

'Uncle Hawking' draws nearly half-billion clicks from mourning Chinese (Update)

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British theoretical physicist and mathematician Stephen Hawking arrives in Hong Kong in 2006

[Stephen Hawking's death Wednesday](#) generated nearly half a billion clicks in China, where fans mourned a "giant star" who was admired for rising above physical disability and for heartfelt messages to his Chinese social media followers.

Already well-known in China, the British cosmologist two years ago further endeared himself by opening an account on the Twitter-like Weibo platform, posting in both Chinese and English.

The account drew one million fans in its first few hours and now has nearly five million followers.

The infrequent posts by Hawking, who Chinese affectionately called "Hawking Dada", or "Uncle Hawking", typically generated tens of thousands of admiring comments apiece.

News of his death at age 76 quickly became the top-trending Weibo topic, with the hashtag #Hawking passed# generating more than 450 million reads and nearly 250,000 comments in the hours after his death was announced.

Many called his passing "the falling of a giant star".

"The deterioration of his body did not trap him. Today this superhuman brain has left this world, and his next journey, death, remains a mystery," one user said.

"I hope he has the strength to send us information from the next world."

Another user wrote: "Even though I can't understand Hawking Dada's books... he is the one who knows the secret of this world."

At a daily press briefing in Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman

Lu Kang called him a "fighter for science who arduously battled illness for a long time".

Lu noted that Hawking also "strongly insisted" on visiting the Great Wall on a previous visit to China despite his physical condition.

"Mr. Hawking and his contributions will be remembered forever."

Most of Hawking's life was spent in a wheelchair, crippled by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a form of motor neuron disease. He died at his home in England on Wednesday, his family said.

Hawking posted on Weibo about black holes and other phenomena, and wrote in one message that being on China's leading social media platform was "a source of great inspiration".

One of his more popular postings was a June 2016 message of encouragement to tens of millions of Chinese students preparing for annual national college-entrance exams, a stressful, make-or-break ordeal that can determine one's future.

"Whether you aim to be a doctor, teacher, scientist, musician, engineer, or a writer, be fearless in the pursuit of your aspirations. You are the next generation of big thinkers and thought leaders that will shape the future for generations to come," he wrote.

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