

## Interdiscursivity, Social Media and Marketized University Discourse: A Genre Analysis of Universities' Recruitment Posts on WeChat

**Abstract:** The joint force of social media and marketization has transformed university communication in terms of style, discourse structure, and communicative purpose. To understand its new features in comparison with print media, this paper analyzes a corpus of universities' recruitment posts on WeChat in China. Using the method of genre analysis, the study identifies 8 moves which serve 5 different communicative functions. Each move is analyzed in terms of its salient semantic features and linguistic/visual strategies of realization. Analysis shows that WeChat recruitment posts are characterized by (1) an interdiscursive mix of a wider range of communicative functions, particularly the coexistence of policy discourse and promotional discourse, (2) sophisticated hierarchies of talents wanted and highlighted remuneration information in detail, (3) the use of personalized language and multimodal resources such as photographs and tables to engage readers' interest and to build solidarity. The new features are then discussed critically in relation to the ongoing 'recruitment hype' in China and the affordances of WeChat.

**Key words:** university recruitment discourse; genre analysis; interdiscursivity; multimodality; social media; China

### 1. Introduction

In order to enhance its global competitiveness in higher education, the Chinese government has explicitly set the construction of world-class universities as a primary goal in its education policy. On November 5, 2015, the State Council issued the 'Overall Plan to Coordinate and Carry Forward the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines' (the 'Overall Plan' hereafter). The 'Overall Plan' prescribes tasks such as recruiting top-level academic staff and advancing leading-edge scientific research. The aim is to develop a considerable number of world-class universities so that China becomes an education power to match its economic status by 2050. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has selected a number of top universities and will provide additional financial support, which is known as the 'Double First-class Initiative'. Responding to this initiative, universities in China have started a race for talents that is fiercer than ever before. The race has spread to third-tier and fourth-tier regional universities as well. As a result, most, if not all, Chinese universities are engaged in the 'war for talents', in which recruiting high-profile researchers has become a top priority in the education policy at the university level.

University policies in this regard entail two aspects, namely, recruitment policies and communication policies. In terms of recruitment policies, universities have developed sophisticated hierarchies of talents and offer alluring remuneration packages commensurate with their qualifications. This policy is situated in the broader context of the marketization and decentralization of higher education in China since the reform and opening-up policy in 1978 and the transition to market economy in the early 1990s (Mok 1997; Mok and Han 2017;

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka 2006). As a result, universities now enjoy more autonomy to formulate their own human resources policies with more flexible recruitment plans and remuneration packages, rather than following a standardized salary scheme. In 2016, to facilitate the 'Double First-class Initiative', the MOE issued the 'Guidelines on Accelerating the Recruitment of High-level Talents in MOE Affiliated Universities' (MOE 2016), which further endowed autonomy to the universities and encouraged them to adopt more flexible measures to recruit high-level international talents.

In terms of communication policies, universities are making more effective use of new media to report various events and to advertise recruitment information. Recruitment information is posted on various online platforms and is carefully designed to engage viewers. Administratively, all universities have established new media offices to publicize their activities and to keep connected with their stakeholders, especially on social media. According to the 'Bluebook of New Media in Chinese Universities' (Chinese Internet Data Centre 2017) released in December 2016, universities' social media public accounts would exceed 100,000 in 2017, and it is reported that more than 90% of universities have created their WeChat accounts. It is no exaggeration to say that social media is a major battlefield where the current war for talents is fought.

In this context, it is important to investigate how the interwoven factors of current education policies, marketization, and social media shape university discourse, and how universities make active use of social media to promote themselves and their recruitment information. To achieve these purposes, the present study analyzes a corpus of recruitment posts on WeChat using a genre analysis approach. The data was chosen for the following considerations. First, WeChat is a leading social media platform in China, with a more than 94% penetration rate into smart phones within China (Beta 2016). By March 2018, the number of active WeChat users has exceeded 1 billion, with the number of registered overseas Chinese subscribers surpassing 100 million (Ma 2018). Therefore, most Chinese universities have turned to WeChat as one of the major channels to release their recruitment information to talents at home and abroad. Second, recruitment posts are an interesting and unique genre for their dual nature as policy documents and advertisements, which represent a new form of university communication. They contain policy information such as qualifications of candidates, remuneration packages, and recruitment procedures; at the same time, the information is not provided on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, but designed to 'sell' the academic positions and the universities (cf. Fairclough 1993).

Genre analysis (Swales 1990; Bhatia 2013, 2016) has been effectively used in analyzing language use in many professional and institutional contexts, such as international commercial arbitration (Han and Li 2011), review responses (Ho 2017), and group buying pages (Lam 2013). Particularly relevant to the present study is Xiong's (2012) analysis of universities' job advertisements in newspapers, which shows that they serve the functions of branding the universities as well as promoting the academic posts concerned. Premised on the assumption that genres change continuously and new media are different from traditional media (e.g. Askehave and Nielsen 2005; Bhatia 2016; Miller 2017), this study seeks to contribute to genre studies by investigating what happens when universities' job advertisements move to social

media. It explicates the structure and rhetorical features of the unexplored genre of WeChat recruitment posts in China. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions: (1) what are the distinctive features of WeChat recruitment posts in terms of communicative purposes and move structure, (2) what are the rhetorical strategies used to realize the moves, particularly in terms of the use of linguistic and visual resources, and (3) what do the features reveal about the latest recruitment policies in Chinese higher education and the influence of social media. In what follows, I will first briefly introduce studies of marketized university discourse, and then present the analytical framework and the analysis of WeChat recruitment posts. I conclude that genre analysis provides a useful perspective for understanding this new form of university communication on social media, which is characterized by the interdiscursive mixing of different communicative functions, the co-existence of different styles, and the prevalence of multimodal elements such as tables, photos and graphs.

## **2. Studies of marketized university discourse and new media genres**

Neo-liberal free market ethos has affected higher education in terms of government policies, university management and communication around the globe during the last three decades. This process, known as the ‘marketization’ of higher education, includes the withdrawal of the government in education policies, and the adoption of free market practices in university management such as ‘cutting production cost, abandoning goods not in demand, producing only popular products and advertising products to increase sales and the profit margin’ (Kwong 2000, 89). The impact of marketization and promotional culture on university discourse has been a key topic of concern for discourse analysts during the past 25 years or so, largely inspired by Fairclough’s (1993) seminal work. Fairclough (1993) selected four representative types of university discourse in the UK, namely, job advertisements, program materials for an academic conference, an academic curriculum vitae, and entries in undergraduate prospectus. His study suggested that the promotional function has become increasingly salient in university communication. For job advertisements specifically, he found that they have become a hybrid, including commodity advertising (i.e. the job), corporate advertising (i.e. the university), as well as traditional advertising for academic posts. In terms of linguistic features, he noted the ‘personalization of both institution (we) and addressees (you), and the individualized address of potential applicants (it is a singular not a plural you)’, which ‘simulates a conversational and therefore relatively personal, informal, solidary and equal relationship between institution and potential applicant’ (Fairclough 1993, 147). He then interpreted the changes by discussing the social context of the marketization of higher education. He argues that discourse analysis is an important approach for its capacity to put social/policy analysis into connection with particular instances of institutional practice and textual details. During the last two decades, discourse analysts have investigated the discursive practice of universities from all over the world, such as Europe (Askehave 2007), the US (Saichaie 2011), China (Xiong 2012; Han 2014), Singapore (Teo 2007) and Japan (Yokoyama, 2005). The discourse types they analyzed include prospectuses (e.g. Askehave 2007; Teo 2007), job advertisements (e.g. Xiong 2012), president’s

speeches (Han 2014), websites (e.g. Mayr 2008; Saichaie 2011; Zhang and O'Halloran 2013), policy documents (e.g. Uzuner-Smith and Englander 2015; Johansen et.al. 2017; Wodak and Fairclough 2010), and so on.

A main approach to the study of university discourse is genre analysis (Askehave and Swales 2001; Bhatia 2013; Swales 1990; Upton and Cohen 2009). Askehave (2007) analyzed the generic characteristics of international student prospectuses from Finland, Scotland, Australia and Japan, and then conducted an in-depth analysis of the language use in the international student prospectus from the University of Stirling, Scotland. Osman (2008) conducted a structural analysis and a textual analysis to investigate the rebranding strategies in Malaysian universities' brochures. Both studies found that the materials are highly promotional, using advertising techniques to construct of an ideal image of the universities. Han's (2014) study found that university presidents' speeches at graduation ceremonies include authoritative discourse for ideological and moral education, as well as conversational discourse to build rapport and reinforce connection with students. Xiong (2012) used Askehave and Swales' (2001) genre analysis model to analyze 48 universities' recruitment advertisements in newspapers.

In recent years, researchers are increasingly interested in digital genres, developing new analytical models to address the question 'What happens when various genres move online?' (e.g. Andersen and van Leeuwen 2017; Askehave and Nielsen 2005; Caple and Knox 2017; Miller and Shepherd 2009). Genre analysts agree that the new affordances of the web give digital genres distinctive features compared with 'traditional' genres. Studies of homepages, e-shopping sites, blogs, and YouTube videos suggest that digital genres are characterized by multiple communicative purposes (e.g. mixture of information, promotion and entertainment), non-linear move structure (e.g. navigation by hyper-links), and the use of multimodal resources. For example, in analyzing corporate homepages, Askehave and Nielsen (2005) argued that the conventional move structure is not applicable as web documents are connected by hyperlinks instead of linear sequence. Andersen and van Leeuwen (2017) investigated online shopping sites and found that they should be considered as a series of micro genres, rather than having a single generic structure as in face to face shopping. This position echoes Lam's (2013) corpus-based multimodal move analysis of internet group buying webpages. Through analyzing 100 product pages, Lam (2013) identified 13 move types, which include an interdiscursive mix of regulatory discourse, instructional discourse, informative discourse, promotional discourse, and social discourse. These moves are realized through language and visual images.

A notable gap from existing literature is that there has been no systematic genre analysis of university discourse on social media. In the context of social media explosion, it is important to understand how the affordances of social media, as well as marketization, have changed universities' discursive practice, which is the objective of the present study. Many researchers have discussed the affordances of social media (e.g. Bucher and Helmond 2017; Schrock 2015; Treem and Leonardi 2012). For example, boyd (2011, 46) argued that social network sites are shaped by four central affordances: persistence (i.e. the posts are captured and recorded), replicability (i.e. content can be duplicated), scalability (i.e. different levels of visibility), and

searchability (i.e. access through search). Schrock (2015) proposed four affordances of mobile media: portability (i.e. they can be used anywhere), availability (they are constantly connected), locatability (i.e. users can be located) and mulimediality (i.e. the use of pictures and videos). For the object of our analysis, WeChat recruitment posts by universities' 'public accounts', not all of these general affordances are relevant. They are different from homepages in that they are more like page-based texts in a Word document, only without page numbers or page limits. In other words, WeChat simply provides a virtual space for universities to write articles and post them. A screenshot is illustrated in Figure 1. Images and videos can be inserted, but language is dominant in the text space. Readers can scroll down (usually on mobile phones) for the whole document, share it with friends, like it, and leave comments, but there is usually no hyperlink within the running text. This means that, unlike hyperlink-based organization, textual linearity and move structure are present in WeChat recruitment posts. Meanwhile, because of the unlimited virtual space and the nature of social media dissemination, I assume that the posts exhibit new features in communicative purposes, style, structure and the use of multimodal resources.



Figure 1 Screenshot of a WeChat recruitment post

### 3. Methodology

In this section, I will briefly introduce the method of data collection and analysis adopted in this study. The corpus under investigation consists of 80 recruitment advertisements posted by Chinese universities on WeChat from 28 August 2016 to 5 September 2017. The dataset has exhausted all posts that the author could get on WeChat during the period and the universities range from top-tier national universities to low ranking regional universities. The analysis draws upon Swales' (1990) genre model, Bhatia's (2014) notion of interdiscursivity, and corpus-based move analysis (Upton and Cohen 2009). In the Swalesian model, a genre is analyzed at three

levels, namely, communicative purpose, move structure, and rhetorical strategy in a relation of realization. At the first level, a genre is defined as ‘a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs’ (Bhatia 2013, 49). It follows that the first step of the analysis is to determine the shared communicative purposes of the recruitment posts. At the second level, the communicative purposes are realized by texts with conventionalized internal structures. ‘A text is described as a sequence of “moves”, where each move represents a stretch of text serving a particular communicative (that is, semantic) function’ (Upton and Cohen 2009, 588). The identification of moves is therefore a key step in this approach and in analyzing the corpus of recruitment posts. Three principles are observed in the analytical process. First, not all genres are conventionalized to the same degree; for example, academic articles tend to have a more homogeneous structure than digital genres such as WeChat recruitment posts. Second, in a genre, some moves are obligatory, while others are optional, which creates variations. Third, the moves may not necessarily occur in a fixed order and may be mixed without clear boundaries (Bhatia 2013). At the third level, the communicative purposes and the moves of a genre are realized by choices of language, visual images, and other semiotic resources. The aim of such analysis is to look for salient features in the actual formulation of a genre (Askehave and Nielsen 2005, 123), using methods such as corpus analysis (e.g. Upton and Cohen 2009) or qualitative discourse analysis (e.g. Xiong 2012). The present study adopts the latter approach in order to identify a wide range of linguistic and visual features. However, the features are quantified wherever necessary to understand their distribution. As genres are ‘intimately tied into the social, political and cultural structures and practices of a given society’ (Kress 1985, 143), I also include the fourth level of analysis, that is, to explain the findings of the analysis with relation to the war for talents under the Double First-Class Initiative as well as features of the medium of WeChat.

Central to all the levels of analysis is the notion of interdiscursivity. Originated from Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) notion of heteroglossia, interdiscursivity has been a key concept in critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 1992) and genre theories (e.g. Bhatia 2014). According to Bhatia (2014), interdiscursivity is the appropriation of generic resources ‘violating’ the generic integrity to fulfill various ‘private intentions’ (Bhatia 2004). For example, in his analysis of corporate annual reports, Bhatia (2014) identified four types of discourse: accounting discourse, discourse of economics, public relations discourse, and legal discourse. Interdiscursivity is motivated by the highly interwoven professional practices and is manifested in the mixture of communicative purposes, which are in turn realized by various moves. Therefore, interdiscursivity is not an additional level of analysis, rather, it is used to describe the hybridity at the first three aforementioned levels of analysis. In this study, I will explicate how the recruitment posts integrate the functions of policy documents and advertising based on move analysis.

To guarantee the accuracy of analysis, the author and two research assistants familiar with genre analysis went through the data and discussed the move types. The determination of communicative purposes and move types also draws upon previous studies, particularly Bhatia (2014), Lam (2013) and Xiong (2012). After the move types were finalized, the two research assistants annotated the 80 recruitment posts in excel sheets. Aside from the frequency of each move, the number of tables and images were also annotated. As the framework is very straightforward, the intercoder agreement was above 90 percent and disagreements were

resolved through discussion with the author.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Generic structure and interdiscursivity

The detailed analysis of the 80 WeChat recruitment posts identifies a total of 8 rhetorical moves, of which 5 are obligatory and 3 are optional (see Table 1). The sequence of the moves is relatively fixed, following the order in Table 1. The most remarkable feature of the posts is that they are a hybrid of policy discourse and promotional discourse, creating an interdiscursive mix. Policy discourse refers to the recruitment policies as explained in Introduction, which includes information on recruitment plans (Move 3), requirements (Move 3), remuneration (Move 4), regulations (Move 5), and application procedure (Move 7). Promotional discourse refers to the promotion of institutional image and the positions concerned by highlighting their main 'selling points'. The recruitment posts include functions of both corporate advertising (i.e. advertising the university, Move 2) and commodity advertising (i.e. advertising the position, Move 4). Policy discourse and promotional discourse are products of two different professional practices: the former belongs to the authoritative activity of policy making from governments and institutions, and the latter is an instance of marketing and public relations practice. As such, they serve different communicative purposes: one provides information about relevant policies and instructions, and the other promotes a university and persuades readers to apply for the position. Specifically, the 8 moves serve 5 different communicative functions as follows.

- Promotional function: to draw attention and to persuade high-level talents by highlighting the prestige, location, facilities, etc. of the university and the lucrative remuneration packages;
- Informational function: to provide information about job vacancies, requirements and qualifications for different levels of talents as well as contact information;
- Regulatory function: to state the legal principles regarding the recruitment, as well as regulations regarding the contract;
- Instructive function: to specify the application procedure, required documents and submission method for the potential candidates;
- Relational function: to establish an equal, approachable and personal relationship with the audience, especially potential high-level candidates.

With the 5 different communicative functions, an interdiscursive relationship between policy discourse and promotional discourse is formed. It is important to note that these two discourse types are not just juxtaposed, but also blended. That is, some policy items are not just presented as information, but also as 'selling points' to attract potential candidates. This is especially the case for policies on remuneration packages (Move 1 and Move 4) which will be elaborated in the following section. As a result, while the main communicative functions can be mapped onto the 8 move types, it is typical for a move type to achieve multiple functions. The most prevalent blending is between promotional and informational functions, as illustrated in Table 1. The Titling move is particularly multi-functional because of its important role in catching readers' attention,

as will be explained in the following. Such blending is consistent with Lam's (2013) analysis of online group buying deals and seems to be a salient feature of digital genres. That is, interdiscursivity in the recruitment posts is not only manifested as the juxtaposition of different move types, but also as blended functions of single move types, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis.

Table 1 Move analysis of WeChat recruitment posts

No.	Move	Frequency	Tables	Pictures	Main functions
1	Titling	80	0	0	Promotional/ Relational/Informational
2	Introducing the university	80	0	60	Promotional/ Informational
3	Specifying positions and requirements	80	64	8	Informational
4	Offering remuneration	80	40	32	Promotional/ Informational
5	Stating regulations	31	0	0	Regulatory
6	Communicating future aspirations	37	0	0	Promotional/ Relational
7	Instructing application procedures	60	0	10	Instructional
8	Providing contact details	80	0	3	Informational

The juxtaposition and blending of policy discourse and promotional discourse is beneficial to both discourse types. On the one hand, the authoritativeness and accuracy of policy discourse may lend promotional discourse credibility which it usually lacks. Potential candidates would trust that the alluring remuneration packages are not stunts to catch attention, but reliable information based on official policies. On the other hand, advertising techniques can make policy items more engaging. Nowadays, communicative effect has become an important consideration in policy processes and texts, which is referred to as the 'mediatization' of public policies (Fairclough 2000; Lingard and Rawolle 2004). As far as recruitment policies are concerned, recruitment advertisements are the main channel through which they are 'mediatized'. Rather than using formulaic policy language, the WeChat recruitment posts make use of personalized language style, as well as words in large size and salient color to engage readers' attention. Aside from language, another striking feature of the WeChat recruitment posts in comparison with those in traditional media is the extensive use of multimodal semiotic resources, such as logos, graphics, tables, pictures and even videos, not just for the promotional elements, but also for policy elements (see Table 1 for their average occurrence rate in each post). The semiotic realizations of the interwoven policy and adverting genres in different moves will be discussed in the following. I will mainly focus on the first 6 moves, as the last two moves of application procedures and contact details are fairly short and routine, including instructions on what to submit, email addresses and phone numbers.



## 4.2 Move 1-titling

As macro-propositions in the discourse, titles primarily serve the function of capturing the most important information of the texts. Compared with the titles of newspaper recruitment advertisements which typically contain the institution's name and the academic post(s) (Xiong 2012), those in WeChat posts demonstrate several new features. In terms of the content, most titles also include remuneration packages and target candidates. The remuneration often includes handsome annual salary, considerable housing and settling-in allowance, research funding and so on, as in Text 1(a). It can be argued that the purpose of including remuneration details is not just to provide information, but also to attract the attention and interest of potential candidates (i.e. blending of informational and promotional functions). This is particularly evident in cases where remuneration details are positioned at the very beginning of the title and become the most salient information, as in Text 1(b). The titles of most posts also include target candidates, which are 'high-level talents' and 'outstanding academics', occurring in 72 of the 80 WeChat posts, as in Text 1(a), Text 1(b), Text 1(d) and Text 1(f). This information reflects the universities' primary interest in high-level talents in the context of building world-class universities.

### Text 1 Examples of titling

- (a) Blockbuster: Linyi University recruits with sincerity top-ranking talents with RMB 180 million yuan, come if you are bold enough!
- (b) [Settling-in allowance for talents: 1500,000 yuan, and a brand new 160-m<sup>2</sup> flat] Huangshan University recruits with sincerity high-profile talents from China and abroad
- (c) Nanjing Normal University Recruitment Notice 2016
- (d) Northeastern University (China) sincerely invites high-level overseas talents to join
- (e) Ping Ding Shan College Talent Recruitment Assembly, are you coming?
- (f) [Join me and fulfill you] Qufu Normal University Top Talents Recruitment Notice (2017)

In terms of linguistic expressions, the titles in our corpus are characterized by their rich variety of styles and the prevalence of informal language as compared with those in Xiong's (2012) study. Drawing upon Joos' (1967) formality scale, we can categorize the styles of the post titles as frozen, formal-consultative, and consultative-casual. In the frozen style, the titles are 'frozen' as noun phrases and the expressions remain unchanged for a long period of time. The formulaic title, 'xxx University's Recruitment Notice/Announcement/Plan', was used by all universities and companies during the era of planned economy. 9 WeChat posts still use this traditional expression, as in Text 1(c), where the university is positioned as a detached, impersonal object. Interestingly, all those universities are high ranking ones in China. This type of style suggests the ongoing influence of the authoritarian model in education policies and university communication. However, more universities (46 out of 80) adopt the formal-consultative style which takes the form 'xxx University sincerely recruits/invites high-level talents'. This expression borders on the 'consultative' style because of the use of 'sincerely', and in many cases 'invites', which represents the university as a person. This strategy of 'synthetic

personalization' (Fairclough 1989) alleviates the power asymmetry between the recruiting institution and the applicant and shortens their distance (Xiong 2012, 326). A third type of titles is of the consultative-casual style, which is used by 25 universities. In those cases, the audience is engaged through interrogatives and imperatives, as in Text 1(e) and Text 1(f). The universities are more personalized also by using personal pronouns such as 'me' and 'we' and conversational style, as in the expressions 'are you coming' and 'come if you're bold enough'. It is noteworthy that all the 25 universities are lower ranking ones, which may suggest that they are more eager to attract high-level talents. The change of style, and as a result, the change of author-reader relation from distant and detached to close and involved, is a direct manifestation of the effect of marketization (e.g. Fairclough 1993; Han 2014). It reflects the universities' effort to construct a friendly image to attract high-level talents.

### **4.3 Move 2-introducing the university**

The main function of this move is to promote a university and to establish credentials, rather than just providing information (Fairclough 1993; Osman 2008; Xiong 2012). Under the force of marketization, universities have become business-like entities, so-called 'knowledge enterprises', and have gone through a 'rebranding' process with the aim of 'improving the image of the universities by focusing on the facilities and highlighting the quality of the academic programs' (Osman 2008, 59). This move consists of 3 steps: (a) location and scenery, (b) history and status, and (c) academic strength. Salient features distinct from what previous studies suggested about this move in traditional media are summarized as follows. First, this move is considerably longer than that in traditional media, very often occupying more than 10 screen pages and accounting for two thirds of the whole post. Second, visual images are prevalent in this move, appearing in 60 of the 80 universities' posts. 212 photos are found in total and some posts contain as many as a dozen. The distribution of different types of photos is shown in Table 2 and will be discussed in the following section. Third, in terms of linguistic features, this move is clearly promotional because of the frequent use of positive evaluations, including explicit ones using evaluative lexis (e.g. famous, prestigious, and leading) and implicit ones through recounting facts that invoke specific evaluations (e.g. xxx university has 10 disciplines that belong to the top 1% in ESI world ranking).

Table 2 Types of visual images in Move 2

Panoramic view	Gates	Faculty	Students	Signature statues	Total
141	25	17	16	13	212

#### *Location and scenery*

Previous studies have found that location and scenery are important promotional information foregrounded in higher educational genres (e.g. Askehave 2007; Osman 2008; Xiong 2012). For example, Osman (2008, 67) noted that Malaysian universities 'employ the attraction of the

tropical greenery'; Xiong (2012) observed the use of 'unique landscape of the city' by Chinese universities. In contrast to the predominantly linguistic descriptions in print media, location and scenery in the WeChat recruitment posts rely heavily on photos. Photos in this step mainly include panoramic views, university gates, and signature statues. Two thirds of them are panoramic views of university campuses, as illustrated in Figure 2. The photos are not just depictions of university campuses; rather, they are professionally designed to promote the universities and to engage viewers. Like photos of scenic spots, they are very often 'beautified', featuring the blue sky, beautiful sunset, lightning effects, and so on. The other photos are university gates and signature statues. Universities with a long history usually showcase their gates with traditional Chinese architectural design in close shots, as in Figure 3. Some universities use their signature statues, such as Confucius and mottos carved on stones in Chinese calligraphy. Their function is similar to that of well-designed product photos in advertisements, which is to attract viewers' attention. No matter what images are selected, they are the ones that the designers think can best represent the university and give readers a good first impression before providing more concrete information.



Figure 2 Panoramic view of campus (Suzhou University of Technology)



Figure 3 Close shot of university gate (Qufu Normal University)

### *History and status*

Having a long history is considered as an essential aspect of status in the Chinese culture and is highlighted by many universities. The most prominent feature is the constant use of explicit evaluative lexis of ‘first’ and ‘earliest’. It is clearly promotional as universities often take the trouble to find areas where they started earlier than any other university, even if they do not have a long history. For example, Fujian Normal University promotes itself as one of the earliest normal universities in China, and Anhui Normal University claims its status as the first higher education institution in Anhui Province. Another feature is what Xiong (2012) calls ‘celebrity effect’, i.e. the listing of historical figures associated with a university. Aside from ‘borrowing’ prestige from the glorious past, many universities also emphasize that the tradition and culture cultivated by the historical figures have been handed down and are being practiced today. This is important for establishing credentials in advertisements as Chinese people value tradition (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996).

Official status is highlighted by all universities. Top universities often mention that they are comprehensive universities under the direct jurisdiction of the MOE and that they are members of ‘Project 211’ and/or ‘Project 985’ (and the ‘Double First-class Initiative’ since September 2017). Regional universities often emphasize that they are ratified by the MOE and managed by a provincial government. Unlike newspaper recruitment advertisements, visual images are sometimes used in WeChat posts to show ceremonies where the status is conferred. For example, Figure 4 shows the ceremony where China’s Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Shandong Provincial Government signed an agreement to co-fund Shandong University of Finance and Economics. Official status is considered a key aspect of credentials because public universities are more prestigious and reliable than private ones in China. Due to the long period of planned economy in China, most good universities are public, and private universities are still at their early stage of development (cf. Mok and Han 2017). Furthermore, as public universities are ‘operating according to a quasi-bureaucratic system modeled on the government, the higher the official profile is, the more important a university is’ (Xiong 2012, 328).



Figure 4 Official ceremony (Shandong University of Finance and Economics)

### *Academic strength*

Academic strength is the most important aspect of credentials for attracting high-level talents. It typically includes three types of information, namely, the range and level of academic programs, the number of national key laboratories and centers, and the number of high-profile academic staff. Compared with newspaper recruitment advertisements in Xiong's (2012) research, this step exhibits two new features which I will focus on in my analysis, namely, the highlight of high-profile faculty and the use of visual images. First, 54 universities include the number of high-profile academic staff, such as academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Changjiang Distinguished Professors, as illustrated in Text 2. Second, photos play a key role in this step and are used to depict high-profile talents, official ceremonies, and students. As shown in Table 2, 17 universities include photos of their faculty, which include portraits of high-profile faculty, as well as those in ceremonies. Figure 5 is a typical portrait photo with the name and title of the academic. Aside from faculty, there are 16 images of students, mostly in laboratory settings or graduation ceremonies. For example, Figure 6 depicts a group of students with smiling faces who are presumably working on a project together. The aspects of academic strength and the images selected clearly reflect the promotional nature of this step, which serves to convince high-profile candidates by promising them pleasant teaching experience, excellent platforms for research and like-minded leading experts.

### Text 2 Excerpt of academic strength

The university has 2,640 faculty and staff, and among them, there are 2 academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences...9 awardees of the Thousand Talents Scheme, and 9 awardees of the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars.



Figure 5 Professor Gao Ju, awardee of the Thousand Talents Scheme (Suzhou University of



Technology)



Figure 6 Students' group work in a laboratory (Shandong University of Finance)

#### **4.4 Move 3-specifying positions and requirements**

The primary purpose of this move is providing information about the positions on offer and the required qualifications. In the context of racing for high-level talents, this move exhibits new features that were not found in previous research. First, the positions are primarily categorized according to their level of importance, rather than disciplines. According to Xiong (2012), in recruitment advertisements in print media, positions on offer are classified into 4 levels, namely, distinguished professor, lecture professor, leading academics and backbone academics. In the present data, there are significantly more tiers due to the increased need of high-level talents, ranging from 7 to 12 tiers. The main visual form of representation in this move is tables, which are found in 60 out of the 80 posts, as indicated in Table 1. Tables, and in some cases bullet points, clearly mark the boundaries between different tiers.

The first tier is always academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chinese Academy of Engineering, overseas Academy of Sciences and Engineering, and in some cases Nobel Prize winners. The second tier is awardees of national talent programs, such as the Thousand Talents Scheme, the Changjiang Scholars Program, and the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars. Some universities further divide these programs into 2 to 4 tiers. This is followed by provincial level and university level talent programs, usually in 2 to 4 tiers. The last tier is PhD graduates who are not eligible for any of these programs. The recruitment plan is a direct reflection of higher education policies. As explained in the analysis of titling, this reflects the universities' primary interest in high-level talents in the context of constructing world-class universities. Meanwhile, the uniformity of the hierarchy of talents suggests that the recruitment plan models on government talent programs at different levels.

Required qualifications for talents of all tiers are detailed. In contrast to Xiong's (2012) finding that the requirements 'are quite diverse', including political loyalty, moral and academic integrity, age, and so on, the present data shows a remarkably homogeneous pattern. First, academic titles are the most important qualification for top-tier talents. One has to be an academician or awardee of one of the national talent programs to be eligible. Second, the recruitment is clearly targeted at well-established overseas academics. For the Thousand Talents Scheme, only tenured professors in reputable overseas universities are eligible. All the other tiers explicitly include a professorship or PhD in a prestigious overseas university and international influence as qualifications. For example, in Text 3, Linyi University clearly specifies that fifth-tier talents should be outstanding overseas academics, with a PhD from a prestigious overseas university, and have at least 2 years' teaching experience at the level of Assistant Professor. Third, for more junior high-level talents, international publications are the only requirement. The number of papers in SCI indexed journals (first quartile, Q1) is directly commensurate with the tier a candidate is qualified for. For example, in Text 3, 3 SCI Q1 papers are required for fifth-tier talents and 1 SCI Q1 paper or 3 SCI Q2 papers are required for sixth-tier talents. This unique requirement indicates the only purpose of hiring young academics is producing high impact papers.

Text 3 Excerpt for qualifications required for high-level talents at Linyi University

- Tier-5. Overseas academic backbone talents: a PhD degree from a prestigious overseas university, at least two years' overseas teaching and research experience at the level of assistant professor, more than 3 SCI Q1 publications as the first author or corresponding author.
- High-level PhDs. PhD in science and engineering disciplines: 1 SCI Q1 publication or 3 SCI Q2 publications as the first or corresponding author.

#### **4.5 Move 4-offering remuneration**

This is the core promotional move which attracts potential candidates by providing various forms of incentives. This move is characterized by what van Dijk (1995, 275) calls 'a high level of detail and a high degree of completeness' in the description of remuneration packages. First, the exact amount of annual salary and other benefits is provided, including house allowances, settling-in allowances, post allowances, start-up funding, etc., as illustrated in Table 3. The annual salary for second-tier talents in Table 3 is RMB 1.5 million (approx. USD 230,000), which is higher than the salary of a full professor in the United States. This also suggests that the universities target overseas professors. Some universities even promise that the salary they offer can be higher than that of the candidate's current salary in western universities, whatever amount it is. It should also be noted that this amount is paid in the form of an 'allowance', on top of the basic salary in the last column in Table 3.

Second, as also shown in Table 3, the remuneration package is clearly specified according to the level in the talent hierarchy. The terms for first-tier (and for some universities the first four

tiers) talents are usually ‘negotiable’, which means that as long as an academician is willing to join a certain university, anything is possible. That is, the recruitment of top-tier talents is on a ‘whatever it takes’ basis, and is not bound by remuneration regulations. This gives rise to the widely adopted ‘one person, one policy’ practice, which is a polar opposite of the standardized salary system in a planned economy. The blatant ‘pricing’ of scholars, the flexibility of terms, and the large discrepancy among different levels are a direct manifestation of the talent policy and the effect of marketization on higher education in China. Meanwhile, the detailed description also indicates the universities’ intention to highlight remuneration information to attract potential candidates. As van Dijk (1995, 275) suggests, ‘as soon as people or events become more relevant and important, they tend to be described in more detail and at a more specific (less abstract) level’.

Table 3 Remuneration package of Linyi University (translated from the original)

Category	Remuneration	House allowance (lump sum, RMB)	Settlement allowance (lump sum, RMB)	Post allowance (annual, RMB)	Research funding (lump sum, RMB)		Job for spouse	Others
					Experiment-based disciplines	Other disciplines		
Tier-1 talents					Negotiable			
Tier-2 talents		1,350,000	1,000,000	1,500,000	8,000,000	3,000,000	Yes	Basic salary (professor)
Tier-3 talents		1,050,000	800,000	800,000	5,000,000	2,000,000	Yes	
Tier-4 talents		750,000	500,000	400,000	1,000,000	800,000	Yes	
Tier-5 talents		600,000	400,000	300,000	800,000	400,000	Yes	Basic salary (associate professor)
High-level PhDs			200,000		200,000	100,000	Conditional	
PhD graduates			60,000		100,000	50,000	No	

Aside from using detailed descriptions, the WeChat posts also use other techniques to achieve their promotional purposes. In many cases, the remuneration package is under the heading of an official recruitment program, or is termed ‘remuneration policy’. As previously mentioned, it has the dual identity as a policy document and a promotional message, which makes the information appealing and reliable at the same time. In terms of presentation, the most popular form is tables, as in Table 3. As shown in Table 1, 64 posts use tables in Move 3 and 40 use tables in Move 4. Tables are considered as offering the precise value of the data (Uzuner-Smith and Englander 2015), and therefore, what is represented in tables should be regarded as accurate and reliable. Some universities use more creative diagrams and figures to make the specific information more eye-catching and easy to remember, which reinforces the promotional effect of the recruitment posts. For example, Pingdingshan University uses several gamified pictures and diagrams to represent its remuneration package, as illustrated in Figure 7.



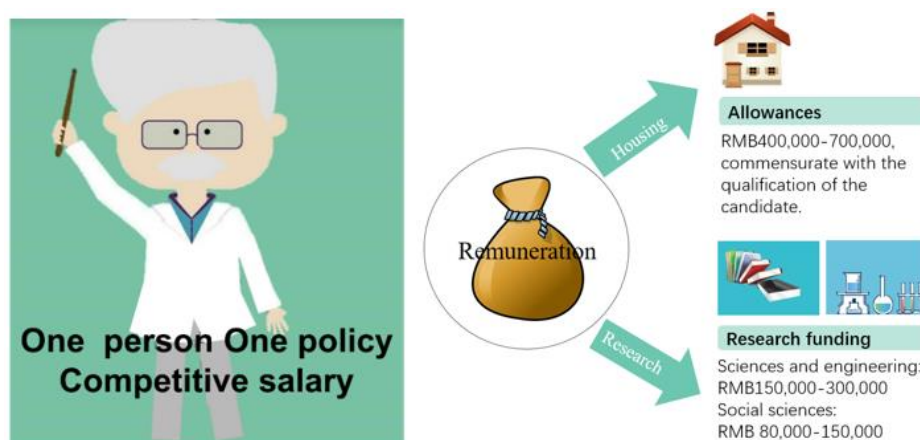


Figure 7 Example of the representation of remuneration of Pingdingshan University

#### 4.6 Move 5-stating regulations

This move is the most prototypical component of policy discourse. Contrary to the overall promotional nature of the recruitment posts, this move actually deters potential candidates from applying. For this reason, it appears only in 31 of the recruitment posts. It usually contains (a) principles of the recruitment, (b) recruitment procedures, and (c) conditions of contracts. First, the principles of the recruitment include fairness, transparency, and so on, which regulates the process of recruitment. The principles are usually realized through modal verbs of obligation (e.g. should and must) and verbs such as 'stick to' and 'adhere to', as illustrated in Text 4(a). Second, some universities also include official procedures for recruitment, which model on government practice and are similar across universities. This typically involves four steps, namely, application, initial screening, university assessment, and signing contract. Detailed principles and regulations for each step are explained. Third, some universities specify the conditions of the contract. Text 4(b) is an extract from Hebei University's post, which prescribes the serving time and period if employed. Other conditions include penalty for violating the contract, failing to fulfill duties, and so on. In order to minimize the deterring effect, this move is usually presented in paragraphs with formal and distant language style, and without any special typographical features or multimodal elements. As a result, it is the least reader-friendly part and many readers would simply dismiss it as formulaic legal discourse (cf. Bhatia 2010; Lam 2013).

Text 4 Examples of regulatory discourse

- (a) The implementation of 'Shanxi University's Hundred Junior Scholars Program' must stick to the national standard, and must stick to the principles of objectivity, fairness, and transparency.
- (b)
  1. The full-time on-post time is calculated on the basis of 12 months, and that of recruited overseas high-profile talents on the basis of 9 months.
  2. The above recruited talents shall work for the university for no less than 8 years.

#### 4.7 Move 6-communicating future aspirations

This move is designed to reassure potential candidates about the future of the advertised university and the future of the candidates if they join the university. This move echoes the relational discourse in Move 1 and appears in 37 WeChat posts which use consultative-casual style titles. First, a university communicates its aspiration to become a world-class or prestigious research university and explains the measures taken to accelerate its development. Particularly highlighted is its determination and capability to recruit more high-level talents. Through these aspirations, it reassures its applicants that they will be working in a prestigious university dedicated to high-quality research and that they will be valued. Second, it promises to provide its staff with the best research and living conditions. For example, in Text 5(a), Northwestern University (in China) promises its potential employees with four ‘senses’—a sense of belonging, a sense of recognition, a sense of honor and a sense of happiness, and assures them that they will ‘work with dignity and live with decency’. In Text 5(b), Inner Mongolia University aspires to provide first-class academic environment, service and living conditions for its employees. Finally, many universities also extend invitations to high-level talents. For example, Jiangxi Normal University states ‘we sincerely invite outstanding talents from all over the world to join us and shape the future’. Through communicating aspirations and extending invitations, universities construct their friendly image and consolidate solidarity with potential candidates.

#### Text 5 Examples of Communicating Future Aspirations

- (a) Northwest University (China): We will constantly make efforts to endow our talents with a sense of belonging, a sense of recognition, a sense of honor and a sense of happiness. We will guarantee you a dignified job and decent life.
- (b) Inner Mongolian University: In the next 5 years, we will recruit more than 400 full-time high-level talents and young scholars. We will provide our employees with first-class academic environment, first-class resources, first-class services, and first-class living conditions.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis in the previous section shows that universities’ WeChat recruitment posts are different from newspaper job advertisements at the first three levels of genre analysis set out in the Methodology section, namely, increased complexity of communicative purposes (i.e. juxtaposition and blending of policy discourse and promotional discourse), move structure (e.g. the moves of stating regulations and instructing application procedures), and forms of realization (i.e. mixed linguistic styles and the extensive use of photos, tables, and graphs). In this section I will explain the contextual factors behind these features (i.e. the fourth level of analysis in Methodology, including the new social contexts of the Double First-Class Initiative and the ‘recruitment hype’ in marketized Chinese higher education, and the new medium context of WeChat (e.g. unlimited virtual space which allows for much longer texts). The recruitment posts as ‘discourse’ are a direct reflection of universities’ professional practices, namely, the race for high-level talents, which includes the formulation of recruitment policies and the communication of them. On the one hand, aiming at recruiting high-level talents, they propose sophisticated

hierarchies based on titles and publications, and offer high remuneration; on the other hand, rather than just providing information, they use various discursive strategies to promote the jobs and the universities, and to construct an equal and close relation with high-level talents. Therefore, aside from being a policy document and job advertisement, the WeChat recruitment posts also serve the purposes of university branding and public relations management. These practices are enabled by the medium of WeChat, and at the same time, are a response to the intensified competition among Chinese universities in the contexts of the Double First-class Initiative and accelerated marketization of higher education. In what follows, I will elaborate these new contextual features. I will then problematize the recruitment policies (i.e. in relation to the social context) and communication strategies (i.e. in relation to the medium context) from a critical perspective and propose possible solutions.

In terms of the recruitment policies, the recruitment posts reflect an unprecedented nationwide ‘talent mania’ and ‘recruitment hype’ in Chinese higher education under the Double First-Class Initiative. This is possible because nowadays universities enjoy the autonomy of offering remuneration based on the ‘market price’ of scholars. Meanwhile, the fierce competition for high-level talents driven by marketization forces universities to offer extremely high remuneration and prescribe high requirements on titles and international publications. The first ‘symptom’ of the ‘talent mania’ is the universities’ preoccupation with the title/status of an academic in the talent hierarchy, as demonstrated in the analysis of Move 3. Scholars argue that the titles from various talent programs have changed higher education into a vanity fair where the sole aim of doing research is to get a title. Scholars have also developed a quick-fix mindset and only pursue research that is immediately rewarding, rather than explore important areas that are difficult and time-consuming (Zhao 2016). As a result, there have been constant voices that those talent programs and titles should be terminated. A related problem is that the faculty recruitment plans usually cover all disciplines and are homogeneous among all universities. As Altbach (2003, 7) remarks, ‘even the best universities are not the best in everything...It might be more appropriate for many countries and institutions to focus on building world-class departments, institutes, or schools’. The Double First-class Initiative has rightly proposed the construction of first-class disciplines as well as world-class universities. Following this policy, universities should strategically employ talents to strengthen their key disciplines and avoid irrational competition with their fellow universities. The second ‘symptom’ of ‘talent mania’ is the high remuneration packages offered to high-level talents. Notwithstanding their crucial role in attracting overseas talents (i.e. ‘reversing the brain drain’ termed by Xiong 2012), they have also created problems that need the attention of policymakers, such as the large income discrepancy between high-level talents and ordinary faculty, the unbalanced development of universities in different regions, and so on. The most notable problem is the ‘brain drain’ from underdeveloped provinces in western and northeastern China to more developed provinces in the east. To tackle this problem, in January 2017, the MOE promulgated a policy document titled ‘Notice on Taking the Right Direction and Promoting the Rational and Orderly Flow of High-level Talents among Universities’ (MOE, 2017), which includes measures such as discouraging universities in eastern

China to recruit from western and northeastern China, censorship on remuneration, prioritizing scholars from universities in western and northeastern China when awarding Changjiang Scholars, penalizing staff members who break their contracts, and so on. However, the effect of such measures is yet to be seen.

In terms of communication strategies, the affordances of WeChat public accounts make the recruitment posts different from job advertisements in print media. Drawing upon previous studies (e.g. boyd 2011; Schrock 2015) and the uniqueness of the present data, I summarize five central affordances: unlimited article space, circulation by sharing, traceability of the number of views, portability, and multimodality. First, the recruitment posts are significantly longer than newspaper job advertisements (Xiong 2012), ranging from 5 to 15 screen pages. As a result, they are able to accommodate more communicative functions as well as a large number of tables, graphs, and visual images. Second, the main way of circulation is sharing through WeChat groups or personal accounts based on an individual's social networks (re-distribution using the 'forward' button on the top right in Figure 1), and the number of views and likes are shown at the end of a post (see Figure 1). Third, a related feature is that because WeChat is primarily used on mobile phones, the recruitment posts can be read anytime and anywhere, for example, during meals, while walking or lying in bed. The pressure of engaging readers' interest and spreading to the widest audience as possible requires that the posts are easy and pleasant to read. Therefore, the posts use eye-catching titles (particularly by including the salary), pictures of beautiful scenery, strength of the university, and alluring salary to attract reading and encourage sharing. The language use exhibits different styles, but casual and conversational styles are preferred for the construction of a solidary relationship with potential candidates. Finally, as a result of the above features, multimodal resources such as tables, photos and graphs are used. As elaborated in previous analysis, photos of university scenery, eminent faculty members, and students in Move 2 are used to construct an ideal image of the university and to engage readers' attention. Tables, which are mainly used in Move 3 and Move 4, organize the information about positions and remuneration in a clear way for easy reading. They also serve to represent remuneration information as precise and reliable. However, contradicting these features, it is also found that some universities, especially elite universities, still use formulaic recruitment language and include an authoritative regulatory move (Move 5). These universities usually present information in paragraphs, without using tables or visual images. This indicates their attempt to keep the status quo in resistance to the influence of social media. However, as pointed out in the University Bluebook on New Media (Chinese Internet Data Centre, 2017), the discursive regime formed in traditional media, including political propaganda, hierarchical system, and authoritative style, is incompatible with social media and will eventually collapse. With the increasing penetration of promotional culture and social media, it is important for elite universities in China to consciously rebrand their images through WeChat and other platforms.

To conclude, this study provides a new understanding of the latest higher education policies in China and universities' recruitment practice on social media. The new social context of the Double First-Class Initiative and the recruitment hype in marketized Chinese higher education

and the new medium context of WeChat (e.g. unlimited virtual space) have given rise to an updated genre of job advertisements with increased complexity of communicative purposes (i.e. juxtaposition and blending of policy discourse and promotional discourse) and forms of realization (i.e. mixed linguistic styles and the extensive use of photos, tables, and graphs). The detailed genre analysis of 80 WeChat recruitment posts sheds light on the joint forces of education policy, marketization and social media in shaping university communication. The understanding is valuable for universities to design their recruitment discourse more effectively to attract high-level talents. Further studies in this regard can use surveys and interviews to examine the perceived effectiveness of different styles. New features of language use in other forms of university communication and other institutional settings (e.g. governments and public sectors) on various social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) are also important areas for pragmatic and discourse analysis.

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