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MEETING "THE ONE" AT MIDNIGHT IS YOUR DESTINY: THE ROLE OF YUAN IN USE OF THE TAIWANESE SOCIAL NETWORK, DCARD

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

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in

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Taiwanese college students understand the traditional, culturally Chinese concept of Yuan and its role in their use of a new and distinctive Taiwanese social networking site—Dcard. Particular attention is paid to the Dcard's unique friending mechanism, which provides users the opportunity to connect (or not) with one, seemingly random new friend each day at midnight. Through thematic analysis of 15 semi-structured long interviews, the study finds that Dcard users understand Yuan as a multi-faceted concept pertaining primarily to interpersonal relationships (relationalism). Users perceive Yuan to influence relationships in a predetermined, causal fashion (fatalism), but they still assert some agency in their relationships (controllability), including their ability to believe deeply in Yuan. Users perceive Yuan to play an important role Dcard use, and the concept's different facets each influence key moments in the friending process—from receiving a friend recommendation, to the choice of whether to accept or reject that request, to the initiation and maintenance of relationships through Dcard. Dcard's architecture, including elements of randomness and partial anonymity intensify the experience of Yuan. This study underscores the importance of studying how cultural concepts like Yuan are socially constructed and used in online contexts. More, it illustrates how social networking sites can use design and architecture to tap into culture to attract and retain users.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my families and all beings in this period. I would first like to give a huge thanks to my chair, Dr. Corrigan for his continuous encouragement and extensive support. The door of his office (and his Marco Polo app and Skype) was always open. He respected this paper to be my own work, but he steered me in the right direction whenever he thought (or I thought) I needed it. Sincere thanks to Dr. Song and Dean Chuang for serving on my committee and providing me insightful feedback. I would also like to show my appreciation to the participants who were involved in this research.

And yes, my very profound gratitude comes to my parents, and my brother for providing me with unfailing support and unconditional love. I also simply can't ignore my partner, roommates met in "Ginkgo house". and all beautiful encountering for being this supportive and affectionate. They nurture, prepare, and cultivate me in loving ways. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. I am deeply indebted to them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"It is romantic to meet a person online every day at midnight," Chien, Chin-Yo told attendees at a seminar on technology in Taiwan in 2017 (Hung, 2017). Mr. Chien is the founder of Dcard, a social network that was created in 2011. Dcard is marketed to Taiwanese college students, and it offers a unique "friending" experience. Every day at midnight, Dcard recommends to each user one, seemingly random, new "friend." The site provides that individual's real, but partially anonymous profile, including school, major, hobbies, and profile photo. Moreover, users can read about that prospective friend's best experience in life, a hard life lesson, or favorite mottos. However, the names of each user are not be revealed, and the two cannot communicate and see each other's full profile until and unless they agree to become "friends" and send out friending invitations to each other. If one of them does not respond within 24 hours, the two cannot connect with each other on Dcard again.

Despite—or, perhaps, because of—this unique friending mechanism, Dcard has amassed a growing user base—particularly among Taiwanese college students. Since 2011, Dcard has attracted one million users, and it ranks 8th in social media penetration in Taiwan (The News Lens, 2017). Its friending

mechanism sent out one hundred and fifty million invitation cards in 2016 alone (Tseng, 2017).

Dcard's friending model poses a puzzling problem, though: how can a social network create new connections and friendships between people who do not know each other and did not seek each other out? Chien explained that Dcard focuses on building trust among its users: "Dcard has a goal which is to help Dcard users make friends by creating an online environment filled with trust. It can be achieved by partial anonymity when users reveal their identities in the profiles" (Sun Yat-sen News, 2017, para. 3). Building interpersonal trust in an online forum is essential, especially in developing online interpersonal relationships (Bekmeier & Eichenlaub, 2010); moreover, in culturally Chinese societies, such as Taiwan, the cultural concept of Yuan may play a role in mitigating users' uneasiness about online friending experiences. Indeed, Mr. Chien told an audience in 2017 that, "the D in Dcard stands for destiny." (Sun Yat-sen News, 2017).

The concept of Yuan has been deeply ingrained in culturally Chinese societies, including Taiwan, since the Tang dynasty, 1,111 years ago (Chang & Holt, 1991). Yuan, treated as a cultural belief, is an indispensable concept for understanding interpersonal relationships in these societies. Those who believe in Yuan assume that it influences the formation and destruction of various relationships based on the person's past behaviors. A belief in Yuan presupposes that human encounters are predetermined by an unknown universe

that individuals are unable to confront, change, and escape (Yang, 1982). In this, Yuan can function as a relationship "coping mechanism" (Lee, 1995). Those who believe in Yuan can attribute unsuccessful encounters to "not having Yuan." This can reduce their sense of helplessness, and save face for others and themselves, which is particularly valuable in collectivist cultures (Wen, 1988). In fact, Chien created Dcard in response to a heartbreaking, regrettable relationship, which he attributed to a lack of Yuan (Thecard, 2017). It was conceived as a site where people could terminate the past, mend the regret, and continue to move on.

The Internet, particularly social media, has emerged as a popular tool for younger generations to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships (Caronia & Caron, 2004). But while Yuan has been thoroughly studied in offline relationships, its role in online relationships is less well understood. Moreover, Dcard, as a relatively new and niche—but growing—social networking site has received minimal attention from researchers. Thus, this study uses semi-structured long interviews to explore users' understandings of Yuan and the concept's role in their Dcard use, particularly the site's distinctive friending mechanism. In this, it examines the transformative use of a cultural concept (Yuan) among a specific demographic (Taiwanese college students) in a new and distinctive online context (Dcard).

There are several reasons these phenomena are worthy of attention. First, given its novelty and distinctiveness, Dcard's friending mechanism provides a fresh vantage point on the formation and maintenance of online relationships,

particularly in culturally Chinese societies. Indeed, Dcard's market niche—
Taiwanese college students—appears to prefer Dcard to other social networks,
which may be a function of the site's purposeful consideration of Yuan in its
design. For academics, examining Dcard users' perspectives on Yuan may shed
light on the cultural factors that influence relationship formation, whether online or
off. As social relationships are a crucial sociological process, this study explores
how culture factors tap into relationship formation and maintenance in online
contexts.

Furthermore, while Yuan has been extensively studied as a cultural factor in
Chinese societies, its role in online relationship formation remains understudied.
Cultural concepts like Yuan can evolve as the societies change and as different
demographics adopt those concepts. Since Yuan's meaning and use is not
stable over time or across groups, exploring the role Yuan in a specific context,
such as Dcard, can illuminate how those changes tangibly shape relationship
formation and maintenance. Finally, given that Chien had "Destiny" in mind when
he created Dcard, this study can also illustrate the significance of cultural beliefs
in relation to social media design and use. These insights are useful for
academics who want to understand the relationship between culture and social
media, as well as marketers who want to design and use social media most
effectively.

Preview of Chapters

The following chapters review the relevant literature on Dcard, Yuan, and online relationships. First, the literature review describes the Taiwanese media and social media landscape, including Dcard, its college student niche, and its unique friending feature. Then, Yuan is defined, and its significance in interpersonal relationships in culturally Chinese societies is explained. While Yuan has been examined in offline contexts, the concept has received less attention in online contexts. Then, the formation and maintenance of online relationships, and Dcard's architecture and its relationship implications from those, is discussed. Through the perspective of cultural psychology, attribution theory is identified as a useful theoretical framework for exploring—and perhaps explaining—the role of Yuan in Dcard use.

Chapter 3 describes and justifies this study's method for gathering and analyzing Dcard users' perspectives and experiences—specifically, semi-structured long interviews. This method is compared to other ways of studying media use, including surveys and ethnography. In doing so, the usefulness of the long interview for this study is identified. Participants were recruited from Dcard, itself, from classes at the university, and with snowball sampling, as needed. To avoid recruiting a homogeneous sample, the researcher employed maximum variation sampling to capture a diversity of experiences and perspectives among key demographics. To analyze these interview data, the researcher conducted a

thematic analysis. This involved identifying common threads and core ideas across the data that help answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Chapter 4 begins with a brief description of this study's 15-participant sample of Taiwanese Dcard users, including their demographic characteristics. The chapter then describes the findings of this study's long interviews and thematic analysis. The findings are organized into two sections focusing on 1) how participants understood Yuan, and 2) what role Yuan plays in their Dcard use—particularly the site's unique friending mechanism. Participants perceived Yuan as an influence in interpersonal relationships, and they emphasize causation in those processes, including a sense of fatalism, as well as opportunities for agency or "controllability" in those processes. These understandings of Yuan each play important roles in three key moments of the Dcard friending process: 1) the experience of receiving a friend request; 2) the choice of whether to connect with that user or not; and 3) the initiation and maintenance of relationships through Dcard. , Additionally, the randomness and anonymity designed into Dcard's friending mechanism shapes users' behaviors and experiences, including their perceptions of Yuan.

Finally, chapter 5 summarizes and discusses the findings for the study. While many participants emphasized Yuan's fatalism—the sense that Yuan is an unchangeable and external force dictating relationships outcomes—many participants believe they have some agency over their relationships and even Yuan, itself. This multifaceted view of Yuan helps explain users' Dcard use and

experiences, including at the three moments in the Dcard friending experience. Through examining these moments in Dcard's friending, it provides a window into the ways in which these processes of change are unfolding by Yuan in a novel context among a particular demographic group. Limitations of this study are acknowledged, including its sampling techniques, generalizability, translation process, possible alternative methods. However, the strength and significance of this context-specific research lies in its capacity to provide rich and in-depth insights into people's lived experiences, including the role of culture. The researcher then suggests further opportunities for studying the connection culture and social media design and use, including similar studies of other social networks and cultures, as well as quantitative study of these findings across Dcard users.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Social Media in Taiwan

Taiwan is an island country in Southeast Asia with a tropical climate and a

population of twenty-three million. The official languages in Taiwan are Mandarin

Chinese and Taiwanese, and people also speak local dialects. Taiwan operates

in an effective and stable democratic political status, and Taiwanese people

enjoy vibrant civic lives. The media landscape in Taiwan is diverse and highly

competitive since freedom of speech is protected under its democratic political

system (Singapore Management University, 2012). Most Taiwanese media are

owned by private or non-governmental organizations (Rajczyk, 2016). According

to the World Press Freedom Index, Taiwan was rated as the freest media in Asia

(Reporters without Borders, 2017).

Taiwan has been progressive in developing its information technology

industry and has positioned itself as one of the leading high-tech countries in the

Asia-Pacific region (Steckman & Andrews, 2017). Taiwan enjoys a high level of

Internet penetration. Seventy-nine percent of the Taiwanese population have

access to the Internet on a daily basis in Taiwan (Taiwan Business Topics, 2016).

Nine out of ten people in Taiwan are computer users and smartphone owners

(eMarketer, 2015). While Internet use is widespread among Taiwanese residents,

the Taiwanese government also established a free Wi-Fi network for its citizens and visitors in 2011 (Hsiao, 2015).

Given this high level of Internet penetration, social media has become a central aspect of Taiwanese life—particularly among young people (Singapore Management University, 2012). Social media provide users with tools to represent themselves, expand their interpersonal networks, construct social identities, maintain or create new social bonds, and stay informed (Caronia & Caron, 2004; Singapore Management University, 2012). Taiwanese residents use social media to follow current events and trends and to stay connected with friends and family (Wei, Lin, Lu, & Chuang, 2015). The country's large population of foreign migrant workers also uses social media to maintain social bonds, navigate intercultural communication, and assimilate into Taiwanese culture (Chen, 2013; So, 2011). Social media serve political and economic functions, too. During the 2010 Taiwan presidential election, political campaigns used social media to recruit and create a sense of belonging among supporters (Lin 2015). And as of 2016, 62% of Taiwanese residents reported making online purchases (Mehra, 2016), and demographic- and location-based e-commerce is on the rise (Zheng & Xie, 2011).

Taiwanese people have, on average, four social media accounts (Tien & Wu, 2017). Facebook, the country's most popular social network, has a 91% penetration rate (Institute for Information Industry, 2016), and Instagram and Twitter are also very popular (Fulco, 2017); further, Taiwanese people use

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various social media and related applications. Taiwan's top messaging app, Line, has an 88% penetration rate and is the dominant messaging app (Institute for Information Industry, 2016). Blogging and micro-blogging (e.g., Twitter, Plurk) are also popular online activities for Taiwanese people (Singapore Management University, 2012).

PTT (ptt.com)—a non-commercial, open source bulletin board system—is Taiwan's 4th favorite social media site overall (Institute for Information Industry, 2016), and it is one of the country's top four sites among 12- to 24-year-olds; YouTube, Instagram, and Dcard are the others (Tien, & Wu, 2017). The site's 6 million registered users contribute to thirty thousand "bulletin boards" on topics ranging from computer programming to cross-cultural relationships to poetry. PTT's boards provide abundant and trusted sources of information, and its credibility has rendered it a long-lasting, competitive digital platform since 1995 (PTT.com, 1995). However, the site is not without controversy. Users on PTT are anonymous, and online bullying, including "doxing," is a real problem. At the same time, some users have had their accounts hacked, leading to concerns about user privacy (PTTPEDIA, 2012).

Dcard 's Approach to College-Based Social Media

College students are early and heavy adopters of social media, which they use for a variety of purposes, some of which differ from other demographics (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Yang, Pulido, and Yowei (2016) identify five major online activities among U.S. college

students: forum discussions, information browsing, information exchanging, information gathering, and blogging. Matsuba (2006) finds that college students in Canada use social media for two primary purposes: 1) mood management, such as gaining social support and information seeking; and 2) social compensation, such as relationship development and social recognition.

The Taiwanese social network, Dcard, has taken a somewhat unique approach to social media, focusing specifically on the college market and offering users a unique "friending" experience. Chin-Yo Chien, and Yu-Chin Lin, created Dcard as a final project at Taiwan National University (NTU) in 2011. The site was originally exclusive to NTU students, but it later expanded to other universities and become the first, and so far biggest, campus-based social network in Taiwan. Overall, Dcard ranks 8th in social media penetration rate in Taiwan and is one of the country's top four sites among 12- to 24-year-olds (The News Lens, 2017; Tien, & Wu, 2017).

Dcard, itself, has elements of other social networks. Like PTT, Dcard has various "boards," such as long-distance relationships, "foodie" culture, and LGBT topics that verified users can post to and respond to others' posts. Like Facebook, Dcard users can also "like" others' posts; however, Dcard distinguishes itself from other social networks in two important respects. First, it markets itself as a comfortable and trustworthy place to connect by restricting its users to university students. Users need to verify a university email, and that e-mail is verified by at least two employees at Dcard. This students-only policy helps enhance comfort

between users, as well as the quality of posts on the site. In doing so, it aims to mend the gap between on- and off-line socialization (Won & Huang, 2013).

The second difference—and most important one for this study—is the site's unique friending mechanism. Every day at midnight, Dcard recommends to each user one, seemingly random, new "friend." The site provides that individual's real, but partially anonymous profile, including school, major, hobbies, and profile photo. Moreover, users can read about that prospective friend's best experience in life, a hard life lesson, or favorite mottos. However, the names of each user are not be revealed, and the two cannot communicate and see each other's full profile until and unless they agree to become "friends" and send out friending invitations to each other. If one of them does not respond within 24 hours, the two cannot connect with each other on Dcard again. This friending mechanism allows its users to meet only one person each day on Dcard. In 2017, Dcard introduced a new interface for users' friending experiences, including a "wishing fountain." The wishing fountain allows users to filter the friend recommendations they received based on gender, university, and school major. When used, the new wishing fountain feature narrows the diversity of friends that a user might be recommended. But within those parameters, recommendations are still seemingly random.

Though not necessarily a tool for developing romantic relationships, Dcard's friending mechanism is intended to create cherished opportunities to meet "that individual" (Sun Yat-sen News, 2017). As Dcard founder, Chien explained "the D

in Dcard stands for destiny" (Sun Yat-sen News, 2017). This layer of destiny

colors Dcard with a cultural concept that is very important Chinese societies:

Yuan.

<div align="center">Yuan</div>

<u>Yuan's Evolution and Role in Interpersonal Relationships</u>

Yuan has its origins in the early Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D.9). It originally

referred to the edge of decoration on clothing (Shuowen Jiezi, A.D. 100);

however, it evolved to refer to a cultural concept—the belief that life experiences

are predetermined and derived from one's past.

Chinese beliefs, including Yuan, were strongly influenced by Buddhism

during the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–907) (Chang & Holt, 1991). Buddhist norms

emphasized the role of causation in Yuan, particularly in interpersonal

relationships. Chang and Holt (1991) described Yuan as the causative process

through which an individual's past behaviors producing encounters and

influencing an individual's relationships. Thus, belief in Yuan involves attributing

encounters and relationships to the causal role of people's past behaviors,

including one's deeds in previous lives (Chang, 2011; Chang & Holt, 1991. This

is consistent with the concept of Karma—the belief that past behaviors determine

the behavioral contexts and trajectories of action in the future (Dissanayake,

2013, p.17). These beliefs tend to be fatalistic, presuming "a predetermined

relationship with other things or individuals that are far beyond one's control"

(Cheng & Yau, 2006). Under the influence by Daoist principles, the optimal way

to deal with this superstitious power is to obey Yuan and mitigate the desire to change one's relationships or experiences (Hsu & Hwang, 2016).

The concept of Yuan also integrates with Confucian philosophy, including its focus on ethics in interpersonal relationships. Chinese cultural societies are known to be collectivistic and relationship-oriented, and in Confucian philosophy, reflecting on oneself is essential for reaching harmony in interpersonal relationships. Thus, while Yuan is believed to influence various life experiences, it is particularly associated with interpersonal relationships in culturally Chinese societies, where such "relationalism" is especially important. Given its presumed role in interpersonal relationships, Yuan is understood to facilitate precious, chance encounters and the conditions for people to meet (Chang & Holt, 1991). Since some individuals are presumed to "have Yuan" with one another, the initial anxiety and awkwardness associated with those new interpersonal interactions can be reduced. In this, Yuan can serve as a catalyst for interpersonal relationships (Li, 1995). Moreover, the element of fatalism in Yuan means that first impressions (and impression management) are crucial to relationship success or failure (Goodwin & Findlay, 1997). If there is no feeling of Yuan in the first impression, the relationship's prospects diminish. Yuan emphasizes the mercy of letting go and a peaceful mood at the end of a relationship (Hsu & Hwang, 2016). In this case, Yuan also serves as a rationalization for relationships that either fail or do not develop. Thus, Yuan can be both a catalyst and a hindrance to developing relationships. For instance, Li (1982) found that

patients would predict whether their illness could be cured on the basis of the Yuan with their doctors. Chang and Jou (2004) indicated that the belief of Yuan had a positive influence in romantic relationship satisfaction.

<u>Yuan's Adoption among Different Demographics</u>

While culturally Chinese societies, such as Taiwan, have transformed rapidly in recent decades, Yuan is still a widely held belief. Indeed, Cheng and Yau (2006) found that more than ten percent of Chinese pop songs having the word Yuan in the lyrics. However, as culturally Chinese societies have evolved, so, too, have understandings of Yuan—particularly among younger demographics. Specifically, the Buddhist fatalism of Yuan has given way to a belief, for some, that such unseen powers, no longer fully dictate the relationship outcomes (Yang, 2005). Yang and Ho (1988) found that individuals who believe they can adapt to change are less inclined to attribute the formation or dissolution of relationships to Yuan. These individuals are also less likely to believe that the absence of Yuan in the initial impression is an inhibitor to interpersonal interactions. Similarly, Bond (1991) found that students in China believe that their values are neither identical with traditional Chinese, seeing Yuan as a rigid norm, nor different from Westerners, pursuing individualism (Bond, 1991).

Yang and Ho (1988) explored Taiwanese college students' views about Yuan and interpersonal relationships. These authors found that younger generations comprehend and adopt Yuan in their relationships differently than older generations in that they were less likely to rationalize negative outcomes as

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a function of Yuan. Moreover, they attributed non-interpersonal relationships, such as one's health condition, as less attributable to Yuan. Fu and Hung (2011) surveyed 1,920 undergraduate students in Taiwan and found that their belief in Yuan is still firm; however, those students considered Yuan more as a guideline in interpersonal interactions, instead of an unchangeable fate. Thus, Yuan is no longer taken as a norm to obey, but as a provider of opportunities for change.

Lee (1995) contends that Chinese belief in fate now contains both passive fatalism and active voluntarism, creating, together, a form of "fatalistic voluntarism." In other words, when faced with unpleasant or unexpected life events, belief in Yuan encourages individuals to "do all that is humanly possible and leaving the rest to heaven" (Wilson & Tang, 2011, p.137). Lee (1995) asserts that belief in Yuan leads to a positive outlook on life: While the fatalistic element in Yuan would make people accept certain events, its voluntaristic element would encourage them to actively pursue changes. In this sense, passive fatalism is a coping mechanism that involves accepting encounters as predestined and unchallengeable. Active voluntarism, on the other hand, involves adapting flexibility, to psychological discomfort (Cheng, 2003).

Cultural psychology and Yuan

Cultural psychology describes interactions between culture and people, and it emphasizes the mutual influences between human-beings and their culture from the perspective of social constructivism (Heine & Ruby, 2010). Social

construction is the process through which individuals construct meanings by interacting with others and the surrounding social context (Gonzalez, 2015).

Social constructivism contends that people are active cultural influencers, rather than passive receivers of information and ideas. In the framework of cultural psychology, "people create, apply, reproduce, transform, and transmit their cultural routines in their daily social interactions" (Snibbe, 2003, para. 10). At the same time, behaviors reflect broader cultural practices, rituals, meanings. This framework guides the present study's understanding of Yuan as a cultural construct that operates dynamically in diverse contexts. As societies and cultures change, so does Yuan, its understandings, and use. Thus, cultural psychology explains the importance in exploring individuals' understandings of Yuan and its influence on their use of Dcard.

<u>Yuan as an Attribution</u>

In culturally Chinese societies, Yuan is believed to influence interpersonal relationships, but it is also to explain those interactions. Thus, according to attribution theory, Yuan can be seen as an explanatory framework. A social constructivist perspective, "attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, para. 2). In other words, attribution is the psychological process of looking for a cause in order to make sense of an event or a behavior in a culture.

Attribution theory contends that individuals comprehend and construct the meaning of events or behaviors by attributing them to causal factors (Heider, 1958). Further, attributions can be internal or external. An internal attribution explains an event, or a behavior based on internal features, such as personality, beliefs, or motives. External attributions explain a cause as a function of outside forces, which are situational (Heider, 1958). Kelley (1967) explains that these two types of attributions can exist and function together when individuals try to make sense of an event or a behavior. Furthermore, attributions can feature stability and controllability (Weiner, 1972). Stability refers to whether the cause is stable or may change over time, and controllability is the ability of an individual to control the causal process.

Chang and Holt (1991) identify attribution theory as a useful tool for understanding perceptions of Yuan. Through the lens of attribution theory, Yuan is understood as an external, less controllable, but stable and credible force in relationships, which functions as a social norm (Sun, 2008). However, as Yuan evolves and is adopted by different demographics, external, fatalistic attributions are increasingly integrated with internal, voluntarist attributions, as captured in Lee's (1995) concept of "fatalistic voluntarism" (Heger, 2015). This point deserves further attention. Here, Yuan is not perceived as a direct cause of an event or a behavior, but rather, as an indirect, and situational attribution which accelerates or inhibits the happenings (Asante & Chai, 2013). In this, Yuan

functions as a secondary attribution through which individuals comprehend encounters.

<div align="center">Online Relationships</div>

Forming Relationships Online

The Internet and social media have become important spaces for building online relationships, including romantic relationships. The perception of online dating has grown more positive in recent years, and in 2016, fifteen percent of U.S. adults reported that they use dating websites or apps to look for partners. Sixty-six percent of online daters report meeting people from a dating site, and ten percent say they have found serious romantic partners and developed committed relationships (Pew Research Center, 2016). Building relationships through online dating sites is also common in Taiwan. Seventy percent of college students in Taiwan reported that they use dating sites or apps for friending (Hu, 2010). Fifty-nine percent of them hope to expand personal networks and seventeen of them seek to build romantic relationships (INSIGHTXPLORE, 2009).

Knapp's (1978) relational stage model identifies five stages of relationship formation: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. Uncertainty reduction theory describes and predicts the initial interaction in interpersonal communications (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). According to uncertainty reduction theory (URT), uncertainty reduction and self-disclosure are essential elements in the initiating online relationships (Ben-Ze, 2003). Although social media are rarely used to meet potential partners, individuals often browse

others' social media profiles to gather information, about an individual's identity and social history. The significance of information- seeking behaviors lies in helping to reduce uncertainties and deepening the understanding of online interactants (Fox, Warber & Makstaller, 2013). More, twenty percent of users report making their public social media profile more appealing in order to create positive perceptions (Smith & Anderson, 2016). By adjusting their public profiles, users can reduce uncertainty, "break the ice," and engage in conversation. This can invite more self-disclosure, accelerating the depth of online interactions and mending the loss of verbal cues (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

Maintaining Relationships Derived Online

Although online relationships are increasingly common, online interpersonal communication is not seamless. Online interactions often lack vocal and facial cues and body proximity, which are essential elements in developing emotional dependency, constructing shared value and meaning, and most importantly, establishing mutual understanding (Stafford, 2005).

However, social information processing theory (SIP) suggests that the absence of non-verbal cues can be overcome with time. That is to say, information is gathered at slower rate in online relationships, but it is still gathered, nonetheless (Griffin, 2006). For instance, Jiang and Hancock (2013) found that behavioral adaptation, such as, frequent intimate (emotional) self-disclosure, can ultimately enhance the satisfaction in romantic relationships. Whitty and Gavin (2001) found higher self-disclosure can benefit the interactions

with online partners and contribute to the construction of emotional supports and mutual friendships. Huang (2013) found that individuals who released highly accurate information about themselves tend to have greater relationship satisfaction.

Online interactions can develop into face-to-face interpersonal relationships. Parks and Floyd (1996) reported that one-third of respondents met their online partners in person, but some relationships failed to continue after the initial face-to-face interaction. The first meeting is usually arranged in one week after they met their online encounter (Whitty & Carr, 2006). While meeting someone in one week may be considered hasty, Ramirez et al. (2015) suggest that extended online interaction can produce negative outcomes, due to the potential of developing an idealized mental construct of partners. Indeed, brief online communication before an initial meeting predicted stronger relationship satisfaction.

Dcard's Architecture and Its Relationship Implications

The digital interfaces or "architectures" of social networks, such as their algorithms and default settings, play important roles in shaping users' behaviors and experiences (van Dijck, 2013). For instance, a social network's profile interface can facilitate or encourage different kinds of self-presentation, which is especially important in the friending process. Indeed, van Dijck (2013) argues that social networking sites like Facebook and Linkedin made conscious changes

to their interfaces in recent years, encouraging more self-presentation by users, and more uniformity across profiles.

Dcard's friending profile encourages users to reveal their best experience in life, a hard life lesson, or favorite mottos. In doing so, Dcard users can not only connect to new friends but also sculpt a persona. Besides it's friending profile options, Dcard's architecture involves algorithmic friend recommendations that are not intended to trigger as many as connectives possible like other social network sites (Beer, 2009). Limiting connections to one per day may shape the way users engage in evaluating, initiating, and maintaining relationships on Dcard. Thus, Dcard's unique friending experience, including its profile options and algorithmic suggestions, are assumed to impact the formation and maintenance of relationships on Dcard.

Objectives of Current Studies

The existing literature suggests that the meaning of Yuan has transformed as it has been adopted by different demographics. However, current studies tend to decontextualize Yuan, focusing less on understandings of Yuan in among specific groups and in specific contexts, which social constructivism would suggest is important. These decontextualized studies have tended to rely on quantitative approaches, particularly surveys. Further, Yuan has largely been examined in offline contexts, despite the increasing pervasiveness of online relationships. In any case, the purpose of this research has generally been to measure attitudes and relationship experiences among people with varying levels

of belief in Yuan in order to better predict relationship outcomes. Uncertainty reduction theory and social information processing are common theoretical perspectives in this literature.

Based on the current state of existing literature and the research gaps perceived by the researcher, the role of Yuan in social media use, particularly the initiation and maintenance of relationships deserves more attention. Moreover, changing cultural beliefs about Yuan among younger demographics, and their impact on interpersonal relationships, should be examined. Given its users' demographics, and site's unique friending mechanism—which was designed with "destiny" in mind—Dcard provides a useful entry point for exploring these processes. Thus, this study seeks to answer two research questions:

1) how do Taiwanese Dcard users understand the culturally Chinese concept of Yuan?

2) how do those users' understand the role of Yuan in their use of Dcard— particularly the site's unique friending mechanism.

The following chapter describes a methodology for answering these questions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Yuan is a traditional concept in culturally Chinese societies, including Taiwan. This study examines Dcard users' understandings of Yuan and its role in their use of this social network. To explore these processes, the researcher conducted semi-structured long interviews with 15 Dcard users (detailed demographic information about the sample is provided in Chapter 4). These participants were recruited from Dcard's "Learning" board, through classes at the university, and through snowball sampling. The researcher then organized and interpreted those interview data using thematic analysis—a flexible, qualitative approach. This chapter describes and justifies these methodological choices.

Competing Approaches for Studying Media Use

Semi-structured long interviews are not the only method available for studying media use. Researchers often use surveys and ethnography, too. Surveys provide an efficient, relatively low cost means of gathering data about large, dispersed groups (Neuman, 2011), and that data can be quickly analyzed using computer software. However, surveys are limited in their ability to illuminate contexts, discern nuance, or shed light on subjective experiences, such as people's cultural beliefs and practices (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015). Moreover, following up with respondents for clarification can be cumbersome (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008). As the purpose of

the study is to make sense of users' understandings of Yuan and its role in their use of Dcard, a dialogue between researcher and participants is essential so participants can put their experiences in their own words and provide clarification where it is needed.

Ethnography is another method for studying media use. It entails observing or even participating in a culture in order to describe and interpret its cultural beliefs and practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In doing so, ethnographers can come to understand participants' subjective experiences, behavior nuances, and the role of contextual factors (Silverman, 2015). Nevertheless, firsthand use of Dcard and observations of people as they use the site may not reveal participants' understandings of Yuan its role in Dcard use. Moreover, observing participants' activities on Dcard may involve privacy issues.

Alternative methodologies considered, this study used semi-structured long interviews to gain users' insights into their understandings of Yuan and its role in their use of Dcard. Semi-structured long interviews employ open-ended and flexible questions to gain access to an interviewee's views and experiences (Silverman, 2015). Through dialogue with participants, researchers can learn the rich meanings behind behaviors, discover diverse views about phenomena, and clarify the nuances of personal experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The nature of semi-structured long interviews situates understandings in a fuller cultural and social context, facilitating what Geertz (1973) describes as a "thick description." Unlike surveys, interviews provide access to participants' subjective experiences.

Through dialogues, Dcard users could share understandings of Yuan and their experiences friending on the Dcard platform.

Moreover, interviews allowed the researcher to make sense of and interpret processes that cannot be observed directly (Patton, 1990). In this study, the researcher could not directly observe the role Yuan plays on Dcard in that such process unfolds privately and largely in the minds of users. But in interviews, participants have the chance to articulate stories, processes, and perceptions in their own words. Specifically, through dialogues with participants, the researcher could ask questions that elicit participants' accounts of experiences in their own words, enable follow-up questions and clarifications, and use probes to explore intriguing tangents while staying on topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although interview data are not objective descriptions of thought, experiences or events, they have a referential function to real subjective processes (Briggs, 1986). Thus, this study used semi-structured long interviews to understand the role of Yuan in the use of the social network, Dcard.

Sampling and Recruitment

The population for this study is Dcard users, and the researcher was particularly interested in the experiences and understandings of Dcard users who use the site's "friending" feature. Since only Dcard account holders can post, interact, and friend other users, participants had to be Dcard account holders (which requires school email verification). Additionally, given this study's

interested in perceptions of Yuan among younger demographics, all participants had to be Taiwanese and college students, which is Dcard's market niche.

To recruit participants from the Dcard population, the researcher used convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Convenience sampling involves the selection of participants based on their availability to the researcher (Lindlof, 1995). Specifically, the researcher recruited participants through two convenient sources: 1) a post on Dcard's "Learning" board; and 2) classes at the university. Dcard limits the number of posts a user can publish (Dcard, 2016), so the researcher had to be selective in posting recruitment messages. Specifically, the researcher published a recruitment post on Dcard's "Learning" board. The "Learning" board is a space that welcomes questions and reflections on one's learning processing. Additionally, the researcher recruited participants through Practical English classes at the university, Taiwan. The professors agreed to give the researcher a list of student emails to reach out them for initial contact, and participants received incentives, such as free snacks or free meals, from the researcher for participating in the study.

When potential participants responded to the recruitment message, the researcher asked them screening questions to ensure they met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix D). These questions included: "Are you Taiwanese college student?" "How often do you use Dcard?" And "Are you able to meet the researcher in Taipei?" If the potential participant was a Taiwanese college student who used Dcard at least once every three days and could meet the

researcher for an interview, then the researcher would schedule an interview. At the end of each interview, snowball sampling was employed to locate more participants, as needed. Initial participants were asked to identify other potential participants from their personal networks (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010; Silverman, 2015).

Through these sampling techniques, the researcher recruited fifteen Dcard users to participate in semi-structured long interviews. While small compared to the sample sizes of surveys, 15 participants is an appropriate number for understanding a complex set of cultural beliefs and practices from individuals' perspectives (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The purpose of the study was not to gather surface-level knowledge about all Dcard users' beliefs and practices, or even a representative sample. Rather, it was to understand—in a rich and meaningful way—how individual make sense of Yuan and its role in their Dcard use from their perspectives. For these purposes, long interviews with 15 participants is preferable to more cursory data from hundreds or thousands of participants.

One key limitation of convenience and snowball sampling is the risk of recruiting a homogeneous sample that lacks diversity in experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2007). For instance, in this study, Dcard users who believe in Yuan may have been more interested in participating than those that do not believe in it. In this, the sample may not reflect the beliefs of the Dcard population as a whole. Likewise, by recruiting participants from the Dcard

"Learning" board and a university class, the sample may be more homogenous in their demographics and interests than the Dcard population. That said, some oversampling in these areas is also a strength. To understand college students' views of Yuan, it helps to talk to college students that believe in Yuan.

One way to address the problem of homogeneity in small, non-probability samples is through maximum variation sampling (Palys, 2008). This involves selecting interviewees that differ in key demographic respects in order to capture a diversity of experiences and perspectives relevant to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 1990). Given this study's attention to friending and relationships, and the important role of Yuan in interpersonal communication and romantic relationships, the researcher sought maximum variation in the areas of gender identity and relationship status. Doing so may contribute distinct insights on Yuan's role in Dcard use. Miles and Huberman (1994) also encourage including deviant or extreme cases to diversify non-probability samples. Thus, the researcher worked to include participants who are Dcard users but do not friend. The experience of friending with others through Dcard's mechanism is a key focus of this research, and it was important to talk to people who use this feature; however, Dcard users who are never involved in the friending may have insightful perspectives on Yuan's role in Dcard use—either among other users or in other activities on the sites. Through these strategies, the researcher sought to mitigate the shortcomings of convenience and snowball sampling by capturing

heterogeneity in the population and documenting a range of experiences and understandings among Dcard users.

Data Collection

This study used semi-structured long interviews to collect data concerning Dcard users' understandings of Yuan and its role in Dcard user. Semi-structured long interviews involve a loose interview protocol and open-ended questions, allowing the researcher to maximize the insights from a limited number of dialogues and under time constraints (MacCracken, 2000). The researcher posed questions, but limited her own involvement, allowing users to share their perspectives on Yuan and its role in Dcard use. In doing so, the researchers could come to an understanding of Yuan's role in Dcard use from the participants' perspectives, as well as any patterns in responses among participants.

Interviews were roughly 90 minutes in length, and participants had the choice of conducting the interviews at a coffee shop, a public library, or—if they are students—a classroom at the university. Each location provided a quiet, comfortable space for conversation. Before the interview started, the researcher briefly introduced herself and engaged the interviewee in informal conversation. This was intended to build rapport, which can positively influence the interview process by building trust between the researcher and participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher then introduced the study and asked participants to read and sign an informed consent form. A reminder of audio-recording was given before the interview started. The record device was placed visibly on the table or

hidden depending on participants' preferences. Participants were informed that they could request to stop recording at any time, and they could revise the transcription after the interview.

The researcher guided the interview based on the interview protocol (see Appendix A). After basic demographic questions, the researcher asked topic-specific questions relevant to the research question. First, the researcher started with the general questions regarding Dcard use, such as, when do participants become the users of Dcard or what are the purposes of using this social site. Then, the researcher focused on the users' experiences with Dcard's friending mechanism and the relationships derived from it. The researcher was also interested in the process of friending from reviewing friend's suggestion to accepting invitations to becoming friend. Lastly, the researcher asked users about their understanding of and belief in Yuan, as well as its role in the use of Dcard, if any. Specifically, the researcher focused on the relationship between user's understandings of Yuan and their uses of and experiences with Dcard.

The researcher worked to be a good listener—non-judgmental, sincere, and open-minded to participants' responses from interviewees. The researcher also worked to keep the conversation on topic; however, when participants offered unexpected insights, she would ask probing questions to further explore those unanticipated ideas. At the end of the interview, the researcher asked participants if they were willing to receive a call to clarify any content from the interview. As part of the snowball sampling technique, the researcher also asked

participants if they were willing to share names and contact information for others that may be willing to participate in the study.

Pilot Interviews

In order to collect useful data and ensure a smooth interview process for participants, it was beneficial to conduct pilot interviews. A pilot interview is a small-scale version of the anticipated study in order to guide the actual development of a research plan (Prescott and Soeken, 1989; Buckingham & Saunders, 2004). For instance, pilot interviews can ensure the informed consent form is easy to follow and the questions in the interview protocol are clear and effective. Most importantly, the researcher can tailor and sharpen the interview process and questions in order to effectively answer the research question. Moreover, conducting a pilot study is extraordinary useful for the researcher, as a novice investigator, to prepare interview techniques and further enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Padgett, 2008).

The researcher conducted face-to-face pilot interviews with two male Dcard users, who were recruited through the researcher's personal network. One interviewee had engaged in the friending process on Dcard and the other had not. The researcher found that the participant with no experience friending on Dcard still provided insights on Yuan; however, he lacked perspective on Yuan's role in Dcard use. Moreover, pilot interviewees identified potentially noteworthy processes concerning Yuan's role in Dcard use, such as randomness and anonymity.

In terms of interview process, one participant was sensitive about the recording device. Therefore, the researcher considered using her cell phone record, instead. The length of two interviews also exceeded the anticipated 90 minutes. Thus, the researcher made sure, in future interviews, to pay extra attention to the time allocated in different topics in order to make sure core questions relevant to the research question were addressed. As Yuan is an abstract concept, the researcher also recognized that it would be valuable to have participants describe Yuan in examples to conceptualize it.

Transcription and Data Analysis

To transcribe the interviews, the researcher first listened to the interview recordings to familiarize herself with the data. Then, she followed the "intelligent verbatim" approach to produce a clear and readable transcript (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997). This approach does not include all utterances, such as verbal pauses or false starts.

After all interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed those transcripts using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting "themes," which are meaningful and patterned aspects of a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In doing so, qualitative researchers can identify common threads and core ideas across those data that help answer the research questions (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Thematic analysis is a flexible approach, useful for different types of qualitative data and compatible with different theoretical frameworks (Sullivan,2008). Additionally, thematic

analysis is useful when examining a novel phenomenon, such as Yuan's role in Dcard use (Boyatzis, 1998).

Grounded theory analysis (GTA) is widely employed in analyzing textual materials, such as, interview transcripts, and there is a considerable overlap between grounded theory and thematic analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Unlike GTA, though, thematic analysis does not necessarily seek to generate original theories from data. Rather, thematic analysis takes applicable theories into account during interpretation. For this study, the researcher considered theories and information from the literature review, such as attribution theory, uncertainty reduction theory, and perspectives on digital architectures, to help make sense of interviewees' understandings of Yuan and its role in their Dcard use.

As a qualitative approach, thematic analysis can help a researcher identify meaningful patterns in the ways participants understand, experience, and talk about a given phenomenon, as well as relationships between those themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This study would not ignore the prevalence of each theme and subtheme across the data; however, a prevalent theme is not the same thing as a significant one. On the contrary, the importance of themes necessarily lies in whether themes capture processes related to the research question.

The study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to thematic analysis. First, the researcher produced and familiarized herself with data. She created the interview protocol, hosted the interviews, listened to the interview

audio, and produced the transcripts. Thus, through production of the data, the researcher was familiar with the data, its context, and even some initial patterns in the data. Then, the researcher read the interview transcripts as a whole and created memos noting any meaningful chunks and potential patterns across the data. The significance of memos lies in triggering the analytic insights (Maxwell, 2013).

The second phase of thematic analysis involves what Lindlof and Taylor (2010) called reduction. Here, the researcher sorts, recognizes, categorizes, and even prioritizes data, physically or conceptually. This phase began with initial coding—briefly identifying and summarizing the interview transcripts in order to create meaningful and systematic chunks of data. Following Howitt and Cramer (2005), the researcher read through two or three lines of transcript at a time and identified the key topic or topics in these sentences. Furthermore, the researcher coded all textual materials, and, if needed, coded the same segment more than once. The intention is not to complicate the data analysis process, but to "fracture" the data (Strauss, 1987).

Importantly, there are two approaches to initial coding: data-driven and theory-led. This study employed both. Data-driven approaches involve coding based on a careful reading of the interview data, itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For instance, if a participant noted using Dcard to friend, that chunk of data would be coded "friending on Dcard." Of course, no researcher is a blank slate, so a second, theory-led approach to coding is guided by relevant theories. For

instance, having reviewed the literature on attribution theory, the researcher coded some chunks of data based on the dimensions of attribution theory, including internal or external attribution, and the stability or controllability of attribution. In this approach, when the researcher noticed chunks of the transcript that were relevant to a particular theory, she coded them as such.

The third phase in thematic analysis is to search for the themes, and, if possible, sub-themes, based on the list of the initial coding. A theme, again, is a meaningful and patterned aspect of a data set that is relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012). Themes are produced by combining or collapsing codes that are related to the research question in a similar way. Different ways of sorting or joining codes affect the presentation and interpretation of themes. Thus, themes are generated from the researcher's engagement with the data, rather than actively emerging from in the process, themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher reviewed the coded data to identify patterns and similarities across the data set. For instance, the researcher noticed clusters of similar codes when participants talked about the seemingly random friend recommendations they received on Dcard and other anonymous dating sites. So, the researcher then constructed the theme—randomness.

The fourth phase involves refinement of those tentative themes. Here, the researcher looked for similarities, differences, and relationships among themes, and then combined and split themes including into sub-themes—as necessary.

Themes that did not help answer the research question were discarded. Moreover, the refinement process moved on to the next level, which involved considering how these themes present and work across the entire dataset. For instance, the researcher looked into the how users of Dcard understand the role of the concept of Yuan and then examined those themes in the context of Dcard use. The researcher also took an iterative approach, moving back and forth among the data, themes, and interpretations in order to continually scrutinize and refine the analysis. This refinement process continued until the themes described all relevant parts of the data, and all relevant parts of the data were captured in the themes. This is the point of the conceptual saturation, when further coding and classifying is no longer needed (Harden & Thomas, 2008).

In the fifth stage—theme definition and refining—the researcher considered the meaning of the themes, their relationships to other themes, and their relevance to the research question. Sub-themes are beneficial in explicating each theme (Howitt & Cramer, 2005). They provide the theme with structure, increase its accuracy, and enrich its meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher wrote an analysis for each theme, including: the theme's label and definition, a description of each theme, that theme's relationship to other themes and sub-themes, and an explanation of how the theme relates to the research questions.

The last step in thematic analysis is the report. The report is a logical, accurate, and coherent story of the study supported by themes and sub-themes.

This involves not just defining and describing each theme, but also illustrating those themes through exemplars and examples. The researcher used extracts and vivid examples to richly illustrate each theme described, and to answer the research question. The report also provides an opportunity to justify the methodological design and discuss the analysis in the light of the previous literature review.

Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative studies, the subjectivity of the researcher is inevitable and even embraced. Indeed, the operative metaphor for qualitative research is "researcher as instrument." In other words, it is the researcher, who is unavoidably subjective, that produces and interprets the data. As Miles (1979) explains, qualitative researchers use "a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable" (p. 597).

Thick description is a way to enhance the trustworthy for interpretations made by researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It refers to providing sufficient details about a phenomenon by providing rich, nuanced descriptions of cultural and social relationships and putting them in context (Holloway, 1997). This helps to contextualize the people or sites studied, and the data generated from them. In this study the researcher provides not only a rich nuanced description of Dcard users' understandings and experiences, but also the interview and analysis processes that generated those data.

Reflexivity is another pivotal and indispensable element in the "researcher as instrument" model. Reflexivity refers to the influence of a researcher's predisposition, background, motivations, and personal or professional experiences to a study (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley & Stevenson, 1999). Such subjectivity is inevitable; however, through self-reflection, qualitative researchers can enhance the trustworthiness through their interpretations and aid readers' comprehension of the findings (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Reflexivity reminds the researcher of her presence in the study and provides opportunities to think twice about every decision and its implications.

For this study, the researcher was born and raised in Taiwan and is deeply immersed in Taiwanese and Chinese culture. With this ethnic and cultural background, the researcher is intimately familiar with Chinese cultural concepts, including the concept of Yuan. The researcher has a firm belief in Yuan and it is deeply rooted in the researcher's life experiences, especially in interpersonal communication. The researcher is curious about the connection between this traditional concept, Yuan, and the practices of social media users, including on Dcard. Furthermore, the researcher was a heavy Dcard user in in college and relies on it to stay on current on news and events. Therefore, the researcher has sufficient knowledge of Dcard and its use; however, she has never used Dcard to friend, which is the central focus of both Dcard and this study. The researcher did ongoing reflective commentary throughout the research process to enhance her

trustworthiness by acknowledging her position as a researcher and relationships to the phenomena under investigation.

Ethics

Privacy is an important consideration when researchers ask, record, and report information about individuals' experiences and perspectives (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015). It is a researcher's ethical responsibility to minimize harm by protecting individuals' privacy. Moreover, doing so can also encourage participants to be forthcoming during interviews. As such, neither the interview recording, nor the transcript was or will be shared with others. When reporting results, the researcher used pseudonyms and worked to ensure that any personally identifying information was not included in the report. These practices were communicated to participants in an easy-to-read informed consent form (see Appendix B). The informed consent form also communicated to participants that the study is voluntary, and that they can withdraw at any point without negative consequences. Moreover, participants had the right to ask researchers to remove their data from the study prior to publication. All participants were treated with respect and equally throughout the process.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study aims to answer two interrelated questions: 1) how do Taiwanese Dcard users understand the culturally Chinese concept of Yuan? and 2) how do those users understand the role of Yuan in their use of Dcard— particularly the site's unique friending mechanism. To answer these questions, the researcher travelled to Taiwan in the Summer of 2018 and conducted 15 interviews with Taiwanese Dcard users. Eight participants were recruited from Dcard's "Learning" board, 3 were from the university, and 4 were identified by other interviewees through snowball sampling.

Though this study does not seek to generalize about all Dcard users' attitudes or experiences, such convenience and snowball sampling techniques do raise the possibility of unrepresentative data. Thus, the researcher sought maximum variation (Palys, 2008) among participants with respect to a few key demographic and behavioral characteristics, specifically gender identity, relationship status, and engagement in friending on Dcard. Among the 15 interviewees, 9 identified themselves as female and 6 identified as male. Participants ranged from 19 to 25 years-of-age. All described themselves as frequent Dcard users, using the site at least three times a week. Eleven participants had friended through Dcard, while 3 of them no longer do out of respect for their romantic partners. In terms of relationship status, 7 identified

themselves as single, and 8 were in a relationship. Two participants met their romantic partners through Dcard and had been dating more than one year.

This chapter's findings are organized in two sections each corresponding to the study's two research questions. In the first section, participants' understandings of Yuan are organized around two themes—relationalism and causation. Relationalism refers to participants' understanding of Yuan as factor in relationships—particularly positive, interpersonal ones. Causation refers to participants' views about how Yuan influences those relationships. Some participants see Yuan influencing relationships in a predetermined, fatalistic fashion. Others suggest that individuals have a degree of control over their relationships or Yuan's role in them.

Having established Dcard users' understandings of Yuan, section two then examines how users make sense of Yuan's role in Dcard use—particularly use of the site's friending mechanism. In this section, the researcher examines three key moments in the Dcard friending process: 1) the experience of receiving a friend request; 2) the choice of whether to connect with that user or not; and 3) the initiation and maintenance of relationships through Dcard. The aspects of Yuan reviewed in section 1 (i.e., relationalism, fatalism, controllability) each shape the ways in which users engage with Dcard's friending process in section 2. More, the randomness and anonymity built into Dcard's friending mechanism influences the ways these processes unfold. Thus, the following section begins with an analysis of how participants comprehend the concept of Yuan, in general.

Participants' Understandings of Yuan: Relationalism

Yuan's Ubiquitous, Life-long Influences

According to the existing literature, Yuan is understood as "a predetermined relationship with other things or individuals that is far beyond one's control" (Cheng & Yau, 2006). If Yuan can influence "relationships with other things or individuals," then it can conceivably influence just about anything. Likewise, all of this study's participants saw Yuan as lifelong and ubiquitous, influencing various experiences in one's life. As Jared explained, "You can find Yuan everywhere. When we are born, we are associated with Yuan. Yuan is correlated to families, friends, jobs, and luck."

Jared used the metaphor of "a fish in water" to illustrate Yuan's omnipresence. As he explained, "There are two fish in the water and one fish asks the other fish "what is water?" The end …" According to this metaphor, Yuan is to human-beings as water is to a fish. Like water to a fish, Yuan is all around us, pervasively shaping our life experiences in often imperceptible ways. The metaphor is not perfect, though. Importantly, fish cannot ponder over water and its role in their lives, but people can conceptualize their relationships and the forces shaping them.

Yuan's Role in Interpersonal Relationships

Though all participants saw Yuan as ubiquitous, participants overwhelmingly focused on Yuan's role in interpersonal relationships, especially romantic relationships and friendships. This understanding of Yuan—as a factor

in relationships, specifically—is referred to here as "relationalism" (Hsu & Hwang, 2016), and relationalism was a dominant theme in the interviews. For instance, Judy indicated Yuan's presence in various relationships, including romantic relationships, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. As she describes:

Someone and I become friends. Someone and I work for the same institution and we are colleagues. You and I are sitting here because of our mutual friend. My boyfriend and I met on Dcard. Getting him as a recommended friend is Yuan and our agreement to become friends through the friending mechanism deepened Yuan. All these encounters are because of Yuan.

Some participants, like Erik, did see Yuan as pertaining to romantic relationships more than other kinds; however, other participants, like Jenny disagreed: "I believe Yuan is particularly prominent in friendships rather than with romantic partners. Mostly, friendship tends to be stronger and lasts relatively longer, at least in my experiences." Despite this disagreement, both Erik and Jenny still viewed Yuan through the lens of relationalism—as a factor in interpersonal relationships. Further, each quote also indicates that Yuan is associated with positive relationship experiences.

Yuan's Association with Positivity and Affection. Many participants associated Yuan more with positive relationship experiences than negative ones. This is because Yuan pertains to the level of affection people have toward one another. As Ray explained, "Yuan is involved in describing people I like. Yuan is positive." This association of Yuan with affection is evident in the way that

participants described positive relationships as those that "have Yuan." For instance, Carla said that, "I may meet lots of people in a day, but I may be interested in only one of them. For me, I have Yuan with a specific person, instead of having Yuan with every encounter in that day." Alternatively, Ray used the phrase "No Yuan" to describe a relationship that had come to an end.

This association of Yuan with positivity and affection was evident in one participant's translation of the word into English and back into Chinese. As Ray explained, "Yuan reminds me of an English word 'serendipity', and when serendipity is translated literally in Chinese, it means 'a wonderful destined Yuan' which shows that participants can't help but look for an English word with a positive connotation."

Yuan's Role in Relationships with Non-living Entities

While participants overwhelmingly discussed Yuan in the context of interpersonal relationships, more than half contended that Yuan influences people's relationships with non-living entities, too, such as a decoration or a disease. As Wendy explained, "If I go shopping and see a decoration that I would love to buy, but I don't have enough cash. When I see this thing next time, I will definitely buy it because I feel the Yuan between that entity and me." Similarly, Pauline believed that Yuan shapes health outcomes: "My mom has been fighting with cancer for years. I believe it is resulted from Yuan. I mean her Yuan with disease and the health condition."

To summarize, participants understood Yuan as a ubiquitous factor in relationships; however, they primarily thought of it as an influence in interpersonal relationships—particularly positive ones. This first theme of "relationalism" concerns the aspects of life that Yuan pertains to. It does not explain how Yuan works, though. Thus, the next section explores a second major theme in participants' understanding of Yuan— "causation."

Participants' Understandings of Yuan: Causation

Attribution theory concerns how people arrive at causal explanations for events. It assumes that people attribute life experiences to causal factors—some internal to the individual, some external—and it examines the psychological processes behind those attributions (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991). All participants understood Yuan as a determinant factor in relationships, including their formation, maintenance, and dissolution. As Judy explained, "I would never have used Dcard to friend if I did not break up with my ex-boyfriend. Then, I met my new boyfriend on Dcard. Yuan has something to do with cause and effect." Judy believed that the break-up with her ex-boyfriend resulted in her finding of a new boyfriend on Dcard, and she characterized Yuan as a causal force in that process, with past behavior impacting her current relationship.

Participants arrived at such causal explanations by comprehending Yuan in two contradictory ways. Some saw Yuan as an external causal force—one that fatalistically predetermines relationships. However, others saw people as having more agency over interpersonal relationships, even if Yuan was involved. In

other words, participants perceived people to have a degree of internal, causal control over their relationships and Yuan's role in them. Thus, the theme of causation, is divided into two sub-themes: 1) the perceived fatalism of Yuan; and 2) the perceived controllability of relationships and Yuan.

<u>Yuan's Fatalism</u>

As explained in the literature review, Yuan is commonly understood as a predetermining influence on relationships (Yau, 1994). Indeed, all participants understood Yuan as a force that fatalistically predetermined relationships in unpredictable ways that participants have little-to-no control over. For instance, Alice said, "Human efforts are useless! Yuan is simply not changeable. I am destined to meet my boyfriend on Dcard and meant to be together even though I did not expect that." Likewise, Wendy believed that Yuan makes any efforts to intervene in relationships fruitless: "I don't think human-beings are capable of changing Yuan even though lots of efforts are made. The change may be temporary or in vain." That participants perceived Yuan as an external force— one that is beyond human control—is also evident in the metaphors that participants used to describe Yuan's impact on relationships. For example, Jenny compared life to the unpredictability of meeting someone on a train:

Some may get on the train with you and get off earlier than you. You never know the same person may get on the train at some point in the future. People come and leave your lives without expectations. We are just dictated by Yuan.

Yuan's Comparison to Destiny. Given this fatalistic view of Yuan, it is unsurprising that many participants compared Yuan to destiny. As Wendy said, "I believe Yuan and destiny are closely related. They are similar but distinctive ... and have mutual influences on each other." Despite their similarities, there are some nuanced differences between destiny and Yuan, as it was understood by participants. First, participants focused on Yuan as a force impacting relationships, specifically, while destiny may determine any aspect of a person's life. Second, because Yuan pertains to relationships, it concerns at least two interactants, while destiny is generally seen as an individual's burden. Third, Yuan is understood as a good thing for relationships, while destiny may shape one's life experiences in either good or bad ways.

Participant's explications of these two concepts illustrate that they are intertwined, yet distinctive. As Amber described "Destiny is like a script for one's life but Yuan is an unknown force leading human to move on. Destiny is a broader concept facilitating one's life but Yuan dictates relationships." Ray contended that Yuan usually described a positive relationship while destiny can refer to either positive or negative life: "Destiny can influence one's life in a either good or bad way. I always use Yuan to describe the relationships that I enjoyed."

Yuan's Relationship to Religion and Superstition. When asked about Yuan, a handful of participants situated Yuan within their religious perspectives and practices—particularly Buddhism. For instance, as Jason said, "I believe in Buddhism and it is the main reason that I think everything results from Yuan. You

may not feel the invisible power from it, but it indeed influences us in a comprehensive way." Jenny discussed Yuan's fatalism in relation to the Buddhist belief in reincarnation:

> My boyfriend believed in Buddhism. I used to have a bad relationship with my mom. He told me that "you may have done something wrong to your mom in the previous life. You are paying back to her in this life." He always comforts me in this way.

As explained in the literature review, Yuan is presumed to influences relationships based on one's past behaviors. Here, Jenny's comments illustrate that, when viewed in relation to Buddhism, Yuan may also include behaviors from past lives.

Similar to this religious contextualization, two participants noted that they (or their relatives) had consulted fortune tellers concerning their family and romantic relationships, and that those fortune tellers had pointed to Yuan as an explanation for those relationships. For instance, Wendy said that her mother had consulted a fortune teller about complicated family issues, and "My mom was told that even though we are families, Yuan is stronger or lighter within a family's members, causing the disharmonies. I mean, I trust what the fortune teller said because her words are just exactly true." Another participant, Alice said, "I felt insecure about the relationship with my boyfriend, so I went to a palmistry. I was told that 'My boyfriend and I met in the previous life.' How we got along in the previous life had profound influence on us in this life." Fortune tellers

added a layer of superstition to Yuan. These participants believed fortune tellers'

words and took Yuan as an explanation for relationships.

Yuan as a Coping Mechanism. When relationships come to an end, some

people blame themselves, whether fairly or unfairly; however, some participants

noted that belief in Yuan can function as a sort of coping mechanism for

accepting the end of a relationship and moving on from it. Ray described the idea

of "not having Yuan with someone" as "a way to let go when I feel desperate

about the dissipation of a relationship." Likewise, Carla said, "I know that when I

say 'oh, I may not have Yuan with him/her,' I am rationalizing. I am attributing the

unpleasant result of a relationship to Yuan. However, perhaps it is fundamentally

due to the lack of efforts from us."

In both of these examples, "No Yuan with someone" functions as a way to

comfort and not blame oneself for a relationship that has unraveled. It is an

illustration that while Yuan is something that people believe in, they can also use

that belief to strategically to manage their relationship experiences.

Yuan's Controllability

While all participants understood Yuan as a fatalistic force, not all

participants perceived Yuan as the sole or even the most important factor in

forming and maintaining relationships. Indeed, many participants contended that

their relationships are a function not of fate, but of their human decisions,

willpower, and effort. As Judy explained, "I believe that a satisfied relationship

comes from efforts made for it. If I know a person, but we never attempt to be

close friends, we will just stay here and never move forward. Yuan doesn't help."

Likewise, Jenny attributed her relationship with her boyfriend to "our

determination and willingness to be together." Jenny continued, "Even though we

went through some difficulties in the last year, we are still holding hands and

believe we can make it one day."

In these examples, participants either rejected, or at least downplayed the

idea that relationship outcomes could be attributed to Yuan. Instead, they

attributed their relationships to actions and efforts that they controlled. This is

consistent with a second sub-theme of causation—controllability. This theme

refers to internal attributions of cause to human agency over life experiences.

Having it Both Ways. Interestingly enough, some participants saw it as

possible to both believe in Yuan's fatalism and that they had a degree of control

over the formation and maintenance of relationships. For instance, some

participants stressed that it is one's belief in Yuan—an internal factor that an

individual can control—which shapes relationship outcomes. These participants

believed that Yuan can become stronger or "deepened" through human actions

and will power. As Alice explained, "Even though there is Yuan existing between

my boyfriend and I, if I was not open-minded and had faith in Yuan, Yuan would

just slip away, and the relationship would not be initiated. Be open-minded and

Yuan comes." Similarly, Jason said, "Yuan is an opportunity and if you notice it,

you can make good use of Yuan. It is my belief that Yuan can be altered, and we

humans have the ability to change. However, I know some people may not think this way."

In these examples, the fatalistic facet of Yuan is not denied. However, participants argued that they could exert a degree of internal control over their relationship outcomes through their belief in Yuan. The controllability in causation also stresses that participant's actions in current lives, including willingness, belief, and efforts to interpersonal relationships, have profound influence on formation and maintenance of relationships. Together, then, fatalism and controllability capture the complex ways in which Dcard users understand Yuan as a multifaceted, causal process. With these views of Yuan established, the following section now considers the role of Yuan in these individuals' Dcard use—particularly their use of the site's distinctive friending mechanism.

<center>Yuan's Role in Friending on Dcard</center>

Most participants perceived Yuan to play a role in their use of Dcard, particularly in the friending process. As Chelsey explained, "Yes, Yuan plays a role on Dcard for sure. That's what Dcard hopes to provide to it users—letting them feel Yuan through online experiences." As Jared described, "I am a tech geek, and I know Dcard is under a strong algorithm. However, I believe Yuan is infused into the friending mechanism. We connect with people on Dcard and may develop relationships with them but they are under the algorithm on Dcard."

While participants acknowledge a perceived role of Yuan in the Dcard use, the friending process involves several steps, including the receipt of those

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midnight friend suggestions, the choice as to whether to connect or not with that individual, and the further actions necessary to form and maintain a relationship. As a multi-faceted set of beliefs, Yuan impacts these moments of the friending process in distinct and uneven ways. Moreover, certain aspects of Dcard's architecture, including anonymity and randomness impact the way in which Yuan shapes that process.

<u>Receiving a Friend Recommendation on Dcard</u>

Dcard offers its users a unique friending experience—one that is seemingly random. Most participants associated this randomness with fatalism— a key component in their understandings of Yuan. As Jenny explained, "I passively received one friending request for this person among all Dcard users. I am randomly paired with this person instead of anyone else. It is fate. We are destined to connect on Dcard." Similarly, Alice said, "I feel Yuan because we are randomly paired, both had to use Dcard that day we meet, read the profiles, were interested in each other, and then sent out the invitation. Yes, our connection may be due to the system, but I mean 'why us?'" Participants have little control over who is recommended to them, and they perceived the seeming randomness of Dcard's friend recommendations as evidence of Yuan's fatalism.

Further, that Dcard users can only meet one person each day at midnight only adds to the fatalism. It creates a sense of exclusivity, hopefulness, and even romance. As Wendy explained, "I think 12 o'clock means a start to a new day. Users on Dcard can expect another possible relationship every day. It

symbolizes hope." A romantic component was evident in the fairy-tale metaphors some participants used to describe Dcard's friending experience. As Wendy explained, "receiving a friend request at midnight is just like Cinderella. In the friending page on Dcard, it reads, 'when the bell rings at midnight, you will connect with the one.'" Similarly, Jared said: "Just like Cinderella. Everything will be different at 12 o'clock." Dcard seems to give users a hope. If users were not connected with someone yesterday, here comes another chance today or tomorrow."

This association between randomness and Yuan's fatalism was underscored through comparisons to other websites, such as the Whostalk dating site and PTT. On the O2 board, PTT users provide their real contact information and a list of friending criteria. For instance, Jared said, "the person must be at least 6 feet in height, with glasses is a plus, and the expected annual income is more than fifty thousand." PTT users expect that people who meet these criteria will reply and seek to connect. This friending approach apparently lacks randomness because every detail of the friending criteria is spelled out. As Jared put it, friending on PTT is "supply and demand." Unlike PTT, Dcard does not recommend friends based on users' preferences. As such, Dcard friend recommendations are perceived as more random, and more likely to have Yuan.

While Dcard's friending experience is associated with high levels of randomness and Yuan, recent architectural changes to Dcard are shifting perceptions. In 2017, Dcard introduced its "wishing fountain" feature—a tool that

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allows users to filter the friend recommendations they received based on gender, university, and school major. When used, the new wishing fountain feature narrows the diversity of friends that a user might be recommended. Participants perceived wishing fountain in two opposite ways. First, some saw wishing fountain as a plus in that they can more efficiently connect with friends based on their own, subjective preferences, increasing the likelihood they will be recommended a friend they are likely to connect with. As Rena explained, "I like the wishing fountain because I have higher chances to connect with people I want to connect with … The wishing fountain helps me pair with someone I may be more interested in than other people. I will not waste this day connecting with a person I will never want to meet."

Others made the argument that wishing fountain's filters reduce randomness, and, with it, the potential for Yuan. As Judy explained, "If I will be back to friend on Dcard, I may not want to use wishing fountain because it ruins Yuan. I believe relationships from Yuan should be initiated one hundred percent randomly. When friending through the wishing fountain, the relationships seem to be assigned." Similarly, Kevin said, "I think the wishing fountain ruins someone's Yuan. For example, A may be supposed to meet B in the original friending mechanism. However, A may turn to connect with C due to the arrangement of the wishing fountain. B's Yuan with A is ruined." While these examples illustrate that the new wishing fountain feature may sacrifice randomness in the name of

more efficient relationships formation, both of these examples underscore the perceived connection between randomness and Yuan on Dcard.

User's Choice on Whether to Connect or not

Dcard recommends one new friend to its users every day at midnight; however, users are provided with an incomplete profile for that potential connection—one that identifies that individual's school, hobbies, and profile picture, but does not provide his or her name. In this, Dcard's friending mechanism incorporates a degree of anonymity at the moment when users evaluate whether to accept or reject a new friend recommendation. For participants, this partial anonymity only intensifies the experience of Yuan. As Jenny explained, "I feel stronger Yuan when talking to people I don't know. I even have no idea about their names on Dcard. If I am paired randomly with someone and accepted, I think the person likes me because I am who I am rather than merely being attracted by my appearance [in my profile photo]. The interaction is based on sincerity."

This partial anonymity also encourages higher levels of self-disclosure when participants craft their profiles, and self-disclosure is an important element in initiating and maintaining relationships (Ben-Ze, 2003). Indeed, Dcard's profile interface encourages users to reveal more than basic demographic characteristics and their appearance (through the profile photo). Users are suggested to reveal extensive, and, perhaps, more meaningful, qualitative details

about one's life experiences and perspectives, such as one's best experience in life, a hard life lesson, or favorite mottos. As Amber said:

> Dcard's friending profile is a lot different from other dating sites. Other sites require picture, height, and weight. That is shallow. They don't care what you like and dislike. On the contrary, Dcard's friending design helps users to present inner aspects of oneself, instead of listing friending criteria.

While Dcard users have very limited say about what recommendations they will receive each night at midnight, this moment of choice—whether to accept or reject the request—gives them a degree of agency in the friending process. Moreover, since users recognize that they, too, will be evaluated based on a partially anonymous profile, they make choices about how to present themselves to others. These choices reduce some of the perceived fatalism in Dcard use, and processes of controllability become more prominent. The greater role of controllability at this moment, relative to fatalism, is not inconsistent with Yuan. As Carla described:

> I read the profile first, and then I will know if I am interested in making friend with him or her based on my subjectivity. Yuan exists when I want to friend with someone based on "whether I like his/her profile" on Dcard. If I am interested, I will send out the invitation. The moment I send out the invitation, Yuan then exists.

Carla acknowledged Yuan's fatalism, but she still believed she exerted some level of control over the friending process on Dcard. She believed that receiving a friend request from someone on Dcard is fated, but Yuan does not exist until she confirmed the request and connected successfully.

On Dcard, if two recommended friends do not connect within 24 hours, they can never connect with each other on Dcard again. This "never connect again" policy inclines users to think more deeply about the choice to connect with the friends they are recommended on Dcard. Amber said that, "Just because I may never get the chance to connect with this person again … I will think twice before I decide what to do with the friending request." Judy explained that this does not just prompt her to reflect deeply on each friend recommendation. It also positively shapes the way she looks at those relationships initiated through Dcard. She explains, "The 'never connect again' rule makes me feel like cherishing relationships on Dcard. I will consider friending with 'the recommended friend' seriously." Both participants tend to ponder deeply over the friending requests and to cherish relationships more develop out of it.

In their choices of whether to connect with recommended friends or not, participants perceived more controllability and less fatalism than in other moments in the Dcard's friending process. This is because decisions were made mainly based on their preferences toward recommended friends' profiles. Moreover, participants have choices on how to present themselves as the design of the profile encourages users to disclose more meaningful detail. This profile

creation tool further intensifies the perception of controllability in the process. However, Dcard's architecture, including the partial anonymity, and the fact that users only have 24 hours to connect with each other encourage users to see the relationships that develop out of Dcard's friending process as having more possibility for Yuan.

Initiating and Maintaining Relationships through Dcard

Initiating Online Relationships on Dcard. Sending a friendship invitation to someone on Dcard, and, in doing so, connecting with them, is not the same thing as initiating and maintaining a relationship on Dcard. Participants evaluate the relationship potential of new connection through commonalities in the initial interactions and mutual friends, if possible. Through being exclusive, gradually intensifying chatting, and confirming the willingness to move from mediated communication to offline interaction, participants use these approaches to maintain relationships on Dcard. In the dissolution of relationships, participants perceived more or less of a role Yuan plays in terms of relationship outcomes.

In the initiating stage, similarities found in conversations can help a relationship get off to a good start. Interviewees believe Yuan is deepened "as coincidences are accumulated" [Alice]. In other words, as more and more similarities are found, such as similar hobbies or mutual friends, more Yuan is perceived. As Alice explained:

 I met my boyfriend on Dcard. We share similar hobbies, live in the same

 area in Taipei, and attend the same school. The interesting thing about

our first meeting is that it was a coincidence! I had to go to cram at school, but the class got cancelled and he was at the same metro station with me for some reason. Then, we found out we were close to each other. That's how we first met. Totally unexpected!

The participant is cataloging the various commonalities she and her boyfriend share, and she attributed these commonalities in some way to connect to their coincidental meeting—one that implied their relationship had Yuan. This focus on "accumulated coincidences" can encourage Dcard users to engage in higher levels of self-disclosure during their initial chats. As Jared explained:

Self-disclosure may be higher in the relationships on Dcard. I can look for suggestions if I have difficulties (in order to avoiding embarrassing myself) in asking my friends. I can use hypothetical questions and ask friends on Dcard without the fear of offending anyone. Moreover, I feel relaxed even though I know I am talking to someone online, but I feel Yuan between us and thus, I am willing to disclose more sincere information to her/him.

In addition to accumulated coincidences, mutual friends are perceived as intermediaries helping to create Yuan for others. Judy used this study's interview and her romantic relationship as examples. Of the interview, she said, "You and I are sitting here because of our mutual friend. If I didn't know her, I would never do this interview with you." Likewise, of her relationship, she said, "I met my boyfriend because we are someone's good friend. That's where we started our conversation. I feel stronger Yuan in the relationship with him. I feel like we are

destined to meet because of our friend." Some participants mentioned the importance of such intermediaries in starting new relationships, and they suggested that such intermediaries can create or deepen Yuan in those new relationships.

Maintaining Relationships Initiated through Dcard. In the initial stage of relationship development on Dcard, participants stressed the control they exercise in initiating those relationships. Then, once they have successfully connected, participants noted that they made efforts to maintain friendships on Dcard in several, gradually escalating ways, including: the exchange of personal contact information, more frequent chatting, and then plans to meet. As Pauline said, "After several chats, I usually end up exchanging personal contact information, such as Line, with people I connect with on Dcard, if I would like to become friends with them." Pauline then shared how she developed a romantic relationship with her partner on Dcard. As Judy described:

The process of becoming friends from Dcard to offline takes time … First, we have kept in touch through Dcard for two months. Then, we exchanged personal contact information [using the Line messaging application] and maintained frequent chats for six months. We decided to meet in person. Finally, we are together after meeting eight times.

Like Pauline, Alice and her (now) boyfriend moved from mediated chats to an offline relationship. "We exchanged Line and have kept in touch. Then, we started to chat by phone. We decided to meet, and we found that we are meant

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to be together." In these examples, the participants engage in relationship-building through the exchange of personal contact information, through increasingly extensive chats, and and, eventually, by moving the online relationship to offline interactions because of perceived Yuan. The participants' understandings of Yuan and their perception of the role of Yuan on Dcard profoundly influence these relationship-building practices on Dcard.

As participants went about maintaining relationships initiated through Dcard, many perceived themselves to have agency in those relationships while admitting that Yuan is at play. As Wendy explained:

> The system runs by computer for sure, and Dcard is promoted under the concept of Yuan. So, in terms of the relationship itself, these two people are meant to connect after all. But when it comes to managing the development and maintenance of relationships, it requires efforts. Relationships will not move on without any effort made by the interactants.

Being exclusive—concentrating on one, cherished romantic relationship at a time—is a practice some interviewees associated with Yuan. Yes, the initial recommendation may have been random, and they may have connected through partially anonymous profiles, but the act of being exclusive, as one of the approaches to maintain relationships on Dcard, involves agency and control. Here, Yuan's fatalism and controllability reinforce one another since users are choosing to be exclusive with the person they were fated to meet. As Wendy explained:

I usually focus on one person on Dcard. I am concentrated on one person

each time because we are destined to meet. If I am successfully

connected with someone today, I won't friend with a new one tomorrow

until I find out that he/she may not be the person I would like to friend with.

We may not have Yuan anymore.

Alice described how she practices exclusivity with her friends on Dcard.

As she explained, "I am always chatting with one person on Dcard each time. I

want to give him/her a special treatment, though they may not know. The feeling

of exclusivity is what I felt in the friending mechanism."

Yuan's Role in the Dissolution of Relationships on Dcard. While

participants assumed that they had greater levels of control during the

developing stages of a relationship, fatalism was understood to shape the

outcome of relationships—specifically when relationships discontinue or fail. As

Jenny explained, "If we are not compatible, I feel a little disappointed. Well, we

don't have Yuan anyway." However, the standard of success varies depending

on participants' purpose for friending on Dcard. Some may want to become

friends offline, while some expected to maintain interactions online only. As

Wendy explained, "I prefer letting online stuff stay online. My intention is not to

become friends with them in reality. There is no necessity to meet them in person.

The Yuan between us happens only online."

Many participants attributed unsuccessful relationships on Dcard to Yuan,

implying that these outcomes were, to some extent, predetermined. This is

consistent with the existing literature on Yuan as a coping mechanism (Lee, 1995). At the same time, some participants noted that they made active choices to end relationships they had developed on Dcard, or at least stopped using the site's friending feature out of respect for partners. As Jenny explained:

> I stopped friending on Dcard when I started the relationship with my boyfriend. I don't even check the profile of the friend request. I simply close the friending function on Dcard. He didn't ask me to do that for him, but I think it is the way to show respect to him.

> Other participants shared similar perspectives. As Wendy explained, "Although [my boyfriend] said he did not mind if I continue to friend on Dcard, I just don't feel it is appropriate to do that." In such cases, participants were clearly exercising control over Dcard relationships by either ending or avoiding them, but it was out of concern that they might "have Yuan" with someone other than their partner.

In conclusion, since Yuan is a multi-faceted concept, and those different elements of Yuan—particularly fatalism and controllability—play more or less important roles as users go about receiving friendship recommendations, deciding whether to connect with those other users, and developing relationships with them. Fatalism plays a more prominent role in how users think about the friendship recommendations the receive, in the initiation of new relationships, and in the dissolution of relationships that develop on Dcard. Controllability, on the other hand, plays a more prominent role in the decision to connect or not with

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a newly recommended friend, and in the maintenance of relationships developed on Dcard. Interestingly, though, this interplay between fatalism and controllability is not viewed as contradictory; participants can see the friending experience on Dcard as predetermined, while still appreciating the human efforts in the process.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Through long, semi-structured interviews, this study's participants—fifteen Dcard users—shared their understandings of Yuan and reflected on the role of Yuan in their Dcard use, particularly Dcard's friending mechanism. Participants understand Yuan as a ubiquitous, life-long influence in one's experiences. It is primarily understood as a factor in relationships, and relationships that "have Yuan" are experienced more positively. In addition to this theme of relationalism, participants also associated Yuan with processes of causation. Many stressed elements of fatalism—the sense that Yuan operated as an unchangeable, external force. In this, conceptions of Yuan incorporated elements of destiny, as well as religious perspectives, such as Buddhism. However, participants did not see Yuan's fatalism as the only influence in their relationships. Most participants also assumed they had some agency or "controllability" in their Dcard use— particularly when they chose to connect with newly recommended friends and as they maintained relationships developed through Dcard.

Attribution theory provides a useful framework for interpreting these findings. Attribution theory deals with how people arrive at causal explanations for events. The theory assumes that individuals attribute life experiences to causal factors—internal, external, or both—and it examines the psychological processes to form a causal judgment behind those attributions. Consistent with

the existing literature, this study's participants certainly viewed Yuan as an external power that, to some extent, predetermines their relationships; however, they also perceived themselves to have some internal control over those relationships. This interplay of fatalism and controllability is consistent with Lee's (1995) description of Yuan as both passive fatalism and active voluntarism, creating, together, a form of "fatalistic voluntarism." For Lee, Yuan functions primarily as a coping mechanism: Individuals are encouraged to exercise agency (or voluntarism) over relationships in response to unpleasant or unexpected developments, but should a relationship unravel, that outcome can be attributed, externally, to Yuan and its fatalism, allowing the individual to "move on."

This study's participants also characterized Yuan in these terms—as a coping mechanism; however, they identified another important form of controllability: the choice to believe more or less deeply in Yuan. As participants explained, by believing deeply in Yuan, they assumed they could influence its role in their relationships and bring about more positive experiences. Importantly, this is an internal matter of choice—whether to believe deeply or not. In this, they could maintain a belief in Yuan as a fatalistic, external force while still exercising some internal agency over Yuan and, by extension, their relationships. This aspect of Yuan—that it is something controllable through belief—is not mentioned previously in the literature and deserves further attention. Moreover, while the existing literature tends to view Yuan as a force based on previous lives, participants in this study tended to current lives as having more of a causal

influence. This is consistent with an understanding of Yuan as a multifaceted concept—one that balances both fatalism and controllability. Actions in one's current life are more controllable than those of previous lives, yet those actions are still perceived to fatalistically influence subsequent life experiences and relationships.

In all, participants see Yuan as a multi-faceted concept—one consisting of relationalism, fatalism, and controllability; however, some individuals emphasized certain aspects of Yuan more than others (e.g., more or less fatalism or controllability). In this, Yuan can be seen as a continuum of attributions for relationship outcomes. The two ends of the continuum are: (1) the belief that Yuan fatalistically dictates relationships; and (2) the belief that people have full control over their relationships. Most participants fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, acknowledging the fatalistic facet of Yuan, while insisting on some agency over their relationships, and even Yuan itself.

This continuum of perspectives on Yuan is important for understanding the role of Yuan in Dcard use. Dcard's unique friending mechanism suggests one new connection to users each night at midnight. But the full friending process involves 1) receiving that request, 2) choosing whether to connect with that other user, and 3) forming and maintaining a relationship with that individual (or not). At each of these moments, the different facets of Yuan (relationalism, fatalism, controllability) play more or less of a role in users' experiences. More, the design

of Dcard, including processes of randomness and anonymity, influence Yuan's role in these processes.

For instance, when participants discussed the experience of receiving a friend recommendation, they noted the seeming randomness of recommendations, and that they arrived, like a fairy tale, at midnight. Participants perceived these aspects of Dcard to be associated with Yuan, particularly its fatalism. Specifically, since users have little control over who is recommended to them, and since those recommendations are random, these processes are out of their hands; they seem more a matter of fate than choice.

When users then decide whether or not to connect with a recommended friend, the partial anonymity of that other user's profile introduces elements of both fate and controllability. Presented with a profile picture and a partial description, but not a name, users have to make internal, controllable choices about whether to send a friend invitation to the other user or not. The partial anonymity of recommended profiles also prompts some users to self-disclose more in constructing their own profiles. Previous research (Whitty & Gavin, 2001) suggest that high self-disclosure is a catalyst in initiating and maintaining relationships, and by disclosing more in their profiles, users exercise a degree of control, or at least influence, in the friending process.

But participants also perceive predetermination and "stronger Yuan" in these connections because they develop from this seemingly random and partially anonymous system. Moreover, participants perceived the "never connect

again" rule as more fatalistic in that if they did not choose to connect with that recommended friend, the interactants will never have the chance to connect again. This policy prompts participants to think twice in making the decision to send out the invitation, and to cherish the relationships that come out of that process.

This interplay between controllability and fatalism at the connecting phase may be changing, though. Specifically, Dcard's new wishing fountain feature gives users more control in filtering the friends they are recommended, but, in doing so, it creates an experience that seems less random and, thus, less likely to produce with Yuan.

Finally, Yuan's elements of fatalism and controllability each play a role in the initiation, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships on Dcard. During the initiating phase, mutual friends and "accumulated coincidences" can create the impression that a relationship is fated. From there, the exchange of personal information, increasingly frequent chats, and the movement to online relationships can each unfold, often with high levels of perceived controllability; however, that participants practiced exclusivity—avoiding friending on Dcard once a relationship matured—illustrates that they sought to exercise relationship control while still recognizing the potential for Yuan through Dcard's friending experience. When relationships ultimately dissolved or did not mature, those processes were primarily attributed to fate, a finding in line with conceptions of Yuan as a coping mechanism.

Participants views about Yuan and its role in their use of Dcard showed that each dimension of Yuan plays a role in Dcard use. More, since these different aspects of Yuan mutually influenced participants' Dcard use, they cannot be studied in isolation, but in context and as a whole. Participants suggested that belief in Yuan is fluid and that each dimension of Yuan plays a more or less important role in the three key moments of friending Dcard—when one receives a request, chooses to communicate, and, ultimately, initiates and maintains relationships. Besides Yuan's multi-facetedness, Dcard's architecture, including its dynamics of randomness and partial anonymity, impacted and intensified Yuan's role in Dcard's friending process. These insights were made visible through semi-structured long interview, which allowed Dcard users to reflect on their understanding of Yuan, their experiences using Dcard's friending feature, and the relationship between these two processes.

This study and its findings are novel and noteworthy in several respects. First, the existing literature tends to examine Yuan as a static cultural concept, belief in which is correlated with different life experiences and relationship outcomes; however, this study reconceptualizes and investigates Yuan as a fluid and contextualized social construction. According to social constructivism, the meanings of a concept like Yuan are not stable, but constantly reproduced, contested, and changed as people interact with others and the surrounding social and cultural context (Gonzalez, 2015). So, as Taiwanese society and Chinese culture evolves, so, too, does Yuan, its meanings, and use. More, the way a

cultural belief, such as Yuan, is understood and used will vary across groups and social contexts, including in online contexts and even on particular media sites.

Reconceptualized and investigated as such, this study suggests that perspectives on (and uses of) Yuan may be changing. Among participants, Yuan's religious component was less prominent than the existing literature would suggest. Additionally, life experiences were presumed to be shaped more by behavior in current lives than that of past lives. Finally, participants understood Yuan to be controllable, to some degree, through firm belief in this cultural concept. These findings suggest that adjustments to the ways in which Yuan is conceptualized and studied are warranted. For instance, Yuan quantitative scales may need to include an item like this: "I can control Yuan by believing it deeply."

Second, this study provides a rich, nuanced illustration of the ways social media architecture and cultural beliefs relate to one another. By incorporating certain interface and architectural components, particularly randomness and a degree of anonymity, Dcard effectively tapped into its users' multi-faceted understandings of Yuan at different moments in the friending process. Of course, Yuan is a unique cultural concept specific to Chinese societies, and, as such, these insights may seem irrelevant to social media design and use in other cultures and contexts. However, every culture has its characteristic concepts and beliefs that shape people's lived experiences and behaviors. And Dcard is surely not the only social media site where cultural beliefs inform design, and where

those design choices shape cultural practices. Twitter, as an example, limited

tweet length to 140 characters which celebrated speed and brevity. This interface

had been favored by its users as the speed and brevity were apricated by the

culture. However, Twitter changed the defining feature in 2018 and doubled

character limits to 280 words. The interface change has received sweeping

criticism (Heisler, 2018). As such, social media scholars need to further

investigate the ways in which social media design and use shape and are

shaped by cultural concepts and beliefs in context-specific ways.

For marketers, this study also provides a lens for identifying and

implementing design strategies in other social spaces, whether online or off. For

instance, this study can provide a good starting point for social media entities

seeking to operate in and reach new markets. At the most basic level, this study

suggests that social media firms are wise to conduct background research, such

as a mix of historical, survey, ethnographic, and passive "big data" approaches,

on the cultures they seek to operate within, and the target users they seek to

attract. In doing so, they can better understand cultural concepts that resonate in

prospective users' lives and inform the design choices by conducting cultural

research, especially in developing a new market with new cultures or for different

demographics. For instance, Dcard's design components, such as limit to one

connection, never connect again policy, or the design of the friending profile,

create the atmosphere of Yuan by implanting architectural elements—

randomness and anonymity. Therefore, social media firms can more effectively

design their services to attract and keep users based on the insights of this study.

Strengths and Limitations

Given that this study sought to explore Dcard users' understandings of

Yuan and its role in their Dcard use, semi-structured long interviews and

qualitative thematic analysis were the best available research tools. However,

there are certainly limitations to this design.

First, while this study sought to understand participants' Dcard use, the

researcher did not observe any of the participants actually using Dcard. In this,

what participants told the researcher about their Dcard use may not entirely align

with the ways they actually use Dcard; however, passively observing participants'

Dcard use would likely not have revealed much about participants'

understandings of Yuan and the perceived role of Yuan in their Dcard use, which

was the purpose of this study. Semi-structured long interviews permitted the

research to capture, interpret, and understand participants' experiences from

their points of view. Specifically, through dialogues with participants, the

researcher could ask questions that elicited participants' accounts of experiences

in their own words, ask follow-up questions and for clarifications, and use probes

to explore intriguing tangents while staying on topic.

This interpretive approach was essential to developing a rich, nuanced

understanding of Yuan and its role in Dcard use from its users' perspectives.

Such "thick description" enhances the trustworthiness of the study in that it

discerns nuances, conceptualize abstract ideas, and situates a cultural concept in a specific context. For instance, participants' multi-faceted understandings of Yuan were captured through extended dialogues, metaphor and comparison helped to clarify those subjective understandings, and open-ended questions allowed for participants to explain and illustrate Yuan's role in their Dcard use, from their perspectives.

Second, these interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, but then those ideas were translated to English for reporting. Such translation runs the risk of misrepresenting the latent meanings of participants' accounts. Back translation—translation from English back into participants' native language—would have been beneficial to ensure a sound translation; however, due to the limitations of time and resources, back translation was not conducted. However, given the researcher's cultural background, she was well-positioned to both translate the interviews and to identify, comprehend, and communicate the useful insights in them.

Subjectivity—the researcher as the instrument—is often seen as a limitation in qualitative research. Indeed, the researcher's cultural background, her faith in Yuan, and her experiences as a Dcard user may have steered the interviews and analysis in subtle ways; however, this can also be perceived as a strength in generating meaningful insights about complex cultural phenomena. Most importantly, she was familiar with Chinese cultural concepts and practices, including those associated with Yuan. In order to increase the trustworthiness of

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the findings, the researcher reflected on her experiences and assumptions and the role they were playing in study's design, interview, and analysis processes. For instance, the researcher acknowledges that she may have been less likely to attribute relationship outcomes to Yuan. However, she has never had engaged in the friending process on Dcard due to showing respect to her partner. In this, she might subconsciously assume the fear of offending partners as the reason of stopping using Dcard to friend. Thus, she did ongoing self-reflection and kept her presence in the study in mind.

Third, the lack of generalizability is another limitation of this study. Convenience and snowball sampling involve the selection of participants based on their availability, their willingness to participate, and their connection to existing participants. This leads to the risk of recruiting a homogenous sample that does not reflect the diversity of the population. For instance, it may be the case that this study's participants included more people who believed in Yuan than a representative sample of Dcard users might. However, since the purpose of the study was to explore users' understandings of Yuan and how their views shape the use of Dcard, it was necessary to talk to Dcard users that actually believe in Yuan (even if that was not an inclusion criterion). Thus, an oversampling of participants that believe in Yuan is viewed as strength and may elicit more effective insights about Yuan and its role in Dcard use.

That said, in order to ensure a diversity of experiences and perspectives, maximum variation sampling and deviant cases were employed. The researcher

looked for variation in the areas of relationship status and gender identity. Moreover, deviant cases were invited, such as participants who never friend on Dcard. These strategies mitigate some of the shortcomings of convenience and snowball sampling, while still generating insights from the participants most likely to help answer the research questions.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

This study's findings suggest that more research is needed on the connection between a cultural belief and the architecture of social media platforms. In the case of Dcard, culture appears to have played an indispensable role in the site's design, its use, and the extent to which it has been able to attract and keep users. In this, future studies should continue to take cultural beliefs into account when exploring the design and use of sites in different countries and for different demographics.

This study also underscores the importance of investigating the role of culture in social media use in the context of individual users' lived experiences. A de-contextualizing approach, such as a survey of Dcard users, may be insufficient to provide the depth and richness of insights into multifaceted concepts and practices, such as Yuan and its role in Dcard use. That said, the researcher modestly suggests that future studies could take key insights from this study and translate them into a more generalizable study, such as a survey. Such a study would help clarify whether the beliefs and practices identified here are common across all Dcard users, or among any particular subsets of users.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix A- Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Hello, I am Wen-Yueh Shu, and I am currently a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, San Bernardino. I am writing my Master's thesis which is about Dcard, the Taiwanese social network exclusively for college students. I am particularly interested in the role of Yuan in the use of Dcard and how the understanding of Yuan may influence its use. I will be focus on the friending feature on the site and its derived relationship.

The interview involves conversation with me and I will have some questions for you. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer so feel free to share your thoughts. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one and half hour. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the interview questions.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

Before we start, please take a few minutes to read this informed consent form and sign for me. In addition, you must sign a form to meet the human subject requirements from Institutional Review Board (IRB requires every researcher to have this form in order to protect participants and make sure there is no harm or danger.) Essentially, this document states that:

(1) All information will be held confidential,

(2) Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and

(3) I do not anticipate any harm to you from participating,

If you like, we can read through this form together. Please let me know if you have any questions.

(Hand the consent form to the participant.)

Moreover, I would like you to know there are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. Please feel to say what you really think and feel. My purpose is to gain your understanding about Dcard and the concept Yuan. If you have any

preference or thoughts, just let me know and I am very happy to change or accommodate for you.

TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS

I would like to audio-tape our conversations today. It is for the accuracy of the content and avoids the possibility of misunderstanding our conversation. I'll also take notes during the interview. Will you give me the permission on audio-taping and note-taking? The recording device can be placed at the table so that you can tell it is recording or if you prefer not seeing it, I can conceal it. Do you have a preference?

(After the participant returns the consent form and agree on tape recorder instructions, turn recorder on.)

INTERVIEW

<u>Basic Demographic questions</u>

Before we start, I may need your basic information. If you believe I am getting too personal, just let me know. Thank you.

Participants Information:

What is your name?

How do you identify in terms of gender?

May I know your age?

What school do you attend?

What school year are you at?

What is your relationship status?

<u>Interview Questions- main Qs and probing Qs</u>

Dcard [impression+ action]

Q1: When did you begin using Dcard, and why did you start using it?

Q2: What is your impression about Dcard before using this social app?

Dcard [experiences]

Q3: How often do you use Dcard, and what do you do when you're on Dcard?

Q4: How do you like Dcard?

-The best part? -The worst part?

Dcard [friending]

Q5: Do you use Dcard's friending tool? Why or why not?

(Try to get them compared with other social media's friending, if they ever friend on other social media)

Q6: What do you think about Dcard's friending mechanism? How do you like it?

Q7: How do you decide whether or not to send out an invitation? And how does it feel when you successfully connect or don't connect?

[derived relationship]

Q8: Please think of a person you meet on Dcard, how do you think about this relationship?

Q9: Please think of a person you meet on Dcard, have you ever met him/her yet? How do you feel about this friendship?

Q10: Any influence on your existing relationships?

[Yuan]

(I'd like to shift focus here for a bit toward the topic of Yuan and whether it may play any role in Dcard use.)

Q11: Tell me your thoughts about Yuan. What do you think about Yuan?

Q12: Do you think Yuan plays any role in Dcard use? If so, how?

(Connect with attribution theory)

Q13: Do you think the friending mechanism on Dcard implies relates to Yuan? How so? If not, explain please.

CLOSING

I am grateful for your participation and your contribution to my study. Your time is very much appreciated, and your comments have been very helpful. The purpose of this interview is to better understand user's perspectives on Yuan and its influences on their use of Dcard. The results will shed lights on the understanding of this new social media, the traditional concept adopted by different demographics, and other social media and the friending feature.

AKSING FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATION

In order to ensure the accuracy of the interview, are you willing to receive a call to clarify any content from the interview? I am happy to send you my transcription in case you want to review for further revising.

ASKING FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of recruiting more effective participants, do you have any friend who may want to take part in this study? If possible, can you share their share names and contact information?

Please keep in mind you have right to revise or withdraw from the study. If you have any concern afterwards, feel free to contact me. My information is listed on the informed consent form. Thank you very much.

This interview protocol is developed by the researcher of this research.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: The role of Yuan in Dcard use
Principal Investigator: Wen-Yueh Shu
Affiliation: Department of Communication Studies, California State University, San Bernardino
Address: 5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407. USA
Phone: 909-525-5125 E-mail: 005074975@coyote.csusb.edu
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Thomas F. Corrigan

Hello! My name is Wen-Yueh Shu. I am a graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), and I am conducting research on the role of Yuan in people's uses of Dcard. I am conducting it under the supervision of CSUSB's Dr. Thomas F Corrigan. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University-San Bernardino. I would like you to consider participating in this study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand the role of Yuan in people's use of Dcard.

PARTICIPATION: To participate, you must be Taiwanese, a college student, and a Dcard user. You must also be 18 years-of-age or older. No participants will be excluded from this research on the basis of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sex, gender identity, sexuality, disability, or religion.

INTERVIEWS: Your participation in this study will involve a roughly 90-minute, face-to-face interview. Interviews for this study will be conducted between 5/1/18 and 6/12/18.

AUDIO RECORDING: Interviews will be audio-recorded to accurately document and understand your perspectives.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to continue, you can stop at any time without any negative consequences, and you will still receive the full benefits of this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your personal information, including record of your participation and this content form, are confidential and will not be made public. Any reports based on this research will conceal your identify by using a pseudonym (a fake name). Only the researcher will listen to the recordings, which will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

RISK AND DISCOMFORTS: There is no foreseeable risk to participating in this study. Please feel free to answer only the questions you wish to answer.

BENEFITS: Participants will receive either a meal or snacks depending on the interview location.

LANGAUGE: Please let me know your language and communication preferences. I am happy to accommodate you.

CONTACT AND RESULTS: if you have questions about any risk to you because of participation in this study. Please don't hesitate to contact the researcher at 005074975@coyote.csusb.edu or 909-525-5125. You may also contact the Communication Studies department at California State University, San Bernardino at (909) 537 – 5815.

INTENT TO PARTICIPATE: If you agree to participate, please print and sign your name below, and enter the date.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT MESSA

Appendix C- Recruitment Message

Hello! ALLS! My name is Carina (徐文悅). I am a graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), and I am conducting research on the role of Yuan in people's use of Dcard. I am conducting this research under the supervision of CSUSB's Dr. Thomas F. Corrigan. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University-San Bernardino.

I hope you will consider participating in this research so that I can get a better understanding of people's uses of Dcard and the role of Yuan, if any, in those processes. Your participation in this study would involve a roughly **90-minute, face-to-face interview** where you will discuss your understandings of Yuan and your use of Dcard user. The meeting time and location will be negotiated based on your availability and convenience. Participants will receive either a meal or snacks depending on the interview location. I hope you will consider participating in this study!

✧   To participate, you must be:
(1) 18 years-of-age or older
(2) a Taiwanese college student
(3) a **Dcard account holder who uses the site** several times a week
        If you are interested in participating, please leave your name and email address (or preferred contact information) below. For more information, please contact me, Wen-Yueh Shu, at: **005074975@coyote.csusb.edu** or reach me at Line: **carina1120**

✧   **Please leave your name and the email address below. Thank you!**

APPENDIX D

SCREENING QUESTION

Appendix D- Screening Questions

- "Are you a Taiwanese college student?" (Yes/No)

- "Do you have a Dcard account (Yes/No)

- "How often do you use Dcard?" (daily, weekly, less often)

- "How do you identify in terms of gender?" (Male/Female/not applicable)

- "What is your relationship status?"

  (Married/In a relationship/Single/Complicated)

- "Are you using this site's friending mechanism?" (Yes/No)

- "Are you able to meet the researcher in Taipei?" (Yes/No)

- "What is the best phone number at which to contact you?" (short answer)

- "What is the best e-mail address at which to contact you?" (short answer)

The screening questions are developed by the researcher of this research.

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

April 30, 2018

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Expedited Review IRB# FY2018-95
Status: Approved

Mr. Wen-Yueh Shu and Prof. Thomas Corrigan
Department of Communication Studies California State University, San
Bernardino 5500 University Parkway San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mr. Shu and Prof. Corrigan:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Meeting One Person at Midnight
is Your Destiny: The role of Yuan in use of the Taiwanese social network, Dcard"
has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The
informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study
and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed
consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your
protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form.

Your application is approved for one year from April 30, 2018 through April 30,
2019. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is
up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB
Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of
Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol
change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms
menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You
are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least
three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the
following:

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are
proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before
implemented in your research, 2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are
experienced by subjects during your research,

2018/11/17 CoyoteMail Mail - Fwd: IRB-FY2018-95 - Initial: IRB Expedited
Review Approval Letter

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1?ui=2&ik=ca2963294b&view=lg&permmsgid=ms
g-f:1599192098478872846 2/2

3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date, 4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DG/MG

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