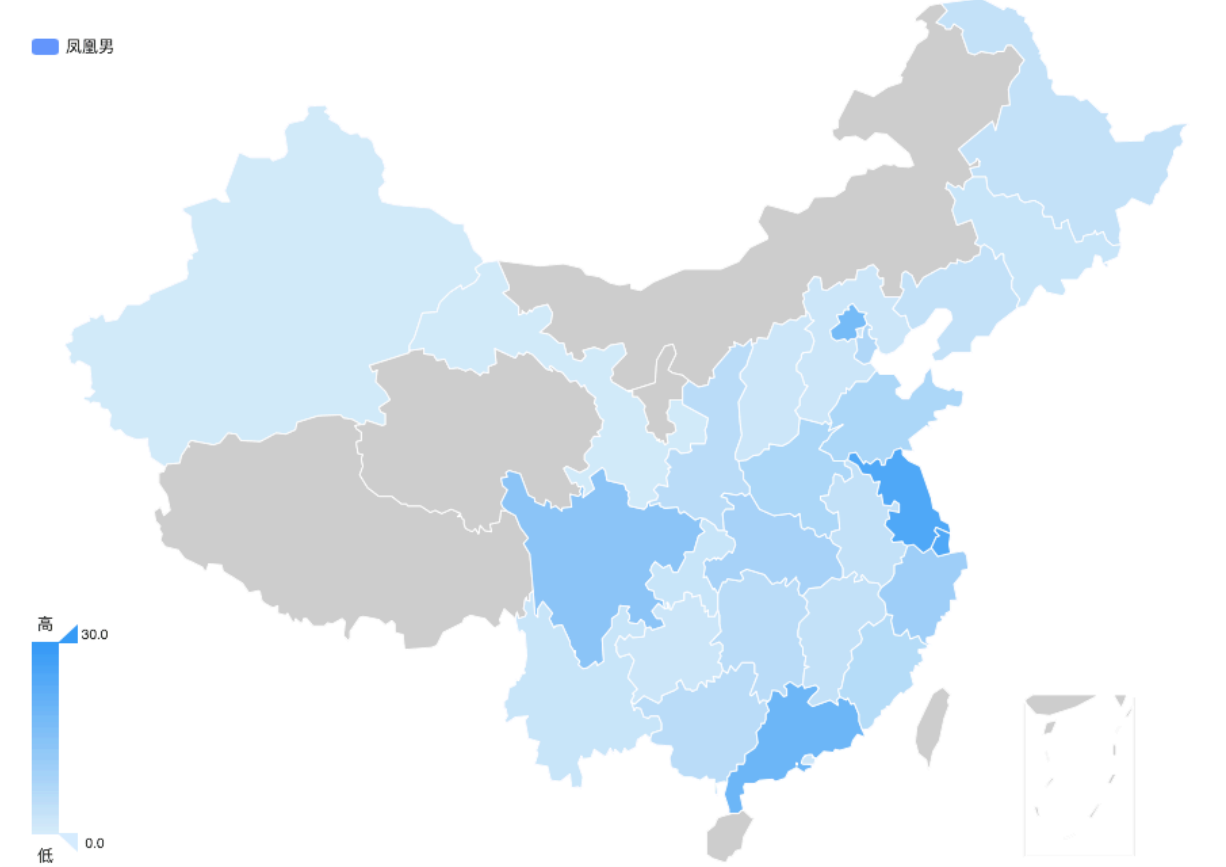
Figure2: Weibo impression of the "phoenix man" in January, 2015

Sources:
http://s.weibo.com/impress?ua=iPhone8%2C4__weibo__6.9.0__iphone__os9.3.5&from=1069
093010&refer=tag&key=%E5%87%A4%E5%87%B0%E7%94%B7&cuid=1685290963

Content analysis

Content analysis is the second methodological technique used in this paper. It is a specific research approach used frequently in media studies and cultural studies. Content analysts often concentrate on one or several persons, events or concepts and seek to ascertain how they are interpreted in texts and what symbolic qualities reader may find related with them (Krippendorff, 2004). Bryman (2004) defines content analysis "an approach to the analysis of documents and

texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner" (p.183). It allows for thorough exploration of themes and keywords, helping to reveal nuances of languages and meaning that are often indistinct and unclear (Mishra, 2012). Resorting to online content analysis, the Internet opens up new areas where huge volumes of available of contents can be studies. As Wimmer and Dominick (2009:p.177-178) indicate that contents exist in the cyberspace can be searched quickly and efficiently by simply using a search engine, and researchers do not have to physically obtain and maintain hard copies of materials.

In order to analyze how the netizens understand the "phoenix man", I choose to download the posts related to the "phoenix man" on Tianya forum in the period of one year (January 2015-January 2016). As for Sina weibo, I download altogether 10,000 topic related posts (pure texts) in the same period for the analysis. Posts on both social media platforms are downloaded by using Python. After that, I read each posts respectively downloaded from the two social platforms to decide whether the post is relevant to the "phoenix man" topic. If the main theme of the post is in relation to the "phoenix man", it then will be incorporated into the dataset. Inspired by Krippendorff's (2004:p.207) ideas that co-occurrence in texts can "indicate associations in people's minds or underlying cultural practices". Then, I employ computer-assisted software to calculate word frequency and conduct co-occurrence analysis of the entire two sets of texts to examine how the conceptions of the "phoenix man" is interpreted by Chinese Internet users. Word frequency can infer the important words in the texts and co-occurrence can significantly above chance suggest the presence of relatedness.

Unlike the English texts that there is a space between words, Chinese is written without spaces, punctuation is used if a sentence is finished. Therefore, it is often difficult for researchers to deal with the Chinese texts. In order overcome the word segmentation obstacle, during the data collection process, the author first employs the "Rost Content Mining System" to process word segmentation and count word frequency. After that, a synonymous table is used to merge Chinese terms that carry the same meanings. Finally, the Rost content mining software is used again to identify the terms that co-occur with the term "phoenix man".

2.3 Ethical consideration

Conducting social science research in China is quite different from that in western countries. Since the 1990s, there is a more open atmosphere, fieldwork in China has become more diverse and multifaceted, scholars come from worldwide seem to obtain the possibilities to collect the first-hand data in that country. However, direct ideological-political control of the party and the intangible influence of the dominance party discourse remain the big challenges for the data collection on some topics (Heimer and Thøgersen, 2006). Skepticism against researchers going to people and discussing political or social issues is quite common. For political authorities, western scholars and the Chinese researchers with a western academic background may have the suspicion to mobilize the masses for social movements against the government; for the common

Chinese people, most of them may be unwilling to be interviewed for social research purpose, as no one can clearly define what constitute a sensitive issue and what may potentially risk the interviewees into a political trouble. Therefore, when they cannot delimit the borderlines with any certainties they prefer to keep silent or play it safe (Heimer and Thøgersen, 2006, Liu, 2011). Based on the aforementioned discussion, the paper focus on the online research that does not often raise questions about ethics (Wimmer and Dominick, 2009), besides, the first- hand data directly collected from the social media platforms help improve the reliability and validity of the research.

2.4 Chapter summary

This part has gone through social media platforms selection and research method. It starts by giving a brief view of current Chinese Internet development, then moves on to introduce Sina weibo and Tianya online forum the most popular social media platforms in China and the reasons of why select them for the research. Next, in order to tackle the research questions, the methods of online observation and content analysis are adopted for further analysis, the latter is supported by the computer-assisted software — "Rost content mining system" for word segmentation, frequency and co-occurrence analysis. While online observation majorly plays a supplementary role for studying other related information that is not easily identified by the computer.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Consanguinity and regionalism

The traditional image of Chinese society is of a rural one that closely related to the two key conceptions — consanguinity (xueyuan) and regionalism *(*diyuan). According to Fei Xiaotong, the great sociologist, Chinese society is fundamentally rural. Discussing in his classic and controversial book — *From the soil: the Foundations of Chinese society* (1992), he clarified that consanguinity and regionalism were the bases of Chinese organizational principles.

For Fei, Chinese society is traditionally a consanguineous society where the older wield imperative power over the younger. Consanguinity means that "people's right and obligations are determined by the kinship. Kinship is the relationship constituted through reproduction and marriage" (Fei, 1992:p.120). Generally speaking, the relationship between the individuals are linked by the extent of the consanguineous differentiation. In a patriarchal society, kinship derived through reproduction is much more valued than that derived through marriage, the consanguineous society "maintains structural stability by using biological process underlying reproduction as the medium to establish social continuity" (Ibid.). From this perspective, a family represents an important circle of blood linkage. In this system, when the father dies, the son succeeds, not only linking to the next generation biological reproduction, but also succeeding identity and wealth within the clan. In addition, consanguinity is conducive to consolidate and maintain the interpersonal relationship, as for most rural people, the social work is often conducted centrally around the kinship family and they are more likely to turn to relatives to call upon support and advice when they face difficulties.

Consanguineous societies usually suggest stable and static as there is a lack of structural changes. In a stable society, regionalism is merely the extension of consanguinity. In China, rural people are often connected with the word "soil" (tu), they are as well described by the urbanites as "soiled" (tuqi). It may sound impolite, but it appropriately figures out the rural people's reliance on the soil that their very livelihood is based on it (Fei, 1992:p.41). It is such a society where their place of their birth is the place where they grow up and where they die, people live there are not readily to leave it. However, it of course does not mean that the whole rural population is fixed, surplus population are also forced to got out to seek out new livelihoods. But the core groups rarely move (Fei, 1992:p. 39). Because people seldom leave, the society is built on the familiarity in which everyone knows everyone else, relationships between people are defined by the level of familiarity. To be more specific, in rural societies, every individual regards consanguinity as the center and draws circles around it. The circles are multiple layers of relationships around the individual, regionalism will be taken into account when the interpersonal relationship expands out from the center. Hence, consanguinity and regionalism decide everyone else's position in the layers of relationship. In addition, as both consanguinity and regionalism imply a stabilizing

power, a deep attachment, in rural areas, people move around very little, being born and dying in the same spot, traditions seem to be more important than that in modern societies.

3.2 Modernity and individualization

Eminent German sociologist Ulrich Beck's account of individualization is inextricably bound up with his analysis of second modernity in Western European societies. According to Beck, people are now in such a situation where the "first modernity" is being transformed into the "world risk society" of "second modernity" (Beck, 1992). In the first modernity, the social system is conceived as a linear system and characterized by clear-cut social rationalization and standardization. It is said that, in such a system, the society is assumed of composing of different parts, and the proper operation of different parts contribute to the smoothly operation of the society as a whole. The roles are taken by people, institutions and organizations, which are all interdependent, any change in any one part requires the other parts take corresponding changes so as to maintain the stability, and only external forces can disturb the equilibrium and trigger the social changes. Despite this linear system accentuates the role of individuals in carrying out their functions and roles to make the structure work, and yet individuals still lack autonomy and agency, they are only part of the production system.

Furthermore, in order to further distinguish first modernity from second modernity, Beck with his associates explicitly identifies a series of premises of first modern society: firstly, nation-states. First modern society is based upon a nation-state society that clearly defined by "territorial boundaries"; secondly, programmatic individualization. The social status of individuals has largely been predetermined and the so-called "free and equal" are as well "moulded" by social institutions; thirdly, first modern society is built upon "work society" or "gainful employment society"; fourthly, the exploitation of nature without limitation; fifthly, the belief of "scientifically defined concept of rationality" — scientization will eventually offer society with perfect control over nature; sixthly, "first modern societies understand and manage their development according to the principle of functional differentiation", differentiation of social system has led to the social development appear synonymous with the growth of complexity, moreover, the continued differentiation of societal functions is supposed will ultimately contribute to "a better and better calibration of ends with means" (Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003, Sørensen and Christiansen, 2013). However, first modernity is being challenged by four developments — a radicalized individualization, a multidimensional globalization, underemployment or unemployment, and lastly, a global ecological crisis (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:p.206). The demises of first modernity then lead to the "processes of enforced modernity" that is based on the foundations of first modernity itself, which in turn gives rise to second modernity. Unlike first modernity, which is featured by distinct social categorization and strict differentiation, unequivocal logic of "either/or", second modernity is featured by ambiguity and uncertainty, multiple meanings and the logic of "both/and" (Beck and Lau, 2005:p.527-529). Metaphorically speaking, Beck analogizes the logic of unequivocalness of first modernity to Newton's laws of physics, whereas

the equivocal logic of second modernity is likened to Heisenberg's uncertainty principles (Alpermann, 2011). Beck expounds the shift from first modernity to second modernity with three complex arguments, one referring to a (world) risk society, one to multidimensional globalization (cosmopolitanization), one to enforced individualization (Hansen and Svarverud, 2010). Since it is the theorem of individualization that is most relevant for the discussion going forward, the subsequent elaborations will highlight the aspect of individualization.

As mentioned above, individualization is part of the theory of second modernity. According to Beck, second modernity is described as a risk society of precarious freedom, unintended results and uncertainties due to the development of neoliberal economic system, the shrinking labour market and the overburdened and unaffordable welfare system of nation states that leave people with the responsibilities for their own well-being, finally bringing forth a process of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Individualization includes three dimensions:

disembedding, removal from historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support (the 'liberating dimension'); the loss of traditional security with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms (the 'disenchantment dimension'); and — here the meaning of the word is turned into its opposite — re-embedding, a new type of social commitment (the 'control' or 'reintegration dimension') (Beck, 1992:p.128).

Beck makes a clear distinction between individualization and individualism. Albeit the two conceptions are easily mixed up, Beck points out that individualization should not be confused with individualism, the latter is commonly understood as "personal attitudes or preferences", describing the voluntary choices of lifestyle of individuals. While individualization makes a stress on sociological effects of modernity that may not result in any changes in the attitudes of individuals. Hence, it exposits "a macro-sociological phenomenon" that is "imposed on the individual by modern institutions" (Beck, 2007:p.681). In this perspective, individualization can be understood as a compulsory condition of modernity rather than a personal choice. Briefly speaking, individualization indicates the disintegration of social form that individuals are disembedded or pulled out and away from the prior traditional norms and institutions.

3.3 Individualization of Chinese society

As elucidated by Beck, individualization describes a complex set of meta-changes that were first seen emerging in Europe during the second half of the twentieth century. Recently, more researches have begun to demonstrate that individualization is not a unique phenomenon of western societies but is present and ongoing in many other parts of the world, including China. (Beck and Grande, 2010:p.415-6). In China, individual has already become a "basic social category" that "permeates all areas of social life" (Hansen and Svarverud, 2010). According to Yan, a set of interrelated factors like the market-oriented policy, loosened control on social mobility, the retreat of the state from most aspects of people's private lives and the trend of

globalization have led to a far-reaching process of individualization in Chinese society (Yan, 2009). As a result, individuals enjoy more freedom to make their own choices and the increasing responsibility for their own fates. The rise of individual is such a transformative change that the Chinese society witnesses a "great transformation" from a collectivist, family-oriented ethics of personal responsibilities gradually shift to an individualistic ethics of rights and development (Evans, 2010). The individuals are disembedded from the constraints of the traditional network of families and Confucian values, they are no longer need to live under the shadows of their ancestors.

However, it is noteworthy that the process of individualization by no means exhibits in the same pattern in all regions of the world, individualization in Chinese society has a different manifestation, it is never the simple copy of what has been observed in most European countries. Unlike in Western societies, where the individualization process heavily relied on the protection and support provided by the sound welfare systems, on the contrary, in the Chinese case, the "loosening" of the individual has been accompanied with little institutional protection and support from the nation state. Individualization without the institutional assistance by a welfare state "has tended to polarize society in terms of economic standing and social status, instead of merely diversifying society in terms of identity construction and life politics ". With the retreat of the party state from the position as the sole provider and funder, individuals cannot only depend on the state for the provision of public goods, they have to achieve their ideal lifestyle and material security by themselves. On one hand, individuals enjoy the new kind of freedom, on the other hand, they share a sense of great insecurity or pressure, especially when the meaning of "good life" is measured by the amount of money. Besides, high parental expectations of the only child in the family intensify the sense of insecurity in such a competitive and unequal society where the old-age insurance system is underdeveloped (Liu, 2011:p.192). It is safe to say that apart from in the sphere of politics and morality, where the state still attempts to guide people's identity formation in line with its will, Chinese individuals have been largely left to themselves to pursuit of personal happiness and welfare.

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter is started by reminding readers about Fei Xiaotong's discussions of consanguinity and regionalism. According to Fei, Chinese society is fundamentally rural, which means the foundation of the whole Chinese society is rural. Consanguinity and regionalism are two essential conceptions to understand rural China. Affected by consanguinity and regionalism, Chinese rural society has long been regarded as static and stable, traditional notions and values are more likely to be retained than in urban areas. Then, moving to the Beck's framework of second modernity, the chapter emphasizes the thesis of individualization that is most pertinent to this paper. Beck suggests that individualization is marked by three distinct characteristics, "dis-embedding", "loss of traditional security" and "re-embedding" (Beck, 1992:p.128). Finally, by

employing the analytical lens of Beck's theorem of individualization, Yan analyzes how the individualization process of Chinese society unfolds in a quite different pattern.

Chapter 4 Historical background

4.1 Confucian notions: "filial piety" and the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues"

There is a well-known Chinese proverb describes xiaoshun or filial piety in the Chinese society, "among the various forms of virtuous conducts, xiao comes first (baixing xiao weixian)". Xiaoshun is commonly rendered as filial piety, referring to love, obedience and respect for parents and ancestors. It has long been treated as the central value of the family relationships. In imperial China, the grown-up children were required to provide financial and physical care for the parents, any behaviours offended against the doctrine of filial piety would be punished by the extended family and the dynastic law. Although during the influential May Fourth movement, filial piety and the other alike Confucian teaching morals were condemned by some intellectuals as the "man-eating institutions", especially the doctrine of filial piety, was conceived as the "source of all evil" that endeavoured to turn China into "a big factory for the manufacturing of obedience subject" (Wu, 1921:p.15), the value of filial piety has not vanished or declined, instead, the practice of filial piety has been changed and reconstructed in current society (Zhan,et al., 2008). It could be said without exaggeration that the concern of filial piety has pervaded all respects of Chinese culture, which influences the way of people's life, both consciously and unconsciously.

The practice of filial piety is strictly followed the rule of patriarchy. Traditionally, filial piety is described as "natural" to males, they are bound by various conditions to be a filial son (Chan and Tan, 2004). One of the main focus of filial piety is to have male children and continue the family lineage. As Mencius said, "there are three unfilial things that a child can do, and to leave behind no posterity is the greatest (buxiao yousan, wuhou weida)" (Mencius, 4A: 26). To have no son is perceived as the ultimate unfilial practice, it not only implies the failure of the parents but also the failure of the whole clan lineage (Chan and Tan, 2004). Besides, being a filial son is often associated with filial responsibilities like respecting and caring the parents in their later years. "Having sons makes one's old age secure"(yanger fanglao), the prevailing proverb declares the traditional expectations of Chinese parents towards their children, especially sons.

While for most women, they are usually required to play the role as a good wife and beloved mother (xianqi liangmu). Although men's filial piety is genetically determined at birth, most women are not (Ibid.). Given the patriarchal traditions, daughters have no value for the continuation of family lineage, they cannot be relied on for support and care for the biological family, as they grow up and marry into another family, and are expected to assume the an entirely new set roles. "Marrying out a daughter is like pouring out water"(jiachuqu de nuer pochuqu de shui), when a woman married, she can no longer act out the roles as daughters or

sisters of her natal family, rather, they began to play new parts of wife, daughter-in-law, and mother.

According to Confucian belief, a virtuous woman should conduct herself with obedience. The behaviour of women should rigidly follow the moral principles regulated by "Three Obediences and Four Virtues (san cong si de)". The Three Obediences require the women to obey the father before the marriage, obey the husband after the marriage, and obey the oldest son after the death of husband. The Three Obediences suggest that women do not have identity of their own, their identity and self-worth are dependent upon the males. The Fourth Virtues refer to moral conduct, proper speech, modest appearance and diligent work. This set of virtues is designed to encourage and teach feminine virtues desirable from male's perspective (De Bary et al., 1999). Additionally, Confucianism acknowledges that women's greatest duty is to produce a son for the family. Reproduction is deemed as the most important "task" for the women, those who fail to have children especially sons are regarded to have committed the worst moral crime and the husband can divorce the wife due to barrenness.

Although nowadays Chinese women are no more required to learn the moral principle of Three Obediences and Four Virtues, the primary role of good wife and worthy mother are still encouraged by the society.

4.2 Political policy: hukou system and One-child policy

Hukou system

In China, few people will dispute the significance of hukou system or household registration system, it is essential for every aspect of daily life. Every Chinese citizen is required to be registered with hukou authorities from birth, they are classified as rural and urban based on their hukou. Hukou registration not only provides the legal basis for personal identification, but also tightly associates with the benefits and welfare provided by the state.

The original purpose of applying hukou system is to advance the development of heavy industry. Faced with agrarian economy scarce in capital in the early phase, the newly established country implemented heavy-oriented strategy to spur its economic development. The Chinese government abandoned its traditional bottom-heavy, household-based economy and turned to the Soviet Union as its primary model. The orthodox Soviet model put a high priority to heavy industry through direct government control, while the benefits and investment poured into agriculture sectors were heavily squeezed so as to finance the expansion of industry (Naughton, 2007). At the same time, the state also provided the urbanites in the urban-industrial sectors for jobs and related welfare, while leaving the rural residence outside the support of the state. This strategy required a strong mechanism to stem rural population outflows. In 1958, the state promulgated The Regulation on Hukou of the People's Republic of China, which officially

created hukou system to control social mobility (Perry and Selden, 2010). Through the hukou system, Chinese citizens lost the freedom of residence and internal migration, especially the "undesirable" rural-to-urban migration.

Since the end of 1970s, China began reforms and opened up to the world. With its pronounced goal of modernization it adopted the market-oriented policy to unleash its economic dynamism. With rapid economic development, large amount of labour forces were demanded by the market, whereas due to the impacts of hukou system, rural dwellers were barred from the cities. In the mid 1980s, Chinese government gradually loosened its control on internal mobility, peasant labors were allowed a legal temporary status in the cities to find jobs (usually manual-work positions), however, they were not eligible for basic urban benefits and social welfare program (Chan, 2010). Urban hukou holders especially in economically developed cities, enjoyed significant even increased state subsidies in various aspects of social welfare like housing, education and pensions, etc. Mega-cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, hukou is also closely linked to the house purchases, without the host city's hukou, the migrants have a higher eligibility threshold to buy houses. Undoubtedly, the separation between rural workers and urban residences were still distinct, they were treated as cheap surplus labour of classical Lewis model and suffered heavy discrimination in the cities. Albeit recent years, the central government tries to narrow the wide rural-urban disparity posed by hukou system, a instant termination of hukou system is not practical, the reform of hukou system still has a long way to go.

One-child policy

As mentioned above, for thousands of years, males are placed high value in Chinese society. With the dominant ideological position of Confucianism, males are deemed as the supporters of the family, they shoulder the responsibilities of financing the family and taking care of the parents. To have sons to continue the family lineage is perceived as the filial obligation, only sons can be the heir of the family. While daughters are viewed as the "outsider" of the family, as they will eventually leave out after becoming married. It is widely accepted that women belong to her husband and are the members of her husband's family once they get married. Male preference has been a distinct feature of Chinese culture, the phenomenon is more prominent in rural areas.

Under the pressure of explosive population growth, In 1979, the Chinese government implemented one-child-per-family policy for population control, those who violated the regulation would risk huge fines, job loss and varying degrees of harassments from the local family planning offices (jihua shengyu bangongshi). It had been the one of the history's most extreme state mandated policies in demographic engineering and had been highly controversial and vilified. But there were exceptions to the enforced policy, like in rural areas, couples were allowed to have a second child if their firstborn was a girl after five years. Overall, the policy achieved more success in urban areas. The total fertility rate decreased from 2.9 in 1979 to 1.7 in

2004 with a rate of 1.3 in the urban areas, while the fertility rate in rural areas remains about 2.0 (Hesketh, Lu and Xing, 2005).

On one hand, the One-child policy was criticized by its forced sterilization or abortion, on the other hand it also resulted in unintended consequences of benefiting the girls born in the urban families. Without competitions comes from the brothers for parental resources and attentions, urban singleton daughters enjoy unprecedented parent support, much more parental investment and concern have been concentrated on them in terms of schooling, livelihood and wealth (Sudbeck, 2012). These daughters who have grown up as the only child in the urban family are more likely to be confident, they become the active members in the society. Higher education plus good family background make it possible for women to have a non-traditional job outside of the home.

4.3 Chapter summary

This chapter provides a brief background for the subsequent analysis part of the "phoenix man". It is divided into two parts, in the first part, Confucian values of filial piety and "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" are introduced to demonstrate the tradition of male preference and the women's subordinated positions in the family. Then, it turns to the state policy — hukou system and the One-child policy. The former has led to great gap between the rural and urban, and the latter is elaborated by giving a bias to urban singleton daughters: as the only child in the family, they enjoy increasing parental investment to improve themselves. In short, this chapter aims to outline the socio-cultural context of the "phoenix man".
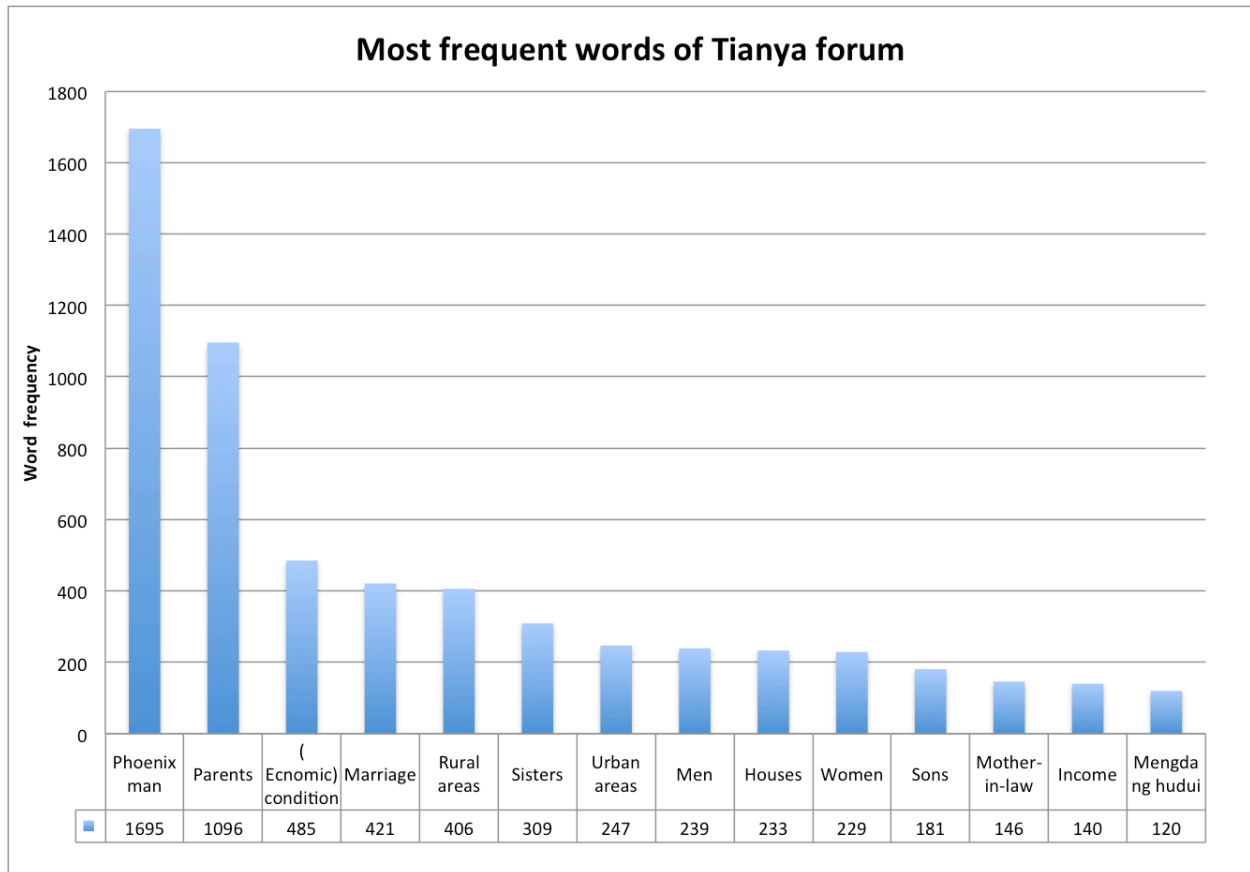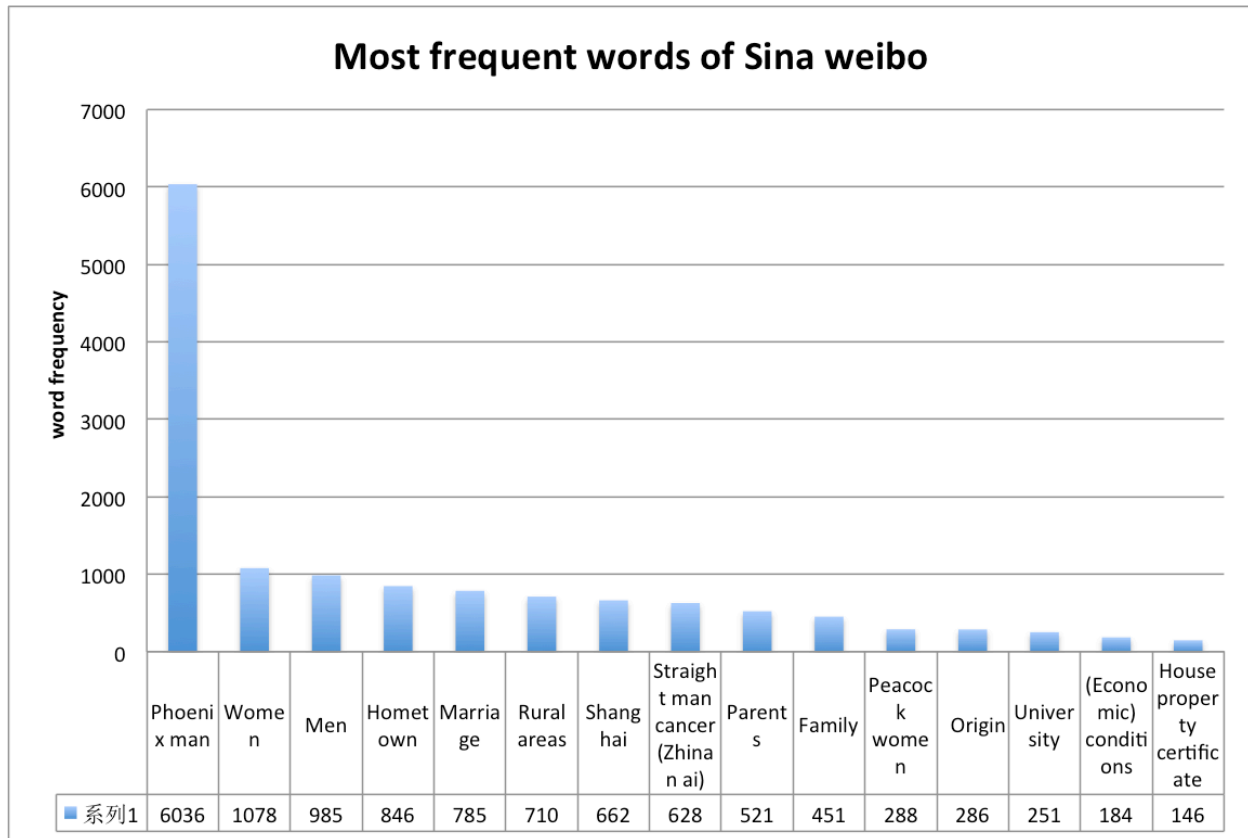
Chapter 5 Data findings and analysis

5.1 Results of content analysis

The analysis in this chapter is based on the data collected from Sina weibo and Tianya online forum from January 2015 to January 2016 by using of Python. And then, word frequency and co-occurrence analysis are performed with the help of ROST content mining system. In this process, the author has to manually filter some meaningless words, like "not bad (bucuo)", "feel or feelings (ganjue)", "hope (xiwang)" etc., to assure the accuracy of the data. Also, as the data are directly gathered from the social media platforms, there are unavoidably many systematic words, such as "thread starters (louzhu)", "repost (zhuanfa)", "reply (huifu)" and "send private message (siliao)", etc., which are irrelevant to the theme of "phoenix man", will be eliminated. In addition, considering of the flexibility and irregularity of the Internet languages, the software may make some mistakes in the process of word segmentation, like "森活", which should be "生活" (life), or "关员", which should be written as "官员" (government official), and some other words that the software cannot be identified. Hence, for these incorrect word segmentation, it will require the researcher to comprehend the meanings of the words according to the specific textual contexts and make further manual correction.

The ROST content mining software generated a word frequency list of Tianya online forum with a total of 11328 words, and a list of Sina weibo with a total of 14881 words. Afterwards, the formula $T = \frac{1+\sqrt{1+4D}}{2}$ is applied to identify the boundary point between high-frequency words and low-frequency words (Sun, Shaw and Davis, 1999). Through calculation, we obtain the result of T=107 for Tianya forum, and T=122 for Sina weibo. Therefore, we define the words used more than 107 times as the high-frequency words for Tianya online forum, likewise, the words used exceed 122 times are defined as high-frequency words for Sina weibo.

Figure 3

Most frequent words of Tianya forum

	Phoenix man	Parents	(Ecnomic) condition	Marriage	Rural areas	Sisters	Urban areas	Men	Houses	Women	Sons	Mother-in-law	Income	Mengda ng hudui
▪	1695	1096	485	421	406	309	247	239	233	229	181	146	140	120

Figure 4

Most frequent words of Sina weibo

	Phoenix man	Women	Men	Hometown	Marriage	Rural areas	Shanghai	Straight man cancer (Zhinan ai)	Parents	Family	Peacock women	Origin	University	(Economic) conditions	House property certificate
系列1	6036	1078	985	846	785	710	662	628	521	451	288	286	251	184	146

The figures above show the most frequent words used by Tianya online forum users and Sina weibo users respectively. Unsurprisingly, the term of "phoenix" man is mentioned most often. Words connected to family and marriage like "parents", "sisters", "mother-in-law" "women" and "men" are much-discussed. Others like "(economic) condition", "houses" and "house certificate" "mengdang hudui" imply the Internet users care about the economic aspect when they talk about the "phoenix man". Additionally, by checking the figures of Sina weibo, it is interesting to find words linked to other identities, like "straight man cancer (zhinan ai)" and "peacock women" are frequently mentioned. Lastly, the term of " university" as well takes a position in the high-frequency words list of Sina weibo.

However, high-frequency word list only allows to count the frequency usage of words in the texts, it cannot directly signify the relations with the term of "phoenix man". Therefore, word co-occurrence analysis is employed to help understand the relatedness of "phoenix man" with other terms.

Table 1

Co-occurrence of the term "phoenix man" with other terms in Tianya online forum	
Categories	Terms
People	Parents, men, women, sisters, sons
Family	Family, family background, marriage
Places	Rural areas, urban areas
Education	University, academic qualifications
Economy	Houses, house purchase, (economic) conditions, *mengdang hudui*
Identity	Peacock girls
Attitudes	Weirdo (*qipa*), "superb (man) (*jipin*)"

Table 2

Co-occurrence of the term "phoenix man" with other terms in Sina weibo	
Categories	Terms
People	Parents, men, women, relatives, sons, sisters, singleton daughters
Family	Family, origin, marriage
Places	Rural areas, urban areas, hometown, Shanghai, Beijing,
Education	University
Economy	Houses property certificates, (economic) conditions
Identity	Straight man cancer (*zhinan ai*), peacock girls
Attitudes	Disgusting, terrible

The tables above categorize the terms co-occurred with the term of "phoenix man". Obviously, co-occurrence analysis provides us a more detailed image of "phoenix man" and most of high-frequency words are demonstrated to have a close connection with the thematic topic. Through comparison, it is not difficult to find that both tables share a lot of similarities and make some supplement to the expression of "phoenix man. " For example, in the respect of education, although the term "university" is not belonged to the high-frequency words list of Tianya forum, it shows a close linkage with the term "phoenix man" in the co-occurrence analysis, which the

co-occurrence frequency between "university" and "phoenix man" has reached 590 times in the texts. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the co-occurrence analysis also provides a channel to understand the online public's attitudes towards the "phoenix man". Words like "disgusting", "weirdo" to some extent show that the group may not be so welcome on the Internet.

In conclusion, word frequency and co-occurrence analysis help us to outline the basic online understanding of the "phoenix man". Geographically, the "phoenix man" is often linked with rural areas and urban areas. Indeed, most "phoenix men" were born in the countrysides, they then later study or are employed in the cities, especially in Beijing or Shanghai such first-tier metropolises. But the repeated mentions seem to emphasize the disparity between urban and rural in the context of China by the Internet users. Economically, economic conditions especially the aspect of house ownership has attracted considerable attention. Educationally, online participants tend to associate "phoenix man" with a high academic background, especially the one who has received university education. In addition, the discussion around "phoenix man" is also related to other people and identities, like parents, sons, women, relatives, "straight man cancer (zhinan ai)" and peacock girls, but judged from the attitudes words, they probably are the disfavoured group of people on the social media. And yet, these are only sketchy perceptions of "phoenix man" simply based on word frequency and co-occurrence analysis, further discussions on the social facts beneath the popularity of the "phoenix man" will depend on the results of the content analysis and the support of the online observation.

5.2 Analysis and discussion

Disputes on filial piety

The "phoenix man" is often seen as a filial son by the public, but the value of filial piety is not widely regarded as a praiseworthy virtue for them. Instead, because of filial piety, they often suffer "verbal attack" by the Internet users. Of course, it does not mean to say that the value of filial piety has been totally eroded by the modern society, actually, it still holds force (Lin, 2013). Or the Internet users completed deny the virtue of filial piety, but rather they have new interpretation of filial piety that differs from the conceptions of the "phoenix man".

When I did online observation I often came across the remarks that show their antagonistic attitudes toward filial piety of the "phoenix man". Like a Tianya forum users remarked, "according to the 'phoenix man', the meaning of filial piety is to require his (future) spouse to fulfill filial duties towards his parents. 'For my parents and other relatives, you have to respect, you have to show your filial piety and serve them. But your parents are only the responsibilities of yourself, as you marry into my family, you are belonged to my family, your parents are no longer significant to you. If I am happy, I can give them some money to spend, but if I am not happy, they should finance me, their son-in-law' (imitating the tone of the 'phenix man')" (Bbs.tianya.cn, 2015). Similarly, a user on the Sina posted a piece of weibo to show her opinions of filial piety,

"'phoenix man' to fulfill filial piety should have a bottom line. Once a man gets married, you with your wife constitute a new family, while your parents belong to another family. What matters to you most should be your 'small' family, rather your parents. Simple-minded filial piety harms more than prodigality in the marriage" (Weibo, 2015). Similar remarks are quite common on the Internet, but most of discussions about the filial piety of the "phoenix man" seem to center around the two aspects showed on the above remarks, one is about the obligations, whose obligations? Or to be more specific, whether women should fulfill filial obligations towards men's parents without any regrets or complaints. The other one is about the disputes of the extended family and the nuclear family.

The discussions on the fulfillment of filial obligations echo the aforementioned Confucian notions. Traditionally, Confucianism upholds filial piety as the central virtue, which defines the ideal relationship between the parents and the children. Nevertheless, the emotion of filial piety is often gendered. In the patriarchal societies, filial piety is emphasized as the obligations of sons in the family, men's filial piety is "genetically defined by lineage through life", or should be described as "natural" to males (Chan and Tan, 2004:p. 215). While for women, filial piety is expected to shift to her husband's ancestral lineage at marriage. Unlike males' "natural" characteristic of filial piety, women's filial piety is more like a "product of nurture", since there is no natural justification for the expectation of women to transfer their solicitude and devotion towards their natal parents to their husbands' parents (Ibid.). But during the imperial times, the Confucianism instills the rule of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" into women's thoughts, requiring the women to regulate their behaviors according to their husbands' will. Therefore, women's filial piety towards their husbands' parents is taught to be part of their responsibilities, they should serve their parents-in-law in the way they serve their husband.

However, after the establishment of People's Republic of China, the central government begun to propagandize and promote Maoist thoughts as the guiding ideology within the country, while the traditional values such as Confucianism ethics were denounced as feudalistic, decadent, which should be eliminated (Yan, 2010). Through a series of women's liberation movements and ideological campaigns, Chinese women were disembedded from the traditional restrictions of Confucianism. The behavior norms of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" lost its rationality, women were encouraged to step out of the family and take social activities. In addition, ever since the adoption of One-child policy, parental investments are mostly poured into the only child in the family regardless of the child's sex. Particularly in the urban areas, where the policy is conducted in a more strict way, urban singleton girls enjoy the most of parental resources to develop their personal capabilities, which afford them the opportunity to find a decent job in non-traditional sectors (Tsui and Rich, 2002). Women's roles are no more circumscribed in the family, men are not the only reliance for the women. They become more open and confident, their earnings can also be focused on their biological parents as their will. The former old expectation of filial piety for women leads to disputes, as there are no biological bonds to husbands' parents and the traditional values seem to be unfeasible in nowadays.

The other debate on the filial piety of the "phoenix man" is concerning to the extended family and "small" family or the nuclear family. People often express their complaints or their dissatisfactions towards the "phoenix man's" seemingly unnumbered relatives. They don't understand why the "phoenix man" have so many relatives and why the "phoenix man" could be so ardent to their rural relatives, and are so willing to cost money and energy to help them. Actually, before the "phoenix man" migrates into cities, they have been living in an environment what Fei Xiaotong called as a "society of acquaintance" (Fei, 1992). People in rural areas grow up among close acquaintances — "where child grows up in everyone else's eyes, and in the child's eyes everyone and everything seem ordinary and habitual. This is a society without strangers, a society based on the familiar" (Fei, 1992:p.41). The "society of acquaintance" as one of the fundamental characteristics of rural society is based on the conception of consanguinity and regionalism. Rural people in accordance with consanguinity and regionalism to decide the relationship with others within the society. Family and kinship networks override the more distance network ties. For this reason, it is no wonder why the "phoenix man" is so zealous in supporting their relatives, as for them, these relatives are the people in the network of family and kinship, they hold the belief that they have the obligations to help them. This phenomenon is only another reflection of the influence of consanguinity and regionalism.

Besides, the traditional notions of filial piety follow the norm of "while your parents are alive, it is better not to travel far away (fumu zai, bu yuanyou)" (Confucius., 4:19) have been challenged by the migration to urban China driven by the rapid economic development. Increased geographical mobility suggests the process of disembedding, it breaks down the previous geographic boundaries and weakens parents' power on the children. But such migration does not destroy the emotional ties between parents and children, filial piety is fulfilled in various individualistic ways, such as financing the members of extended family to satisfy parents' expectations and make them feel pride is also available to demonstrate the filial piety (Lin, 2013).

Compared with rural areas, while in urban areas, the rigorous implementation of One-child policy reduced the number of the children in the family, urbanization tends to separate the family from their kin, the house shortage and the expensive house price make it difficult for the extended family to live together, and moreover, the state tightly control the social mobility. All these macro-forces have brought about crucial changes in family size and structure (Chow and Berheide, 1994). Transforming from a traditional several generations living under the one roof to a relatively small family composing of fewer members, the nuclear family type has gradually replaced the traditional type of extended family. Grown up in such small families, women do not have multiple networks of relationships. They tend to concentrate on the members of the small family and put their interest first. The conflicts of extended family and small family actually reflect the different notions of family relationship, in rural areas where the main axes of the family are the relationship between father and son, mother and daughter-in-law, the relationship

between the husband and wife plays the minor roles. While in urban areas, the family relationships shifts to center around the relations between husband and wife.

Origin determines: the stalled social mobility

When I doing observation on the Sina weibo and Tianya forum, I find that online discussions on the ""phoenix man" often emphasize their rural family background or their rural origins. The later content analysis results have supported this viewpoint. Internet users care about the rural background of the "phoenix man". Despite most of the "phoenix men" have already successfully graduated from the university and find a well-paid jobs in relatively economically developed cities, their rural origins often provoke criticisms for them. Online public overly emphasize the relations between the origin and one's characters and values. It seems all their "misbehaviors" can be linked to their poor rural origins.

Like a weibo users wrote, "I find the 'phoenix man' with poor family background is quite selfish, countrified small-minded and vainglorious. They always dream of becoming rich someday, but do not how to live their lives well. All they have done only for showing off" (Weibo, 2015). Similar remarks are common on the Tianya forum, as well. In a post discussing about whether the urban girl should marry a postgraduate graduated from the top university of China, a Tianya forum participant's remarks have been agreed by many other Internet users. It is commented that the girl should not marry the "phoenix man" as "the origins of the people are quite important. It has nothing to do with one's academic qualifications. Urban girls should remember do not marry the 'phoenix man', or you may have a tragical marriage… family background takes priority over the academic degree" (Bbs.tianya.cn, 2015). Although there are also some rational voices try to denounce the statement, but the saying of "determinism of origin" remains as the main melody on the Internet.

Why do people attach great importance to one's origin? Maybe the high-frequent words — "house" and "(economic) conditions" can provide us some clues to the answer of question. Recent years, China has seen a steady increasing trend of house market, especially in the large- and medium-sized cities, the house price grows very rapidly. For example, in Beijing, the capital of China, the average sales of the existing houses was CNY 43,349 per sq. m in 2015. In Shanghai, the average sales price of new house was relatively lower than that of Beijing, but still stood at CNY 318,44 per sq.m (Global Property Guide, 2016), while the disposable personal income in China only averaged CNY 311,95 in 2015 (Trading economics, 2016). The prohibitively expensive house price has made the house purchase in the big cities become unaffordable for most people.

 In today's China, men and women often desire to buy a house shortly before or after the marriage, but the high housing-price-to-income ratios make them turn to parents for financial help. One of the characteristics of house purchase in China is the heavy reliance on the parental

support (Hong Fincher, 2016). Generally speaking, in comparison to rural people, urban residents are more likely to afford a house for their children. Because of holding urban hukou, they can enjoy the gorgeous welfare and benefits provided by the local government, and their salary is much higher. The burden of buying a house is much smaller than rural people. Whereas the "phoenix men" who come from the rural areas with a poor background often have to rely on themselves to buy a house in the cities. It is no longer practical to purchase an urban house by only depending on the slender salaries. Marrying the "phoenix man" may require the spouse to share the mortgage on the houses, which will probably lead to the reduction of family living expenses and decrease the quality of life.

In China, one of the traditional criteria of marriage is mengdang hudui (equal status, similar background) that in fact inferred hypergamy for women — marrying a man of higher status and economic position. The "peacock girls" with a well-off family background marry a "phoenix man" is not regarded as mengdang hudui, but marrying down in the marriage. The huge economic disparity between urban and rural have built an invisible wall for the "phoenix man" to integrate themselves into the urban life. Despite most "phoenix man" have a high educational background, but the university diploma pales when confronted with rich family background, "having a good dad" has replaced "having a good grade" as the essential "hardware" in job hunting. Especially since the implementation of the higher education expansion plan, the number of university students has largely increased, the university diploma has reduced to the prerequisite for many professional positions. The state no longer provides house and job for the university graduates as before, forcing individuals to be self-reliant. In short, the current educational system is gradually losing its capability to facilitate inter-class mobility (Cai, 2011).

In a nutshell, the limited effects of the university degree, restrictions of rural hukou, and the high urban house price have altogether impeded the social upward mobility for the "phoenix man". On one hand, the "phoenix man" is disembedded from their previous rural environments and move into urban areas, on the other hand, because of lacking of state-supported institutional mechanism for re-embedment, they are still excluded by the urban middle class. As Yan Yunxiang elucidated in his influential work, "the lack of re-embedment into a socialized support system renders the individualization of rural families in China a painful, unbalanced, and risky process" (Yan, 2011).

Other findings

Based on the figures of Sina Weibo index, most accounts discussing the "phoenix man" are females, who often come from economically developed areas like Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang and Guangdong province. They often connect the "phoenix man" with another identity — "straight man cancer (zhinan ai)", the Chinese take on "male chauvinist pig", which is commonly used by the weibo users to describe the outspoken misogyny and entilementlement of men (Jemimah, 2015, CDT, 2016). According to the weibo impression image, the "straight man

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cancer" is one of the most important "impression" of the "phoenix man". From January 2015 to January 2016, almost each weibo temporary impression (monthly) can find the "position" of the "straight man cancer". But no matter "phoenix man" or "straight man cancer", they all tend to use the traditional Confucian norms or values to judge and require women, emphasizing the women as men's inferior. Chinese women have long been suppressed in the patriarchal society, where highlight male preference and male superiority. Recent research by Leta Hong Fincher (2016) even shows that there is a trend of the resurgence of gender inequality in modern China. In the book, the author vividly portrays how single women in their late twenties are stigmatized by the state media campaigns as "leftover women", which prompts them rush into marriage without too much bargaining power; and how they are shut out of the property ownership and wealth accumulation. If "leftover women" is constructed by the state to suppress women, then the invention of "phoenix man" and "straight man cancer" can be regarded as the counterback by the female Internet users. It shows that some women, at least, are no longer willing to swallow stereotypes whole or living under the shadow of patriarchy.

5.3 Chapter summary

In order to analyze how the "phoenix man" is understood by the online public and what social facts hide behind the term, this chapter first goes through the results of content analysis to outline the basic image on the "phoenix man". It has demonstrated that the disputes on the "phoenix man" are usually focused on the filial piety and rural origins two aspects. The "phoenix man" actually reflects the interplay between modern and traditional influences. On one hand, they are disembedded from their traditional social environments and try to re-embedded themselves in the urban areas, on the other hand, the policy-induced urban-rural disparity and lack of channels for upward mobility has made the re-embedment become a unbalanced and risky process. In addition, the popularity of "phoenix man" and "straight man cancer" suggests an emerging attitudes towards individualization, women are no longer willing to passively accept the ideas that demands them to be subordinate to the male, they try to "loosen" themselves from the constraints imposed by the patriarchal society.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The research has provided some insights regarding the phenomenon of the "phoenix man" on the Internet by building its theoretical framework based on the theory of modernity and individualization and discussion on the consanguinity and regionalism of Chinese rural society.

The study employs the method of content analysis and online observation to study the "phoenix man" phenomenon on the selected social media platforms — Sina weibo and Tianya online forum. Sina weibo and Tianya online forum are now very popular social media platforms in China, the large volume of available texts make it possible for the research to analyze various social and cultural issues. The research is focused on the buzzword of "phoenix man", which are widely used to describe the person with a rural background but later study or work in the cities. In their hometown, they are regarded as the pride of their parents, their family even the whole village, but when they come to urban spaces, many conflicts arises. They are criticized by their so-called "filial piety" and their impoverished rural family background. Actually, the "phoenix men" were born in rural areas that value consanguinity and regionalism, which is more conservative than urban areas. When they move to cities, their traditional values formed in the previous environment still influence them in many aspects, like regarding the filial piety towards his parents as wife's obligations or sending money to their members of the extended family as their own obligations. Their behaviors are not accepted by the urban residents, especially for the women who own a relatively rich family background and enjoy most parental resources. Disputes on the "phoenix man" are actually another reflection of huge rural-urban wide. Additionally, the prohibitive house price in the urbans, minor effects of college diploma have made the society more care about the person's origins. Lack of possible channels to go upward, the "phoenix man" may fall down to the members of the "educated youth at the bottom of the society" (Yu, 2010). Without institutional support of various social welfare programmes, the re-embeddement process of "phoenix man" in the urban is predetermined to be arduous and difficult.

Last but not least, as the paper is completely relied on the online investigations, it may be better to combine offline investigations to explore the phenomenon of the "phoenix man". However, as the focus of the paper is to illustrate the social implications reflected by the "phoenix man", online research may be a better way to abstract various viewpoints of the "phoenix man", which is more helpful for the research.

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