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A Chinese Perspective on Face as Inter-Relational Concern

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Facework has served as an important construct to provoke social scientific dialogue about human interaction. Goffman (1959, 1967), who laid the groundwork for this line of research with his dramaturgical analysis, describes "face" as a means of impression management for social actors' interaction with others on the stage of life. The centrality of the concept of face in analyzing human interaction has long been acknowledged. Ho (1976), for example, elaborates the importance of the concept of face in any social system:

> Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgments of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations the others have placed upon him. (p. 883)

If social interaction is unavoidable, then so is mutual concern for face. Taking a sociolinguistic approach, Brown and Levinson (1987) relied on the concept of face in discussing politeness strategies, offering positive and negative face-wants as the underlying mechanism regulating directness and indirectness in linguistic expression. Indeed, Brown and Levinson ar-

gue that the desire for face is a universal phenomenon, underlying the constitution of linguistic expressions in a wide variety of different languages and cultures.

In the field of communication, many scholars have utilized the concept of face as a construct to analyze communicative strategies and performances, addressing issues in such areas as compliance gaining (Baxter, 1984; Tracy, Craig, Smith, & Spisak, 1984; Craig, Tracy, & Spisak, 1986), emotional disclosure (Shimanoff, 1985, 1987), conflict styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubiski, Yang, Kim, Lin, & Nishida, 1991), managerial communication (Fairhurst, Green, & Snavely, 1984), and diplomatic communication (Ting-Toomey & Cole, 1990).

Nevertheless, we feel that communication studies have given insufficient attention to the phenomenon of face considered from a cultural perspective. Human interaction assumes different forms and meanings depending on the cultural environment. The concept of face, as a form of respect which interactants assume toward each other in the course of their interaction, also varies in its contents in different cultural environments. Precisely because of this variation, face needs to be explored in situ within its "home" system of cultural meanings in order to assess how members of a given culture choose to regulate their interpersonal lives. Employing a cultural approach to the concept of face, we can achieve three goals simultaneously. First, we can acquire an in-depth understanding of the concept within a cultural system, through investigating the role face plays in influencing human interaction among members of the culture. Second, we can assess the importance of face in analyzing human interaction, through acquiring new understanding of the meanings of human interaction with reference to the concept of face. Third, we can assess the validity, or at least the usefulness, of the claim for face as a universal organizing theme of human interaction, given its diverse expression in various cultures. This kind of in-depth, emic, understanding in probing the meaning of face in one particular cultural environment is a vital first step in evaluating the appropriateness of the concept of face as a universal, etic, construct.

The Chinese concept of face (or *mien-tzu*) is complex and dynamic. While there are many facets to the long-developed set of Chinese cultural practices relating to face, as we delineate the intersection between face and relationships, we will argue

that the complexity of Chinese interpersonal relationships has paved the way for face to be actively utilized to facilitate (or, alternatively, to hinder) interpersonal activities, and even to solve (or, alternatively, to prevent solution of) interpersonal problems. To substantiate our theoretical perspective, we will present interviewees' accounts from our earlier studies[1] to illustrate the variety of ways in which face can be employed in the conduct of interpersonal relationship. We will present our findings by addressing the following four issues: (1) the cultural dimension of the concept of *mien-tzu*; (2) the significance and meaning of interpersonal relationship, *mien-tzu*, and human emotion, to the Chinese; (3) the social significance of *mien-tzu* as it impacts interpersonal relating; and finally, (4) the implications of the analysis and challenges posed to the current research on facework.

The Concept of *Mien-tzu*

The concept of face, known to Chinese as *mien-tzu*[2] is central to Chinese construal of their social life. The impact of *mien-tzu* on Chinese cultural life has been noted by many people for a significant portion of China's history. Early missionaries and travellers wrote of their astonishment at the pervasiveness of the concept of *mien-tzu* among Chinese (Bard, 1905; Danton, 1938; Smith, 1895). Lin (1939), a Chinese scholar well-known in the West, referred to face, fate, and favor as the "three sisters" who control Chinese life. Commenting negatively on the influence of these three factors upon the Chinese, Lin argued that their impact lies in a gentle but penetrating power which Chinese find difficult to resist: "their voices are soft, their ways are gentle, their feet tread noiselessly over the law courts, and their fingers move silently, expertly, putting the machinery of justice out of order while they caress the judge's cheeks" (pp. 195–96). LaBarre (1946a, 1946b) addresses the phenomenon of *mien-tzu* as it is revealed through various linguistic expressions. In a systematic and scholarly analysis of *mien-tzu*, Hu (1944) elaborated in detail the significance of the concept of *mien-tzu* and a related concept, *lien*, to Chinese culture. Finally, Yang (1945), in his study of a village in Shantung province on the mainland, explained how *mien-tzu* can be a cause for conflict and how it can be utilized as a means of solving conflict through outside intervention.

While the above anecdotal observations and systematic analyses are based upon life in mainland China, many modern

Chinese scholars share a similar viewpoint about *mien-tzu* in regard to present-day Taiwan.[3] Several studies have utilized the concept of *mien-tzu* to explain interpersonal interaction and relationships (Ch'en, 1989; Chu, 1989; Hwang, 1987, 1988, 1989; King, 1989a, 1989b). These and other studies share the common perception that *mien-tzu* helps Chinese orchestrate their daily lives, influencing the way they interact with one another, bringing the delicate philosophical nuances to face into the realm of daily existence. Given the importance of *mien-tzu* to the Chinese, a closer examination of its various meanings is in order.

Mien-tzu: Its Meanings

Literally speaking, *mien-tzu* refers to human physiognomy ("the face").[4] However, the Chinese concept of *mien-tzu* is heavily laden with psychological and sociological meanings. It is different from the concept of "face" as commonly understood in the work of Western social scientists, such as Goffman (1959, 1967). As Yang (1945) explains,

> "Face" is a literal translation of the Chinese character of *lien* or *mien*. Although *lien* or *mien* means just what the English word face does, the Chinese expression *tiou lien* (losing face) or *yao mien-tzu* (wanting a face) has nothing to do with face in our usual understanding of the term. It does not mean a certain expression on, or the physical appearance of, the face, such as implied by "a funny face" or "a sad face." When we say in Chinese that one loses face, we mean that he [or she] loses prestige, he has [or she] been insulted or has been made to feel embarrassment before a group. When we say that a man wants a face, we mean that he wants to be given honor, prestige, praise, flattery, or concession, whether or not these are merited. Face is really a personal psychological satisfaction, a social esteem accorded by others. (p. 167)

Several scholars echo Yang's analysis. Hu (1944) defines *mien-tzu* as "a reputation achieved through getting on in life through success and ostentation" (p. 45). Hwang (1989) contends that *mien-tzu* is a "social status or prestige acquired by one's accomplishment in the society; whereas 'mien-tzu work' is a behavior of impression management, performed purposefully in order to create certain images of oneself in front of others" (p. 305). Since social recognition and social status are major sources of *mien-tzu*, Hsiang (1974) argues that the term

mien-tzu is now synonymous with the term "honor" (p. 52). However, Lin (1939) argues that "to confuse face with the Western 'honor' is to make a grievous error" (p. 200; see also Ho, 1976). This disagreement arises, perhaps, because of the distinction between honor as shared (as in Chinese societies) and honor as individually owned (as in Western societies).

The difficulty in arriving at a common definition for *mien-tzu* is due primarily to the complex socio-psychological implications of the concept itself. As Lin (1939) explains,

> [F]ace is psychological and not physiological. Interesting as the Chinese physiological face is, the psychological face makes a still more fascinating study. It is not a face that can be washed or shaved, but a face that can be "granted" and "lost" and "fought for" and "presented as a gift." . . . Abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated. . . . Face cannot be translated or defined. It is like honor and is not honor. It cannot be purchased with money, and gives a man or a woman a material pride. It is hollow and yet is what men fight for and what many women die for. It is invisible and yet by definition exists by being shown to the public. It exists in the ether and yet cannot be heard, and sounds eminently respectable and solid. It is amenable, not to reason but to social convention. (pp. 199–200)

While most scholars see *mien-tzu* as grounded in external social acknowledgment, for King (1989b), it also has its moral element which impels a person to work hard and to achieve higher moral standards.[5] In spite of scholars' diverse opinions, all these definitions seem to support the general idea that *mien-tzu* reflects one's reputation achieved and maintained through the scrutiny of others, with the standard of acknowledgment reflecting not only social values, but moral values as well. To put is simply, *mien-tzu* can be seen as a measure of the recognition accorded by society. As we will elaborate, it is this social dimension inherent in the conception of *mien-tzu*, together with its somewhat obligatory character, that leads to consideration of *mien-tzu* as inter-rational concern.

Mien-tzu: Its Dynamism and Complexity

The richness and complexity of *mien-tzu* can be demonstrated by analyzing its various expressions in the Chinese language.[6] In examining these linguistic expressions, we begin by explor-

ing how *mien-tzu* can be seen as a quality claimed by the individual and accredited by society at large, and then move to an examination of the role *mien-tzu* plays in interpersonal activities. The personal and interpersonal facets of *mien-tzu* are two sides of the same coin: the individual claims *mien-tzu* from the society, and eventually places his/her *mien-tzu* under the scrutiny of others in the process of relating.

The personal perspective: mien-tzu *as claimed by the individual.* Although *mien-tzu* is not like a personality trait possessed by an individual (Ho, 1976), observing *mien-tzu* from the personal perspective reveals an individual's concern about the extent to which she/he is to be recognized by society. Several linguistic expressions suggest that *mien-tzu* can be a quality claimed by the individual, so that individuals may vary in their attitudes toward their own *mien-tzu*. Expressions such as "(someone) loves [their] *mien-tzu* very much" (meaning that one is overly concerned about *mien-tzu*), and "(someone) is particular about *mien-tzu*" (meaning that ones pays particular attention to issues of *mien-tzu*) are two important expressions used by Chinese. Moreover, regarding the extent to which the individual wants to claim *mien-tzu* for him-/herself, *mien-tzu* can be said to have an almost quantitative dimension. Individuals are frequently described as differing in their degree of "face-lovingness": a person who is more interested in having *mien-tzu* may be described as a person who cares more about social values and social judgments. On the other hand, when one has done something dishonorable, it is said that one's "face cannot be hung," meaning that one cannot face others because one's self-respect has been challenged.

The concept of *mien-tzu* is also associated with social values, governed by the principle that the amount of *mien-tzu* one can enjoy is proportionate to the social and relational status one possesses. The amount of *mien-tzu* one can claim in front of others is determined by the recognition accorded by others. Since *mien-tzu* is a quality claimed for oneself, it becomes a front, a mask that one uses to augment and signify personal social prestige. Consequently, one's success in achieving increased social status may be described as a process of gaining more *mien-tzu*. Many linguistic expressions describe face-augmentation: "having much *mien-tzu*," "having *mien-tzu*," "having less *mien-tzu*," and "having very much less *mien-tzu*." These linguistic expressions denote differing degrees to which

one is or is not honored through one's *mien-tzu*, as this status is reflected in the eyes of others. Because the possibility for one to move upward in the social ladder always exists, *mien-tzu* can be said to be "worth fighting for."

This connection between *mien-tzu* and social values shows both flexibility and inflexibility. On one hand, one's social prestige may constrain the extent to which one can claim *mien-tzu* in front of others: on the other hand, external formality based on varying degrees of *mien-tzu* can frequently be adjusted in accordance with social circumstances. *Mien-tzu* may be exaggerated, added to, or decreased, depending upon how one chooses to present oneself in front of others. One may do something to enhance *mien-tzu*, that is, "add to *mien-tzu*," or compete with someone to gain more *mien-tzu* ("struggle for *mien-tzu*"). For example, one may augment *mien-tzu* by inviting a person to dinner at an outstanding or expensive restaurant, or by inviting important people to be guests at a dinner. In both cases, one's public image has been enhanced through manipulation of *mien-tzu*.

Mien-tzu can be claimed not only by individuals, but can also be shared by members of the ingroup, or by people in specific social situations. More often than not, members of the family of an individual who has *mien-tzu* may share pride in that individual's achievements (Lin, 1939). This sharing also implies that one is expected to protect the *mien-tzu* of the whole family or the ingroup.

The interpersonal perspective: mien-tzu *as defined in interaction.* A second significant aspect of *mien-tzu* is that, as suggested by several linguistic expressions, it is defined in the process of interaction, in the give-and-take of daily social life. Social others, whether specific individuals or the society at large, have a stake in the individual's maintenance or protection of *mien-tzu*. *Mien-tzu* is said to be distributed among all interactants in a situation, as reflected in the common phrase, "everybody gets *mien-tzu*," meaning that matters are handled in such a way that everyone shares the honor of "looking good."[7] When matters are not handled properly, it is said that "everybody has no *mien-tzu*." Interactants are expected to know how to respect the *mien-tzu* of others in order to ensure smooth social interaction.

Precisely because of the involvement of others, it is possible for social actors to maneuver *mien-tzu* in interpersonal en-

counters. Since issues of *mien-tzu* cannot be avoided, they must be negotiated between interactants themselves. Several examples of the coupling of indicators of action with *mien-tzu* reveal its dynamic utilization. When practical needs arise, one may choose to "do *mien-tzu*" (meaning to manipulate *mien-tzu* in order to provide a future resource). When someone requests a favor, the other may decide to "give (or not give) a *mien-tzu*" (meaning to honor someone's *mien-tzu*), or to "take care of one's *mien-tzu*" (meaning to do something special for someone because of his or her *mien-tzu*). Whatever one has to do, one must not forget to "leave *mien-tzu* for someone" (meaning to avoid doing something to harm another's *mien-tzu*). When one does not want to grant the other a *mien-tzu*, at least one should "pad (someone's) *mien-tzu*" (meaning to show insincere deference in order to avoid offending the other's *mien-tzu*). As these and many other expressions show, the Chinese have developed a detailed set of social techniques for interacting with others in ways that permit protection of each actor's *mien-tzu* (King, 1989a).

Summary. These different Chinese expressions demonstrate the flexibility, dynamism, and utility of *mien-tzu*; *mien-tzu* is simultaneously a quality claimed by the individual through social recognition, and a quality to be actively engaged in the process of interpersonal relating. *Mien-tzu* is flexible, because it is not a fixed image one portrays for oneself on the stage of life, but an image which can be "added to" or "decreased" in the process of interaction. *Mien-tzu* is utilizable, because it is concerned not only with present conditions, but serves as a resource that can be stored and invested for future use. *Mien-tzu* is dynamic, because it is not only an image or identity one can claim for oneself to enhance social status, but is something which can be used as a means to renegotiate relational obligations. The functioning of *mien-tzu* in interpersonal relations can be understood only if one is able to appreciate the complexity of Chinese relations. To elaborate how the concept must be situated within a system of cultural meanings, we now turn to a fuller explanation of the intricate connection among relations, human emotion, and *mien-tzu*.

Relationship as Focus of Attention: *Mien-tzu*, Relations, and Human Emotion

The functioning of *mien-tzu* needs to be understood by reference to Chinese relations (*kuan-hsi*) and human emotion (*ren-*

ching). Indeed, some analysts (Hsiang, 1974; Hwang, 1989) have argued that *mien-tzu*, human emotion, and interpersonal relations must be understood as a whole.

The Chinese emphasis upon human interaction as the fundamental groundwork of its philosophical systems has been well documented (Chan, 1963, 1967; Fung, 1983). These fundamental assumptions have influenced the way Chinese conduct their lives, resulting in endless connected chains of interpersonal relationships. Particularly significant is the Confucian ideal of different orders of relationships as reflecting varying degrees of human emotion (*ren-ching*). By observing different degrees of relationships and human emotion, the Chinese express, or at least try to appear to express, emotional concern toward each other by showing respect for the relational partner's *mien-tzu*. *Mien-tzu* must be understood within this system of inter-relational positioning. Noting the effect of differing orders of relationships on the Chinese, Hsiang (1974) observes, "there is no way to talk about 'human emotion' between strangers. To work for our acquaintances or friends, to give them *mien-tzu*, and to make them happy, is so-called 'human emotion' " (p. 56). To put it simply, if one does not have a good or important relationship, it will be difficult for one to claim sufficient *mien-tzu* in the presence of another because there is so little "human emotion" involved.

We argue that the central character of Chinese relationship lies in its emphasis upon human emotion (*ren-ching*),[8] the standard against which the quality of *mien-tzu* is measured. To understand the interconnection among human emotion, *mien-tzu*, and relations, we must first understand the role relationships play in Chinese social life. To explicate this thesis, we build a link between the philosophical realm (as reflected in the Confucian school and other streams of philosophical thought) and the cultural realm (as reflected in the folk concepts of relation) (*kuan-hsi*). Let us consider, first, the philosophical ideal of Chinese relationship, and second, the practical social expression of the ideal.

The Philosophical Ideal

Confucius taught that human morality is based on five basic relationships as the proper place where one learns humanity. According to Confucian philosophy, society is possible and stable only when the five basic relationships are appropriately maintained: (1) father-son (the relation of *closeness*); (2) emperor-subject (the relation of *righteousness*); (3) husband-

wife (the relation of *distinction*); (4) elder-younger (the relation of *order*); and (5) friend-friend (the relation of *faithfulness*). Depending upon whether the relationship is close or distant, different ways of interacting should be employed (Fung, 1983).

As Geng (1982) has noted, three out of these five bases of relationship occur within the family (father-son, husband-wife, and elder-younger). Since the family serves as the basis of the society, one relates to the outside world much in the same way as one relates to members of the family. The regulating factors in family relationships are said to be extendable to the whole town, the whole society, and consequently, to the whole country. Even if there is no blood connection or marriage relation, Chinese are still able to apply the rules of ordering between interactants; it is possible to do this, for example, based upon the comparative *ages* of interactants.

To learn to regulate one's proper relations with others, Confucius maintained that one must learn to practice the rules of *li* (propriety) (Chan, 1963; Graham, 1989). While the complex behaviors governed by *li* are often read as the imposition upon individuals of the values of a "collective" society, Confucian philosophy is less a system of *rules* than a means of self-examination and self-development. *Li*, as a set of norms appropriate to one's natural moral development, are not simply prescriptive rules imposed from without.

"Human emotion," the common emotional responses shared by human beings, can be seen as the guiding spirit of Chinese cultural life (Liang, 1964; Hsiang, 1974; King, 1989a). Behavior considered appropriate to a person occupying a particular position is to be understood from the human being's natural emotional responses toward relational partners. It is human emotion (or human feeling) which enables one to make clear distinctions among different orders of relationships. According to the classic *Li-Yun*, human emotion includes "enjoyment, anger, sorrowfulness, happiness, love, disgust, and desire . . . these seven we human beings are capable of without learning them" (Legge, 1967, p. 50). One naturally has more concern for those with whom one is more intimate, and less concern for those in more distant relation. In this way, rules of order (*li*) serve to refine human nature. An example is the relationship between a loving father and a pious son: their interaction is less dictated by external behavioral codes than a product of the natural emotion flowing from their hearts. To learn to appreciate the difference between different

orders of relationships, the *individual* must develop ethically and morally.

The emphasis on relationships in Confucianism can be understood from its central virtue, *ren*, which denotes "all those moral qualities which should govern one man in his relations with another. . . . Briefly defined, it is the manifestation of the genuine nature, acting in accordance with propriety (*li*) and based upon sympathy for others" (Fung, 1983, p. 69). In the ideal Confucian society, to hold one's own position appropriately is to show respect and emotional concern for the other through elevating one's spiritual understanding to encompass the universe as whole. Hence, individuals must learn not only to harmonize with their fellows but also with the universe (Graham, 1989). As Tu (1985) notes, according to Confucian philosophy, one's ability to achieve a harmonious relationship with others is the greatest *spiritual* accomplishment of one's life. For Confucianism, the task of formulating the appropriate behavior will lead to an inwardly elevated life experience.

Compared with the Western philosophical focus on "reason" as a guiding spirit of civilization, Chinese philosophies focus upon "emotion," are humanistically oriented, and are heavily laden with ethical concerns. According to the Confucian ideal, human emotion is not simply a private, selfish emotional response, but part of nature endowed by heaven, corresponding to the cosmos and actualized in human life. The concern for human emotion also leads to the hierarchical ordering of relational position. The permeation of various degrees of human emotion into differing orders of relationship provides the context in which *mien-tzu* is to be played out according to (1) the varying degree of relationship, and (2) the hierarchical system of social ordering. The ordering of relationships provides the first impetus for the individual to be concerned about *mien-tzu*. Unavoidably, individuals are placed into a system of hierarchical positioning relative to each other; one's *mien-tzu* can thus be said to correspond to one's positions in the relational hierarchy.

Practical Social Expression of the Ideal
While the ideals of Confucianism are undoubtedly influential in Chinese society, these ideals have nevertheless been practically transformed to fit broader Chinese cultural patterns. To elaborate this important instantiation of the Confucian ideal,

we turn now to a discussion of the Chinese conception of rela-
tion (*kuan-hsi*) and human emotion (*ren-ching*).

As noted above, Confucian philosophy assumes that differ-
ent relationships imply different norms of interaction. This
principle of behaving "according to the relationship" is one key
element in Chinese society, described by Fei (1947) as "man-
ners of different orders." Fei compares the evolution of Chinese
interpersonal relationships to a stone cast into the water, gen-
erating ripples moving outward from the center: the innermost
ripples represent those closest to the social actor, with different
degrees of the ripple effect representing different degrees of in-
timacy and obligation. Contrary to the accepted classification
of Chinese society as "collectivist" (Hofstede, 1980), Fei's anal-
ogy implies that the individual is the *self*-created center of an
ever-expanding set of relationship "circles."

From a practical point of view, being part of an integrated
network of interpersonal relationships is of surpassing impor-
tance in Chinese society. This practical concern is revealed
through the concept of "relations," or what the Chinese call
"*kuan-hsi*." Literally, *kuan-hsi* can be translated as "relations."
At a deeper and more subtle level, however, *kuan-hsi* refers to
the manner in which Chinese strategically employ relations as
a social resource. *Kuan-hsi* implies a close connection between
people, an interlinkage which brings along with it interactants'
special rights and obligations. It is this latter, deeper, more
subtle level of meaning which paves the way for *mien-tzu* to
function in solving interpersonal problems. Put simply, to
grant *mien-tzu* is to acknowledge the importance or validity of
the *kuan-hsi* of the interactants. *Kuan-hsi* is the token which
permits *mien-tzu* to work.

The importance and usefulness of interpersonal relation-
ship can be seen in the Chinese tendency to utilize an inter-
mediary to solve a variety of interpersonal problems (see, for
example, Fried, 1953; Jacobs, 1978). Fried noted many in-
stances in which an intermediary, because of his/her connec-
tion with the target person, is asked to aid someone else.
Similarly, in the realm of politics, Jacobs (1978), in his study of
a Taiwanese rural township, concludes that interpersonal re-
lationship lies behind the formation of political factions; one
will very seldom ask for a favor from a stranger, but rather will
seek out interpersonal connections which will enable one to
get the job done (p. 265). The person sought out as intermedi-
ary is able to use his/her relationship to get the target person to

agree to help; the intermediary's help is sought because s/he
can "claim *mien-tzu* in front of others."

Use of intermediaries in this fashion works because of the
necessity to acknowledge *mien-tzu*. This necessity is both a
blessing and a burden. The existence of a complex network of
interpersonal relationships provides many Chinese with social
and emotional support, but on the other hand, it can also im-
pose upon them a heavy responsibility toward people with
whom they have close relationships. Mutual social responsibil-
ity implies that certain occurrences of *mien-tzu* must be ac-
knowledged, depending on the degree of relationship between
interactants.

So pronounced is the Chinese emphasis upon interper-
sonal relationships that a cursory examination might lead one
to conclude that Chinese practice a form of nepotism which
disproportionately emphasizes "particularistic ties" (or, *kuan-
hsi*) among interactants. Nevertheless, despite the seeming
pragmatism of the Chinese system, one must remember that
the Confucian ideal of interpersonal relationship (built upon
"human emotion") is in fact derived from the *differing* degrees
of emotion one interactant has for the other. Expression of
emotional concern for the other is in effect to acknowledge the
mien-tzu of the other.

To understand how *mien-tzu* is built upon the emotional
concern one has for another, we need to explore the role emo-
tion plays in Chinese relationships. Here we see how the orig-
inal philosophical attitude toward "human emotion" has been
actualized in Chinese interaction. Indeed, the emphasis on
emotion as a major component of relationship is observable
even in more instrumental Chinese relationships. Although
there may appear to be no obvious natural emotional concern
between instrumental partners (and hence no claim of *mien-
tzu*), there occurs nonetheless, through contact and inter-
action, a building up of concern so that, at some future date,
the relationship may be utilized to protect one's own interests.

An example will serve to illustrate how difficult it can be to
separate the "emotional" from the "pragmatic." In an early com-
munity study, Fried (1953) noted that among the Ch'uhsien of
the mainland, there are two contrasting types of relationships:
the first, friendship, is characterized as mutual concern and
brings with it equal status, whereas the second, *kan-ch'ing*
(*which can also* be translated as "emotion"[9]) "not only re-
cognised exploitation but is a technique of ameliorating it" (p.

224). Fried concludes that the latter kind of relationship has less warmth than the former; thus *kan-ch'ing* often serves to bridge gaps between people of different social status in the absence of kin ties (pp. 226–227). When there is no close relationship upon which one can rely, one needs to cultivate *kan-ch'ing* so as to function well in the society.

It is interesting to note that, although the *kan-ch'ing*-type relationship accents utility, it is nevertheless performed under the name of "emotion." There is no contradiction here; *kan-ch'ing* is built through contact and by constant interaction with others. As Fried (1953) puts it, "even *kan-ch'ing*, however, requires more fertile social soil" (p. 224), and involves a great deal of individual effort and care. Fried (1953) offers the example of a seemingly instrumental relationship between a merchant and a customer:

> Under the old, pre-inflation, credit system of buying there was a frequent development of something approaching friendship between a merchant and a steady customer. This relationship was an advantage to both parties in its encouragement of the growth of *kan-ch'ing*. It made possible a number of deepening contacts which preceded the simple ties of trade and which now might become permanent, thus extending the mutual exchange of help in the placement and security of related individuals or friends and the exchange of credit or other facilities. During the period of inflation, when supplies were reduced and a black market arose in consumer's goods, well established relationships of this type became a prime medium, in the general absence of effective bonds of kin, of protection from the adverse effects of a collapsing economy. (p. 190)

Ironically, the emotional element here prevents the relation between the merchant and a customer from being purely economic. Because this emotional component exists within the relationship, the relationship is viewed as being somewhat particularistic, or at least is distinguishable from other common, nonintimate relationships. This sense of particularity, the specialness of relationship, implies distinctive relational obligations. Within the confines of these mutual obligations, it becomes possible for *mien-tzu* to be employed as a relational resource.

Commenting on Fried's research, Jacobs (1978) further explains the difficulty of distinguishing the emotional from the pragmatic:

> Without exception, each informant confirmed Fried's analysis by saying *kan-ch'ing* is "utilized." The explanation becomes simple if we remember *kan-ch'ing* occurs when people work together and co-operate. With the existence of *kan-ch'ing*, there are no disputes or fights. But *kan-ch'ing*, according to Matsu informants, is necessary for more than just peace; it is essential for successfully carrying out any activity. . . . Without *kan-ch'ing* one cannot do things. Without *kan-ch'ing* lots of problems and possibly arguments occur. In other words, the concept of "utilization" (*li-yung*) implies the existence of *kan-ch'ing*. As one younger leader explained, "Of course one can use *kan-ch'ing*. If *kan-ch'ing* cannot be used it isn't *kan-ch'ing*. (p. 263)

Since relationship is what gets the job done, one must cultivate a somewhat close tie before further transactions can be conducted. Regardless of whether such strategically built interpersonal ties imply some degree of exploitation, such "exploitation" is made possible only when there is a true or assumed emotional concern; thus, even "functional" relationships are not devoid of emotion (Jacobs, 1978).[10] The fact that it is still a "contact" makes it a "*kan-ch'ing*," and since "*kan-ch'ing*" is shared, it is a "relationship."

The emotional component not only serves as the basis upon which a good relationship can be built, it is also an active *process* through which relationships can be maintained. As King (1989a) puts it, "Human emotion . . . does not exist abstractly; it is closely related with concrete, particular social cultural systems" (p. 86). According to Hsiang (1974), the act of acknowledging a relationship means that one shows one's "human emotion" toward relational partners. To show one's emotional concern for the other is to respect the other's *mien-tzu*. The interconnection between human emotion and *mien-tzu* is well explained by Hsiang (1974): "Giving people *mien-tzu* makes it easy to gain for oneself 'human emotion,' whereas hurting other's *mien-tzu* results in hurting one's 'human emotion' " (p. 57).

Through the process of "giving" and "claiming" *mien-tzu*, relational partners reaffirm the bond between them by offering each other emotional support. Hu (1944) illustrates: "If A has *mien-tzu* with B, he can be certain that B will render him friendship services on occasion, and also that B will increase A's *mien-tzu* in front of other people in every possible way. This bond ensures reciprocity, so that the greater the circle of those

with whom 'one has *mien-tzu*,' the better one can counter adversity" (p. 59).

In other words, to show an appropriate amount of "human emotion," and to give *mien-tzu* to each other, is to give life to the relationship. Judgments about what constitutes an appropriate amount of human emotion, as well as the extent to which *mien-tzu* is to be granted, is based upon the depth/closeness, or the importance, of a given relationship. In Chinese society, one must flexibly be attuned to fluctuations in human emotion. Failing to do this, King (1989a) notes, can result in social approbation:

> When we say this person "does not know human emotion," in fact we are saying, "this person has no idea of the relations between people." This is a relatively negative comment. On the other hand, when we say this person "well-understands human emotion" or "understands emotion and is reasonable," we are referring to the fact that such a person is good at dealing with people, good at arriving at the best place between people. This is a form of praise. (p. 79)

Interactions lacking in human emotion may, to a greater or lesser extent, be publicly criticized. Accordingly, it is important for one to know what people like and dislike and how they should behave, so that one may avoid being seen as lacking in "human emotion" (Wen, 1988). This concern for human emotion grants Chinese access to a number of unique cultural resources, such as *mien-tzu*, to help them function smoothly in the interpersonal realm. It is within the web of interpersonal relationships (*kuan-hsi*), with its emphasis upon human emotion as the primary good, that the claiming and granting of *mien-tzu* between interactants is made possible.

Summary
We have elaborated the concept of *mien-tzu* by situating it within the larger Chinese sociocultural system. *Mien-tzu* is closely tied to the Confucian ideal of social ordering, in which people of different relational status can be said to possess different kinds and amounts of *mien-tzu*, with the further requirement that such *mien-tzu* must be respected among interactants. Moreover, due to the Chinese perspective upon human emotion as the guiding principle of interpersonal interaction, *mien-tzu* becomes a means through which relational

partners express their emotional concern toward each other according to the depth of the relationship involved. This analysis corresponds to our earlier discussion on the concept of *mien-tzu*: it can be a quality claimed by the individual according to his/her social position, and can also be applied flexibly in interpersonal relating. We will now discuss how Chinese interpersonal interaction is organized under the concern for *mien-tzu*, and will demonstrate the necessity for maintaining a proper balance between insisting upon one's own *mien-tzu* and giving acknowledgment of the other's *mien-tzu*.

Mien-tzu and Interpersonal Relating
Mien-tzu and interpersonal relating cannot be separated from each other, and it is this fact that holds two contradictory facets of Chinese social life together in uneasy tension: on the one hand, *mien-tzu* may become a barrier to interpersonal relating, while on the other hand, *mien-tzu* provides a facilitating mechanism to improve interpersonal effectiveness. For the Chinese, a balance must be reached, between de-emphasizing *mien-tzu* so as not to worsen an already difficult situation, and emphasizing *mien-tzu* enough to maintain smooth social interactions. The delicate balance requires each actor's understanding of the Chinese conception of *mien-tzu*, encompassing both constructive and destructive elements for interpersonal relationships.

Mien-tzu as a Barrier: A Source for
Interpersonal Difficulties
Mien-tzu as a guiding principle for social interaction commands mutual respect. If the *mien-tzu* of the interactants is not appropriately handled, their relationship may be damaged. As Ho (1976) notes, the opportunities for misstep are extensive indeed:

> Since social expectations are reciprocal in nature, potential conflicts arise when there is a discrepancy between what a person expects or claims from others and what others extend to him. The possibility of losing face can arise not only from the individual's failure to meet his obligations but also from the failure to act in accordance with his expectations of them—that is, not only from the individual's own actions, but also from how he is treated by others. (p. 873)

The need for smooth interaction underscores the importance of knowing *how* to communicate in order to save each other's *mien-tzu*. For Chinese, this understanding is not simply an issue of social technique; it is also a measure of one's wisdom in dealing with the world (King, 1989b). Protecting each other's *mien-tzu* implies that interactants take their relational responsibilities seriously, and is a sign of respect both for oneself and for the other. Since damaging the other's *mien-tzu* may mean the end of a given relationship, it is incumbent on each social actor to protect each other's *mien-tzu* by all available means (King, 1989b, 332).

Although flexibility and warmth are part of Chinese relationship, there are times when Chinese relationships can become very cold and rigid, due to excessive concern for *mien-tzu*, which often leads to interpersonal difficulty and prevents an immediate and expeditious solution of interpersonal problems. A particularly important concern is the image of oneself in the eyes of one's relational partner. In a given relationship, for example, the existence of *mien-tzu* gives rise to a certain status consciousness, governing which of the conflicting parties will be expected to "lower his [or her] head" (i.e., admit wrongdoing) first. One male middle manager we interviewed pointed out the importance of yielding: "There must be one party who can first admit, 'You are right and I am wrong.' If there is such a fact, and one party is willing to recede, then they should be able to get along with each other again."

Unfortunately, when the interactants care too much about their *mien-tzu*, they may refuse to "lower their head" first, even though they may really want to compromise, and indeed may cease to interact for long periods of time, even years. Hsiang (1974) explains that, because Chinese are extremely sensitive, *mien-tzu* becomes particularly important to them. Especially problematic is the situation in which one party assumes a higher relational position than the other party. A story was told to us by a forty-year-old female employee regarding a minister's wife, who was accused by her aunt of being a thief. Because neither was willing to "lower their head" first, they remained separated for several decades:

> She has not talked to her aunt, [and has not] visited her for more than thirty years. Why? Because when she was a teenager, she went to her aunt's home. Someone stole a cucumber, and her aunt accused her and [slapped] her face. After she

> left, she carried her hate from that time on. She no longer [spends time] with her aunt . . . in fact, if one party is [more] mature, then it will not be like that.
>
> One day while learning about internal consciousness, she thought about [the incident] and went to call her aunt immediately. When her aunt received this phone call, on the other side of the phone line, she heard her aunt cry right at that moment. She told her aunt, "Years ago, I did not steal your cucumber." Her aunt said, "I know. Because I found out who really stole the cucumber."
>
> Now [if] we think about that, it is very childish. Had her aunt phoned her and said, "I am too quick [to accuse you] during the time," it would be okay. But her aunt holds back and [does not want to say]. The other side does not want to say [anything] either, because she feels that she was hurt. The result is this [estrangement] for so many years.

The interviewee suggests that if the aunt had been willing to sacrifice her *mien-tzu* in front of her niece by talking things out, she would not have had to live with her guilt for more than thirty years:

> Orientals are always like that, when they commit an error, they do not want to apologize for it. In fact, you don't even need to be [that clear]. You probably can just say, "In fact, I . . . already knew what happened." You state the event, and she will know that she will not be accused because the truth has come out. . . . [The aunt] already knows that it is not her [niece], but she [the aunt] cannot "hold down her *mien-tzu* to say, "I already know it was not you. It was a mistake at that time." Perhaps inside her heart she does feel guilty. Therefore, when the minister's wife called her, she cried immediately after so many years. You can see that she must feel very guilty. Why do you need to have this guilt for so many years and hurt both of you?

A second example shows how the concern for *mien-tzu* is related to the Chinese hierarchical social structure. When asked whether she thinks Chinese are too "fond of *mien-tzu*," the interviewee replied with a story of father-and-son.

> Among Chinese, the father is the older generation. If today he has some conflict with his child, and there is a third party involved in the situation, even if the son is correct, the father would not apologize to his son. He will think, "I am the father,

how could I apologize to you?" This is a common occurrence. If he is older, that is, if he belongs to the older generation, or has higher status, then he cannot "pull down *lien*." He loves his *mien-tzu* to death and thinks, "my status is higher than yours, how can I apologize?" It is his fault but he wants the other to "remedy the situation." This is much too common in Taiwan. This is not reasonable.

Respect for the elderly is well established in Chinese traditions inherited from Confucius. The elderly, being important members of the society, request more respect from younger people, and consequently need more *mien-tzu* from them. The extent to which one can claim *mien-tzu* depends upon who one interacts with, since the relative social positioning is defined within and between interactants. Particularly in the relationship between father and son (one of the five basic Confucian relationships), the father can claim his *mien-tzu* as a father. It is in front of the son that the father's "*mien-tzu* cannot be held," that is, he cannot lose his self-respect in front of his own child.

This example shows the impact of ordering in Chinese interpersonal transactions. When people are placed into different statuses and orders of relationships, the issue of *mien-tzu* becomes more problematic. If *mien-tzu* is an attribute predominantly associated with one's social and relational position, it is not surprising to find that the relative importance of social position has conditioned the extent to which *mien-tzu* can be acknowledged: anyone who occupies the relatively higher position in a given relationship has more to say about his or her *mien-tzu*.

Another of our interviewees, a twenty-seven-year-old female clerk, describes this excessive concern for *mien-tzu* as "taking things too seriously," that (as the folk saying has it) "they won't cry without seeing the coffin": "I think Chinese sometimes take [things] too seriously. . . . Not until they have destroyed the whole situation and the event becomes very serious will they realize they have done something wrong and regret what they have done. They have made the event too big and cannot find a way to remedy it."

Because of the concern for one's *mien-tzu*, interactions which take place in public often imply greater risk than those occurring in private. One middle manager explains that the public situation is different because, "everyone wants to insist

that he is right . . . because there are so many people in that situation." By insisting on their own opinions in an attempt to protect their own *mien-tzu*, ironically, such individuals may end up sacrificing the relationship without dealing with the problem.

Therefore, an effective communicator must know enough not to push the issue too far: in other words, one must act in ways which will protect the other's *mien-tzu*. Typically, such communication is somewhat more circumscribed; to protect the other's self-image and feelings, he or she is not confronted directly. One female interviewee suggests a gentle touch in dealing with conflicts:

> If it is her fault and she knows that, but because she "loves her *mien-tzu*," she cannot apologize in front of you, you can still forgive her. If she already knows her fault, there is no reason to force her to say, "I am sorry." You can see that event as already having passed away. There is no need to force her and embarrass her. This is not good for you, either.

Under the mechanism of *mien-tzu*, it is possible for the relationship to return to its normal state in the absence of reference to substantive issues. This indirect way of handling interpersonal problems is highly valued in Chinese society; it addresses the concern and warmth one has for the other, as Hu (1944) explains:

> The motive is to avoid any action or words that might make the other fellow feel insignificant; rather is it believed that by elevating his self-esteem his good performance will be assured. . . . Individuals of good standing in society, whose words carry weight with their fellows, are particularly expected to "leave other people some *mien-tzu*," an attitude also described as "great in capacity," as opposed to narrowness in dealing with others. (pp. 58–59)

One who can graciously "leave someone a *mien-tzu*" is said to be "great in capacity," meaning that one is generous and kind toward the other. As one of our interviewees put it, one must allow "stairs for people to leave the stage" (that is, a face-saving means of exit from the conflict). Failure to provide "stairs" can itself be taken as a form of offense. Parties deprived of a means of graceful exit from conflict may not only passively resist by refusing to cooperate, but may actively seek revenge

(Hsiang, 1974; Yang, 1945). This is due to the fact that refusal to grant *mien-tzu* constitutes a denial of "human emotion," which in turn implies a refusal to acknowledge the relationship. Hwang (1989) explains how *mien-tzu* operates upon the Chinese norm of reciprocity to ensure revenge:

> When one meets great difficulty and begs "human emotion" from resource controllers, if they do not "give him *mien-tzu*" and refuse him, he will feel his self-esteem is damaged, and experience the feeling of "no *mien-tzu*." Under the social norm of "mercy for mercy, and revenge for revenge," if he has an opportunity in the future, it is very possible that he will let them "look not good on their [own] *mien-tzu*," and finally end up with "everyone has no *mien-tzu*." Therefore, in such situations, it is best for the resource controller to "save human emotion so that people can see each other in the future," that is, "do human emotion" to him [one who requests something under the name of *mien-tzu*]. (p. 307)

Because of the serious consequences which may result from damage to one's *mien-tzu*, social actors prefer to protect each other's *mien-tzu* in interaction. Moreover, such attention is not limited to public, formal relationships. Even between father and son, of niece and aunt, it is equally necessary to engage in mutual protection of *mien-tzu*. This constraining power of *mien-tzu*, however, at the same time enables Chinese interactants to fashion smoother and more harmonious relationships. In the following section, we will see how *mien-tzu* (face), human emotion (*ren-ching*), and relations (*kuan-hsi*) are interwoven to facilitate smooth interpersonal interaction.

Mien-tzu as a Lubricant: A Source for Interpersonal Effectiveness

As a dynamic social resource available to Chinese relational partners, *mien-tzu* is often activated by a request. Because most Chinese treat mutual acknowledgement of *mien-tzu* as obligatory, they generally expect that a request under the name of *mien-tzu* will be successful. Indeed, given the intimate connection between *mien-tzu* and the depth or closeness of a relationship, *mien-tzu* is frequently used as a metaphor for renegotiating mutual rights and obligations. With a close relational partner, one can always "ask for *mien-tzu*" to get things done.[11] Hence, it is natural for Chinese, when they need help

from someone with whom they are not familiar, to find an appropriate person (an intermediary who has a closer tie, or who is considered to be important, to the target person), to approach the target for them. The close tie between the intermediary and the target ensures the success of the petitioner's request. The target is willing to grant the request under the aegis of his/her relationship in order to show emotional concern for the *intermediary*, rather than for the person who makes the request. In other words, The intermediary is the one whose *mien-tzu* will be acknowledged. By utilizing appropriate interpersonal connections (*kuan-hsi*) and through application of the participants' *mien-tzu*, one is more likely to secure needed services and assistance.

Moreover, given the importance of allowing conflicting parties a means of graceful exit, the intermediary also provides "stairs" for the disputants to leave the stage of conflict. Metaphorically, when a third party is engaged in the process of conflict resolution, the *mien-tzu* of the conflicting parties can be protected "under the cover" of the intermediary's *mien-tzu*. Hu (1944) provides an example of how a mediator of good standing—that is, one who has sufficient *mien-tzu*—can solve a seemingly intractable conflict:

> As soon as two people lose control of themselves in a quarrel, a mediator, usually an older person, will appear at once, separate the two and argue with them till they stop. To give his words effect he asks each person to stop "out of regard for my *mien-tzu*." Such an appeal by an individual of some standing . . . must not be disregarded. (Hu, 1944, 60)

Since each party *must display* concern for the mediator, and must honor the mediator's *mien-tzu*, there is really no reason to continue fighting. Fighting results from preoccupation with one's own selfish interests; upon the intermediary's involvement, the focus changes to the intermediary's interests.

Another factor regulating the degree to which an intermediary's *mien-tzu* will be acknowledged is awareness of relational hierarchy. This awareness can function in two ways. First, the higher the relational position the intermediary occupies in a particular relationship, the more likely it is that she/he can claim *mien-tzu* in the presence of the disputants. In a given relationship, *mien-tzu* implies hierarchical order. For example, if one's parents serve as an "inter-relational mediator"

to solve a conflict between oneself and a friend, the parents' *mien-tzu* is not to be taken lightly, in accordance with the Chinese interpersonal norm that older people should receive respect from younger. Second, in general, the higher the social status one achieves, the more desirable one becomes as a target for other to build up relationships with, and hence the more power one's *mien-tzu* assumes.[12] Since the person of high status can claim more influence in negotiating mutual rights and obligations, his/her intervention makes successful resolution of a conflict much more likely.

These seemingly abstract cultural norms are played out in concrete social interaction, as shown in an example provided by a male manager. In his account, notice the delicate interweaving of relations, face, and human emotion used to "smooth the ruffled feathers" of his dissatisfied client.

> For example, if I need to solve problems for my subordinates. Suppose some clients are not satisfied with my subordinates. How can I not "go out the door" to help my subordinates solve the problem? When I need to solve the problem I must go visit [the dissatisfied client], or he may already have called to express his anger. First I need to know, who is he? Where is he? Who is his father? Who is his wife? What does he like? Who are his friends? What is his hobby? If I must face him, I at least can "climb" this *kuan-hsi* to cultivate with him a sense of sameness, let him feel close about me. He may be dissatisfied about our company, about my subordinates, or about my superiors.
>
> When you go to visit him, of course you still need to be very polite. At least you need to invite him to drink some tea. Bring some good tea with you and say, "I know that you like to drink tea, why don't you try this?" Half of his anger will go away. If you are acquainted with his wife, or his friend is your friend, just tell your friend, "Please tell him that I am going to visit him. Please say some good words for me."

One can note in this incident two levels of *mien-tzu*. First, the manager *himself* volunteers to serve as an intermediary to utilize his own *mien-tzu* to mediate the conflict between his subordinates and clients. Second, he actively engages in the process of finding *other* intermediaries ("Who is his father?", "Who is his wife?", "Who are his friends?"), whose *mien-tzu* may be connected to the client, to mediate for him. In this incident, conflict is recast and to some extent lessened by appeal

to the *mien-tzu* and human emotion characteristic of the various "inter-relations" of the people who are involved, or come to be involved, in the conflict. Let us further explore the specific normative mechanisms which enable the participants to use *mien-tzu*.

First, one sees the effect of the cultural norm that the higher the relative position one occupies, the better one's ability to claim face and thus solve the conflict. The manager's *mien-tzu* and his relationship with the client is more powerful than the relationship between his subordinates and the client because he has a higher position than his subordinates, and in the society as a whole, a manager is considered to have high social status. Hence, it is the manager's *mien-tzu* that is more likely to be acknowledged by the dissatisfied client.

Second, however, in his attempt to involve the dissatisfied client's father, wife, and friends, the interviewee seeks relationships that are close and important to the dissatisfied client, and thereby to lessen the intensity of the conflict. Especially for Chinese, who place a great deal of emphasis upon family relationships, a conflict which is partially mediated by a family member is less serious than it might be otherwise. This also is true of good friends, whose words will carry more weight than will a stranger's. In other words, the *mien-tzu* of the target's father, mother, wife, husband, or siblings, being more important to the target, is much more likely to be acknowledged than the *mien-tzu* of the manager himself.

On the one hand, the manager's *mien-tzu* and human emotion must be acknowledged by his subordinates and his client, while on the other hand, the *mien-tzu* and human emotion of the second-level intermediaries must also be acknowledged both by the manager and the client. These two sets of relationships function in different ways and yet tend toward the same goal: the solution of the conflict through a concern for *mien-tzu*. By employing various interpersonal relationships, the manager was able to solve the conflict and at the same time enhance the reputation of his company by protecting the *mien-tzu* of his employees.

It is worth reemphasizing, however, that the functioning of *mien-tzu* in conflict resolution cannot be divorced from Chinese ideals on different orders or relationships. As Gallin (1966) notes, "The effectiveness of mediation that was directed toward the preservation of local autonomy and harmony was possible, in large part, because of the society's acceptance of

the hierarchical relationship system, in which all relation-ships—except, perhaps, personal friendships—are based on the positions individuals hold relative to each other" (p. 268). The effect of hierarchical positioning on conflict resolution is also discussed in Yang's (1945) analysis of governance in a tra-ditional mainland Chinese village:

> When two leading families, or two village dignitaries, or two clans, come into conflict, the case will not be ignored but must be mediated by the village leaders. . . . Usually this is done through the good offices of the village leaders, but when the gentry or the chief clans are involved, the ordinary village leaders do not have sufficient prestige to intervene. In these cases, leaders from other villages are called in. These may be no more capable than the local leaders, but because they are from a different village their presence means more to the conflicting parties, and therefore, they have a greater "*mien-tzu*." Many disputes are thus settled by outside intervention. (p. 165)

Some conflict can be solved *only* through certain individ-uals whose *mien-tzu* will be acknowledged in recognition of their social standing. In his analysis of a Taiwanese village, Gallin (1966) states, "local conflict was resolved on the local level by respected individuals whose 'words could be heard' and respected." (p. 268). Such influential people are often consid-ered good candidates for the role of mediator, based primarily on the amount of *mien-tzu* they may claim. Conflicting parties will "see the *mien-tzu*" of the intermediary and be willing to compromise; it is either that, or else risk damaging the *mien-tzu* of the intermediary (by refusing to acknowledge the rela-tional prestige of the intermediary), with the subsequent social criticism this may entail.

The traditional emphasis upon hierarchical relational po-sition and the impact of *mien-tzu* is observable in today's Tai-wan. Unfortunately, although feelings and human emotion must be taken into account in solving conflicts, one sometimes encounters a situation in which the intermediary's *mien-tzu* and human emotion carry such weight that the less powerful conflicting party finds it difficult to resist any proposed com-promise. This is generally seen as an exploitation of the cul-tural norm that the person with higher social position receives more *mien-tzu*-consideration: relationship is utilized to solve

the conflict, not out of any concern for the intermediary on the part of the disputants, but because the intermediary's power, *in and of itself*, commands disputants to acknowledge his or her *mien-tzu*. This represents the fullest expression of the practical and utilitarian aspects of *kuan-hsi*, and hence more involves the observance of ritualistic rules than an acquies-cence to "real" human emotion. There is more emphasis on form than content.

An example of *mien-tzu* manipulation is provided in the ac-count of a forty-year-old lawyer, who describes how a person can gain advantage in a labor negotiation by invoking *mien-tzu* to coerce compliance:

> When laborers have disputes with their boss, usually the boss has more channels to talk about "human emotion." If you ask the boss to give some "human emotion" to the laborers, usu-ally it has no effect. The boss will say "I cannot recede," nei-ther does he feel any burden of "human emotion." Although laborers and those who want to help them have relatively greater power, the boss has even greater "interpersonal rela-tions." He can ask laborers to consider "human emotion" for him, according to their respective [difference in] power. The boss possesses a greater [degree of] "interpersonal relations," and is able to use "human emotion" more than the laborers.
> If the laborers ask for ten dollars, for example, the boss will go through a lot of "*kuan-hsi*" [relations] to tell the labor-ers, "*You should give [your] boss some 'mien-tzu.' Five dol-lars are [sic] enough.*" Normally the laborers need to back away, because they have a "burden of human emotion." . . . These lawyers or the labor union [who represent laborers] cannot insist against the boss any longer; they will accept some compromise by telling the laborers that "The boss has sincerity. You don't need to ask for ten dollars. Five dollars are [sic] okay." [Emphasis added]

In this example, several interesting facts deserve mention. First, both the boss and the laborers both have their own spokespersons. The lawyer serves as an intermediary between the laborers and their boss, and a third party of considerable status serves as an intermediary between the lawyer represent-ing the laborers and the boss. Second, the bargain between the boss and the laborers is made under the name of "giving some-one more *mien-tzu*." The *mien-tzu* to be acknowledged is that of the boss, not the laborers. Third, although the boss has

higher social economic status than the laborers, the request for *mien-tzu* is not made directly by the boss, but by another who is powerful enough to secure the boss' *mien-tzu* in the eyes of the laborers. Finally, the compromise is made possible because the laborers owe "human emotion" both to their boss and the influential person who speaks for the boss.

This example serves to illustrate the involved and complicated nature of power networks in Chinese society. By appealing to more important and significant people, one can have more power in negotiating. While the boss already has higher position than laborers, the powerful third party is used to further augment the boss' *mien-tzu*. Clearly, the boss is also in a better position to utilize more powerful relationships. The *mien-tzu* of both the powerful intermediary and the boss are to be acknowledged by both parties, even though the results of the compromise favor one conflicting party over the other. It is instructive to follow the layers of interrelation in this example to reveal how *mien-tzu* functions as a resource in Chinese life.

The effectiveness of *mien-tzu* in interpersonal functioning leads Hwang (1987) to refer to the utilization of *mien-tzu* as "the Chinese game of power" (p. 944). Chinese, according to Hwang, "use many different means to enforce [their] own image and power in the other's mind, so as to influence the other, and acquire the life resources one wants" (p. 298). As discussed earlier, the higher the social position one occupies, the more "developed" one's *mien-tzu* will become. In this regard, *mien-tzu* has reward value, like a form of currency with which one may "buy" social resources. As King (1989b) puts it, "the social aspect of *mien-tzu*...is like the credit card. Having *mien-tzu* is like having good credit, so that [one] has a lot of purchasing power" (p. 330). *Mien-tzu* can be acquired by the individual him- or herself, and can be utilized as a token to obtain social resources when necessary.

Work on one's *mien-tzu*, therefore, involves attempts to manipulate degrees of relationship so as to augment one's social resources. As Chu (1989) comments, "in a Chinese society which emphasizes moral relationships, and viewing harmony as the core of their cultural value, 'speaking human emotion,' 'pull *kuan-hsi*,' and 'requesting *mien-tzu*,' become the guiding principles of behavior in interpersonal interaction" (p. 40). These observations echo the point made by Hu (1944), who contended: "The value that the society attaches to *mien-tzu* is ambivalent. On the one hand, it refers to well-earned popular-

ity . . . 'reputation' in its best sense; on the other hand, it implies a desire for self-aggrandizement" (p. 61).

Of course, one should note that not every aspect of *mien-tzu* concerns resource allocation. Indeed, the concept of *mien-tzu* is not only utilized by the important people in manipulating social resources, but it is also manifested through any aspects of Chinese interpersonal interaction, confirming its importance as a guiding principle reflecting respect for the other's self-esteem.

Conclusion
A full understanding of *mien-tzu* as a specifically Chinese cultural concept necessitates considering the complex connections among relations (*kuan-hsi*), human emotion (*ren-ching*), and face (*mien-tzu*). If the interactants' *mien-tzu* is not properly taken care of, the relationship may be damaged even if there is no conflict over substantive issues. One might conclude that, given the importance of *mien-tzu* for the Chinese, showing respect for each other's *mien-tzu* in any interactional situation constitutes, in itself, a "substantive" issue. On the other hand, *mien-tzu* also contributes to effective interpersonal relating, given the fact that it encompasses both emotional and pragmatic elements. One may have sincere emotional concern for the other, and consequently show respect for the other's *mien-tzu*; conversely, respect for another's *mien-tzu*, as one part of the interactants' relational responsibilities, can be utilized to help one to function within Chinese society. One sees the mutual permeation of the emotional and the utilitarian in personal, business, and political interactions, all conducted under the name of *mien-tzu*.

Challenges and Reflections
If we simply attempt to describe *mien-tzu* by itself, without reference to other cultural concepts, we run the risk of losing the essence of *mien-tzu*'s cultural meaning, leading in turn to the misjudgment that Chinese tend to overemphasize external formality at the expense of personal autonomy. Indeed, equating *mien-tzu* with formality utterly fails to capture the richness and delicacy of Chinese interactional episodes which manifest subtle awareness of other parties' *mien-tzu*. By taking a cultural perspective, we can acquire a good understanding of the meanings of face to the Chinese. Conversely, the discussion of

the concept of *mien-tzu* also provides an in-depth understanding of Chinese cultural life, demonstrating the importance of face in helping us reexamine some commonly held beliefs about Chinese. Based on what we have learned, we can further extend the concept of face as an organizing construct to social scientific inquiries on human communication across cultural boundaries.

Connections between the Private and the Public

Mien-tzu, the Chinese concern for face, is one important mechanism which bridges private and public interactional concerns. It is misleading to assume that *mien-tzu*, with its elements of external formality, diverges from private, personal concerns. Given the flexibility and complexity of *mien-tzu* in Chinese relationships, the lines between the public and the private, the social and the personal, are never clearly drawn. Although the concept of *mien-tzu* itself suggests recognition credited by the society at large, recognition and its application in interpersonal activities cannot be detached from the Confucian ideal of hierarchical relational positioning and its associated degrees of human emotion.

Earlier, we noted that the extent to which *mien-tzu* is to be recognized depends both upon the social position one occupies, as well as the depth of a given relationship. While the former condition suggests commonly agreed-upon value judgments, the latter condition suggests that the *mien-tzu* one can claim in front of another is based upon personal and private concerns. In essence, then, *mien-tzu* is composed of essentially private concerns functioning in public; *mien-tzu* brings Chinese personal life to the public arena. For Chinese, the more private, emotional concern which ingroup members exhibit for each other, through the medium of interpersonal connections, can be extended to more distant social others. From emotional concern to acquiring social resources, Chinese are flexible in their utilization of various kinds of relationships. As we have shown, to utilize *mien-tzu* effectively in any interpersonal encounter requires flexibility in searching for the most appropriate and available interconnection, whether a more intimate personal contact, or a relationship which is built primarily upon practical considerations. Within this complex of interrelationships, one *mien-tzu* can be related to another, linking the private to the public.

Reexamining Chinese Cultural Life as Collectivism

As we have elaborated *mien-tzu* serves as a metaphor for recognition of relationships, and may be flexibly attuned to various situations through connecting one *mien-tzu* with another. From our analysis of how *mien-tzu* facilitates Chinese interpersonal effectiveness, the characteristics of collectivism, often thought to be related to the Chinese, can be reexamined.

The individualism-collectivism continuum is one of the most important constructs in cross-cultural studies; among many dimensions which differentiate these two extremes, one of the most important dimensions is the role of ingroups (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1988; Triandis et al., 1988). According to Triandis, ingroups in a collective society are more stable, fewer, impose greater responsibilities, and exert greater control over their members, compared with those in individualistic societies. Collectivist societies tend to draw a clearer line between ingroups and outgroups than individualistic societies: "people [of collective societies] are trained to cooperate with members of a few ingroups and compete with everyone else" (Triandis, 1988, p. 60). Moreover, in collectivist societies, group goals, as defined by ingroups, are considered to be more important than individual goals: "An essential attribute of collectivist cultures is that individuals may be induced to subordinate their personal goals to the goals of some collective, which is usually a stable ingroup (e.g., family, band, tribe)" (Triandis et al., 1988, p. 324). Hence, the emphasis in collectivism is said to place upon social orientation, which "represents a tendency for a person to act in accordance with external expectations or social norms, rather than internal wishes or personal integrity, so that he would be able to protect his social self and function as an integral part of the social network. Here solidarity and social consciousness are more decisive as determinants of behavior than individuality and self-assertion" (Yang, 1981, pp. 159–60).

As we examine Chinese cultural life from the perspective of *mien-tzu* as inter-relational concern, several issues deserve attention. First, the assumed stability and fewer numbers of ingroups in collectivist societies can be misleading. Though their in-groups are fewer and more stable than those of individualist cultures, in Chinese culture at least, due to the role of *mien-tzu*, the line between in- and out-groups can often be made flexible. Indeed, the mechanism of *mien-tzu* provides an effective means through which new, but temporary ingroups

may be established via the concern for human emotion. In everyday activity, Chinese ingroup connections can always be extended, since the *mien-tzu* will be acknowledged when appropriate connections are established. Second, although group goals are important to the Chinese it is precisely this importance that allows *mien-tzu* to function flexibly to fulfill personal goals. The emphasis upon mutual *mien-tzu*-giving not only regulates a person's behavior within a given relationship, it also provides Chinese with a way to approach their goals through interpersonal connections. By observing how *mien-tzu* functions in the presence of human emotion, we can understand how the collectivity is defined with reference to the particular ties one possesses; these particular ties provide the foundation upon which collectivity or community may be built. Unfortunately, the active aspect of Chinese relationships is seldom recognized; scholars typically tend to examine only one side of the issue, concluding that Chinese are controlled externally and that they exercised little personal individual autonomy.

The Concept of Mien-tzu in Other Cultural Systems

In our discussion of the Chinese concept of face, we have shown how Chinese interaction is conducted within a delicate balance, between not stressing *mien-tzu* too much, and at the same time protecting each other's *mien-tzu*. Our cultural perspective provides one example of the importance of issues of face in interpersonal relating. Similar to Ho's (1976) suggestion that the criterion against which face is evaluated reveals the magnitude of social change, we contend that an understanding of the intersection between face and interpersonal relationships provides a vantage point to judge the functioning of interpersonal relating in various cultural settings. Although cultures vary in their emphasis and orientation toward face, the fundamental issues of how to present oneself in the eyes of others, nevertheless, remain to be solved by all of humankind, regardless of whether one's cultural groups is labeled "collectivist" or "individualist" (Ho, 1976).

Just as *mien-tzu* is a unique construct formulated by Chinese, the Western cultural conceptions of face (as in Goffman's work) also derive their contents from the cultures in which they are situated. Western understanding of facework is very much influenced by the idea of impression management, reflecting the dominant individualistic value characteristics of

Western cultures. This can be contrasted with the Chinese conception of *mien-tzu* which places more emphasis on the nature of the *relationship*. *Mien-tzu* suggests a further, very important, question to be raised: considering the semantic implications of "face" and "*mien-tzu*," in applying the concept of "face" to analyze human interaction across cultures, have we paid insufficient attention to the issue of culture in analyzing face as an emic construct?

It is interesting to ask to what extent a cultural concept, particularly as it is revealed through linguistic labels, marks its idiosyncratic cultural practices. Fortunately, if it is language that makes cultural resources available to us, the *lack* of a set of linguistic terms does not necessarily negate the existence of a cultural resource. While the richness and complexity of *mien-tzu* as relational concern remains specific to Chinese, other cultures, without access to the extensive Chinese set of cultural vocabularies, may nevertheless share a universal human problem: the fundamental issue of how to present oneself in front of others. We believe that such fundamental concerns can be more fully addressed through the investigation of different manifestations and solutions to the problems of self-presentation within different cultural boundaries. Through examining the role culture plays in shaping the contents of face, we are able to extend the analysis of the concept of face into different cultural settings. It is for this reason that the study of face and facework is a fruitful area for scholars to engage in dialogue, an area where the relationship between culture and communication can be best understood.

Notes

1. In this paper, interviewees' accounts from our earlier studies are presented to illustrate how the concept of *mien-tzu* is actualized in modern Taiwan. These studies are part of a research project which focuses upon the overall patterning of Chinese interpersonal relationships and communication, in which Chinese in Taiwan talk about four organizing metaphors (*mien-tzu, pao, yuan,* and *kuan-hsi*) in their conceptualization of relationships. In all, fifty-five in-depth interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese in Taiwan, during May and June of 1990. Interviewees vary in their educational background: more than 80 percent of the interviewees have received a college education, and almost 95 percent of inter-

viewees reside in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan. While interviewees very in their occupations, most work in commercial companies. About 80 percent of the interviewees are aged between 30 and 40 years. For this chapter, only several selected interview accounts which relate to issues of *mien-tzu* and which are important to our discussion are presented to facilitate a conceptual understanding of the Chinese concept of face, or *mien-tzu*. We do not intend to make any claim for generalizability of the interviewee accounts before thorough and detailed analysis of these interview contents is conducted.

2. In this paper, all romanizations are based upon Wade-Gile system (Choy, 1980).

3. One must note that there are some clear distinctions between earlier and modern scholars: (1) differences in time; and (2) differences in location. The earlier scholars made their observations in China at the turn of nineteenth century, whereas the modern scholars quoted in this article made their observations in Taiwan at the turn of the twentieth century.

4. Two Chinese terms correspond to the English term "face": *mien-tzu* and *lien*. Hu (1944) marked the distinction between the two: while *mien-tzu* refers to external social recognition, *lien* has internal moral connotations. Although the distinction is not insignificant, as King (1989a; 1989b) and Ho (1976) have pointed out, such standards are often interchangable according to place and time. In this chapter, we have chosen to focus upon *mien-tzu* to avoid unnecessary confusion with various and interchangeable linguistic terms.

5. King contends that there is a close connection between the concept of shame, as described in the Confucian classics, and the concept of *mien-tzu*. Drawing upon the Confucian moral teachings on propriety, or *li*, King argues that, in interacting with others, it is likely that these norms may fall prey to external formality, thus accounting for the social character of *mien-tzu*. Nevertheless, the self-sanctioned, introspective moral reasoning required of each individual in interacting with others also allows for *mien-tzu* to become important: one may be shamed by one's inability to achieve certain moral standards. Under such conditions, *mien-tzu* needs no audience. To put is simply, with its strong social character, the concept of *mien-tzu* also encompasses a strong element of morality; one not only wants to be acknowledged by others, one also wants to be acknowledged by oneself.

6. These linguistic expressions are derived from the observations of the scholars we quote, particularly Hu (1944), Huang (1989), and King (1989), as against the primary author's judgment about how these terms are used in contemporary Taiwanese society. The latter judgment is based upon the data collected in the study.

7. An amusing but revealing example of how this is achieved occurs in one popular Chinese television program aired in Taiwan. The program, roughly similar to the American program, "The Love Con-

nection," allows a contestant to choose among five potential dating partners. However, in the Chinese version, the four contestants who are not chosen are matched with dating partners from the audience at the conclusion of the program! Since each of the pairs of contestants is given a chance to express appreciation for their "date," everyone's *mien-tzu* is protected.

8. For a more extensive discussion of the utilization of Chinese relationship, see Chang and Holt (1991).

9. There are two similar but different Chinese terms which relate to emotion. In this article, we translate the Chinese *ren-ching* as "human emotion," since *ren* refers to "human beings," whereas "ching" refers to emotion. *Ren-ching*, in a philosophical sense, denotes human beings' common emotional response, although it also implies an obligatory affective component which serves to define the responsibility one has toward the other. Another Chinese term, *kan-ch'ing*, is translated as "emotion": *kan* refers to "sense or feeling," and *ching* to "emotion." *Kan-ch'ing* at the cultural level reflects a unique kind of relationship, frequently referring to the "emotional" basis for a more instrumental relationship which has no blood connection. While the distinction can be extensively discussed, in this chapter, we have focused attention on how emotional concern serves as a major regulating factor in the establishment and maintenance of Chinese relationships as a foundation upon which *mien-tzu* can be engaged.

10. Although Jacobs (1978) does not agree with Fried's assessment that *kan-ch'ing* implies a "recognized degree of exploitation," he contends instead that "*kan-ch'ing* has a truly emotional aspect" (p. 262).

11. An overheard conversation between Chinese illustrates this idea: "Good morning, Mr. Huang. How are you? I am Mr. Wang in the Institute. I have a friend who has come from another state and is interested in buying some books from your store. . . . I wonder if it is possible for you to grant me a *mien-tzu* and give her a special discount?" As one might expect, the *mien-tzu* requested was happily granted, and the person interested in buying books was given a fifteen percent discount through the good offices of Wang's *mien-tzu*, as manifested in the relationship between Wang and the bookstore owner.

12. It might be argued that the centrality of "social status" as a factor influencing conflict resolution indicates that Chinese society is "class-conscious." However, we must note that so-called high social status refers to more than simply social, economic, or political standing. To Chinese, a well-educated person, a virtuous person, or a well-respected person, even if lacking in social or political power, can also be considered a "high status" individual.

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Face Parameters in East-West Discourse

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Communication between Asians and Westerners, particularly Northern Americans, is often confusing for both parties.[1] Significant differences in patterns for the introduction of topics (Scollon & Scollon, 1991), in rhetorical structures (Kaplan, 1966; R. Scollon, 1991a), and in face (S. Scollon, 1989) give rise to the stereotypes of the "inscrutable Asian" and the "frank" or "rude" Westerner (Scollon & Scollon, in press; Young 1982). For example, the tendency for Westerners to introduce the main topic (or thesis or premise) early in a conversation or an essay contrasts with the Asian tendency to delay the introduction of such topics until considerably later. This difference in expectations causes confusion between people who hold opposite expectations.

These observations parallel those made for a number of culturally, ethnically, or subculturally different groups when members of those groups communicate with each other. Gumperz (1982) led the way in showing how processes of conversational inference can lead to such negative interpersonal reactions. Our own research has shown the development of negative stereotypes in communication between mainstream English-speaking Americans and Athabaskan people in Northern Canada and Alaska (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Certainly the most widely known and perhaps most immediately recognized stereotypical reactions to discourse differences are the work of Tannen (1986, 1989, 1990) who has written about discourse between men and women in North American society.