

## **Facework as a Chinese Conflict-Preventive Mechanism -- A Cultural/ Discourse Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Goffman's model of facework and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory have been found inadequate in helping understand communicative behaviors of Far Eastern peoples for their culturally biased etic perspectives. This paper synthesizes an emic framework of Chinese facework on the basis of a critical review of significant literature. Chinese facework is conceptualized as a typical Chinese conflict-preventive mechanism and a primary means to cultivate harmonious human relations in Chinese social life. This mechanism is identified through a micro-interpretation of a naturally occurring interactive episode among a group of Chinese professors and students in the United States. The results indicate that facework is a cultural force that reproduces typical Chinese communities. Moreover, the unique Chinese perspective of conflict and conflict prevention is analyzed on the basis of this micro-interpretation. Implications of the study are also discussed.

The study of face and facework is growing, especially in the field of communication and related fields. Several lines of research have emerged. One is the etic approach (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Goffman, 1967; Scollon & Scollon, 1981) in an attempt to discover a grand theory to account for all human interactions regardless of culture. Another line is to interpret human interactions situated in different cultures with two subcategories: one is the mechanical application studies without any critical reflections upon the theoretical model used (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Zhan, 1992); the other is the critical application studies with varying degrees of criticism in light of the emic perspective (Chang & Holt 1994; Gu, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988; Penman, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Coccoft, 1994; Tracey & Baratz, 1994). The last line primarily concentrates on the theoretical development and refinement of a specific emic model - the Chinese concept of face (Chang & Holt, 1994; Cheng, 1986; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944;). No research has dealt with the relationship between facework and conflict-related issues. This study aims to draw relevant connections between Chinese facework and Chinese conflict prevention and cultivation of harmony by micro-interpreting a videotape that contains naturally occurring interactive episodes among a group of Chinese professors and

Chinese students. The study also provides theoretical implications from the perspective of the Chinese facework

### **The Far Eastern Critiques on the Western Literature on Face**

One of the criticisms of Brown & Levinson's theory of politeness is that it is a highly rational model rather than a relational one (Chang & Holt, 1994; Gu, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988; Penman, 1994; ; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Ting-Toomey argues that Brown & Levinson's theory conceptualizes "positive face" and "negative face" from the individualistic culture framework. Matsumoto criticizes that negative face want of preservation of individual territories seems alien to Japanese. Gu finds that the model does not apply to the Chinese social interaction. Penman points out that both the negative face and the positive face are self-oriented. Finally, Chang & Holt find that "Western understanding of facework is very much influenced by the idea of impression management, reflecting the dominant individualistic characteristics of Western cultures. This can be contrasted with the Chinese conception of *mien-tze* which places more emphasis on the nature of the relationship" (p. 126).

Another criticism of works by Goffman and Brown and Levinson is given by Scollon & Scollon (1994). They find that the Western literature on facework is largely transactional, whereas there is a fundamentally moral dimension to the Eastern concept of face; face constitutes the Asian very sense of being of an Asian. They suggest that the concept of self is perhaps more applicable in looking at Western social interactions as exemplified by Carbaugh's recent work. This resonates with Ho's (1976) idea that "the Western mentality, deeply ingrained with the values of individuality, is not one which is favorably disposed to the idea of face, for face is never a purely individual thing" (p. 882).

Finally, Tracy and Baratz (1994) point out that the politeness theory is logocentric, suggesting that it excludes other means of politeness such as nonverbal ones. The authors call for a replacement of the theory with a case study approach because a prematurely developed theoretical model such as Goffman's and Brown and Levinson's would function as *a priori* to impose a hardly invisible but seriously biases towards the topic under research.

### **The Chinese Concept of Face**

The above criticisms seems rely upon a kind of collectivist culture represented by the Chinese Culture. What then is the Chinese concept of face? Specifically, what are its major characteristics, its major social functions and its philosophical roots? The following section reviews literature regarding the answers of these questions.

#### **Major Characteristics**

The Chinese concept of face includes four characteristics: relational, communal/social, hierarchical, and moral.

First of all, face is conceptualized as relational in Chinese culture (Chang & Holt, 1994; Cheng, 1986; Scollon & Scollon, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Volkema, 1988). Synonymous with "relational" could be affective and emotional. Cheng indicates that face is based on human feelings as an appeal to promote a harmonious human relationship. Ting-Toomey identifies face-giving, other-directed face or face-honoring as a major component of the collectivist culture which should be embraced as the relational part of the face-negotiation model.

Volkema, conceptualizing a mediator as a face manager, also treats face as a relational concept. According to Volkema, “it is to the advantage of all parties to help one another to maintain face during a social encounter” (p. 5). This suggests that face is essential to healthy social interactions. Chang & Holt, who situates “face” in the Western cultural context and “*mien-tze*” in the Chinese cultural context, claim that the Chinese *mien-tze* places a central emphasis on the human relationship instead of impression management (p. 127). Cheng (1986) best summarizes the relational nature of the Chinese *mien-tze*:

... the trust, mutual dependence, harmony, forming good feelings, and good human relationships all become ingredients in a generalized notion of human relationship which is connoted by the concept of *face*. *Face* is both the goal and the means for strengthening and expressing the harmonization of human relationships among men in society. It is a substitute for strict legislation regarding duties and rights and obligations among men. It is to act from the basic feelings governing human relationships. Thus, any human relationship which appeals to one’s feelings of family group or semi-family group will acquire an appeal to influence others and thus count as an element of face (*mien-tze*). The larger one’s face is, the more integrative the sphere of human relationships he is capable of forging and embracing.

Second, the Chinese concept of face is communal/social. According to Hu (1944), face is “public censure” (p. 47), or a communal check against any deviation from or violation against the well-rounded norms or traditions of the homogeneous community. Thus, the fear of losing face indicates the awareness of “the force of social sanctions” (p. 50). Ho (1976) explains the same characteristic of the Chinese concept of face. He argues that one can only understand the concept of face from the vantage point of “reciprocity” or interdependence. He states: “It is meaningful only when his face is considered in relation to that of others in the social network” (p. 882). The very concept of face, he suggests, is role-based, thus “having the effect of diminishing the stature of man as an individual” (p.882). Since face is constituted communally, to lose it would negatively affect the community and consequentially the loser would be ostracized by the community; to keep it would contribute to the normal functioning of the community, and the member who retains it is accepted as a full member of the community. The interchangeability of the two Chinese idioms *diou lien* (losing face) and *diou ren* (losing humanity) demonstrate that face is the definition of being fully human in the Chinese context and it is a ticket for a full membership of the community.

Third, the Chinese concept of face is inherently hierarchical (Chang & Holt, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1994). Chang & Holt trace the origin of the Chinese concept of face to the Confucian ontology and ideology. They argue that *mien-tze* is exercised according to the relational hierarchy within the family, which is constructed by age and blood ties, and the hierarchical nature of the society (p. 105). Normally, varying degrees of concern about face of members of the society fits varying degrees of their familial and social significance in the two hierarchies. Scollon & Scollon express a similar point. They argue that the concept of hierarchy is deeply embedded in the Chinese concept of face. Without taking this characteristic into consideration will lead to the misunderstanding of the concept.

Finally, the Chinese concept of face is deeply moral. *Lien* is the primary carrier of moral codes. Hu (1944) defines *lien* or “face” as “the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation” (p. 45) and the loss of face as “a condemnation by the group for immoral or socially disagreeable behavior” (p. 46). She defines the fear of losing face as an effort to keep oneself constantly conscious of moral boundaries and to hold up to the moral values historically transmitted and traditionally accepted. Ho (1976) also recognizes this dimension of Chinese face. He points out that “the concept of *mien-tze* is not altogether devoid of moral content” (p. 868). However, neither article has specified the moral content of the Chinese concept of face.

### The Major Social Functions of the Chinese Face

Based on the literature, three functions of Chinese face have been identified: (1) to substitute the law used to regulate and punish; (2) to cultivate the Confucian version of the gentleman (*junzi*, meaning “the king’s mirror image”) and to undo the meanness of man (*xiaoren*, meaning “trivial person”); and (3) to distribute relational, social and material resources among members of the community.

First, Chinese face functions to be a substitute of the law. Hu (1944) implicitly suggests that the loss of face serves as the **condemnation** of the face-losing member by his/her community/society. This condemnation consists of displacing the member outside the community and putting them in isolated and insecure situations. Ho (1976) indicates that “the concern for face exerts a mutually **restrictive**, even **coercive**, power upon each member of the social network” (p. 873). Cheng (1986) identifies that “Face is both the goal and the means for strengthening and expressing the harmonization of human relationships among men in society. It is a substitute for strict legislation regarding duties and rights and obligations among men” (p. 340); and “In fact, when face prevails, there is no need of law or strict rules of justice” (p. 341). He further argues that “it is precisely due to the lack of the development of legalistic law and due to the Confucian dictum that the rule of propriety (or ritual) governing human society is sufficient for social good, that face talk is developed much more conspicuously in the Chinese context than in any other context” (p. 341). To use face as a substitute for strict law is based on the belief that human nature is inherently good (Cheng, 1986; Hu, 1944).

Second, the maintenance of face, the fear of losing face, and the concern for *mien-tze* are used to help community members cultivate themselves into the Confucian gentlemanhood or gentlewomanhood. This gentleman/woman knows best how to maintain face and *mien-tze*, or how to *zi wo xiu yang* (self-cultivation) which is translated by Hu (1944) as “self-training” to denote a means used to develop oneself to know how to exercise face in the society as well as to be a person having *mien-tze* (p. 49). Cheng (1986) argues that “there is a dimension of face which is derived from political extension of the Confucian morality of self-cultivation” (p. 339). In other words, face is both a means and a product of self-cultivation. Chang & Holt (1994) seems to suggest that face means to learn to regulate one’s proper relations with others. The principle of such a regulation is to follow the Confucian *li* that is “a means of self examination and self development” (p. 104) to strive for the Confucian ideal personhood and social harmony.

Lastly, face is also a basic mechanism to distribute relational, social and material resources among the members of the society. It is a basic social means for any member of the society to

minimally maintain his/her survival socially, emotionally and physically. For example, Ho (1976) argues that to maintain *lien* also means to maintain friends and the social or relational/emotional web, for such a web can ensure both respect from others and even economic help from others when one is in need. In other words, to lose control of such a mechanism means loss of access to all resources and helps.

### **The Confucian Roots of the Chinese Concept of Face**

Scholars only began to recognize the Confucian roots of the Chinese concept of in the past decade (Chang & Holt, 1994; Cheng, 1986). Cheng (1986) points out that "Confucianism, with its theory and practice, no doubt, is the unequivocal ideological background and foundation of the concept of face and face-work in the Chinese language" (p. 337). Confucianism holds that the perfection of a person by means of self-cultivation can only be accomplished within the following five relationships: the father-son (the relation of closeness); emperor-subject (the relation of righteousness); husband-wife (the relation of distinction); elder-younger brothers (the relation of order); and friend-friend (the relation of faithfulness). The family relationships can be extended to the society so that the whole society is a large family. Confucianism dictates that one's self-cultivation is accomplished by *xiao* (filial piety), *ti* (brotherliness), *li* (propriety), and *te* (moral integrity). *Te*, according to Cheng (1986), is both *lien*, meaning small amount of face and *mien-tze*, meaning large amount of face. In addition, Cheng indicates that the five basic human relations are the very source of the face concept. Thus, the concept of face is a means to realize human relationships that constitute the social harmony.

Cheng (1986) further points out that the principle of naming is also part of the roots of the Chinese concept of face. Two ideas of Confucian naming crucial to understanding the Chinese concept of face include: (1) the society is a network of positions, places and relationships that are all fixedly named, and (2) in order to change or reclaim the reality, the proper name has to be rectified. Thus, from the perspective of naming, face is the position one nominally occupies and *mien-tze* is a way to make one's name more widely known.

### **A Critique of the Literature on the Chinese Concept of Face**

Although the above literature on the Chinese concept of face takes an indigenous perspective, it does not treat the concept of face as situated in interactions among the Chinese. Thus, it lacks insights in terms of the actual workings of face and facework in the Chinese communication. Due to the limitations of methodologies employed in the studies, the scholars tend to view face as a static rather than a dynamic. The following analyses, unlike the studies reviewed, are grounded in a videotaped interaction among a group of Chinese in a real life setting by employing an emic approach. The underlying assumption of the interpretation is that face is a process as well as product of social construction.

### **Case Study**

#### **Background and Data**

The episode for the analysis was from a videotaped interaction in a naturally occurring academic environment between four Chinese professors and a group of Chinese students enrolling

in colleges at northeastern United States. The professors were guest speakers invited by the Chair, a professor in the college, of this panel to discuss issues about the Chinese Culture. The language used in the discussion was Chinese. As a translator with M.A. in Translation Studies, I first transcribed the videotaped episode into Chinese, then translated it into English and back-translated the English version into Chinese to maximize the degree of faithfulness of the transcript. The names of interactants in the episode are pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality. Appendix A reports the final English version of the episode..

### **Interpretation**

The interpretation of the episode led to the identification of three features of discourse regarding facework: other-directed face, self-trivialization and redress of face threats; postponing the discussion before the hierarchical construction and the situated reconstruction of social hierarchy; rectification of names as a fundamental basis of interaction.

### **Other-Directed Face, Self-Trivialization and Redress of Face Threats.**

When understood and used appropriately other-directed face, self-trivialization and redress of face threats help prevent relational conflicts and maintain harmony. In contrast, they breach cultural norms, disrupt harmony and create conflicts. In this episode, most participants demonstrated their competence in understanding, using and responding to this feature in appropriate fashions that a harmonious atmosphere was kept.

Other-directed face is mainly defined as face-giving or the other face-honoring by using various means that is frequently illustrated in Lines 4--5, 7-9, 11-13, 41, 47-50, 51-56, 62-63, 64-68, 71-72, 78-80, 81-82 (see Appendix A). Lines 4--5, 8-9 and 11-13 are part of the ground rules laid out by the Chair. When the chair suggests students to ask questions like "Why are they so famous? How have you climbed so high" (Lines 4-5)? he evokes the sense of prestigious social statuses these three professors have. The chair uses "they" and "you" alternately (Lines 4, 5, 8) to refer to the guests collectively so that they are given equal amount of face. He further enhances their face collectively by emphasizing that they are prominent scholars for us to learn through questioning (Lines 4-9). From western points of view this might have invoked the sense of the relationship between the. However, in this episode the chair seems to invoke part of the traditional Chinese scholarship, i.e., persons who are studied are usually virtual sages whose knowledge is inexhaustible. By doing so, the chair seems place the three professors highly above the students. To suggest students to learn and study them denotes that the students should look up to the professors with awe. Finally, the chair's suggestion to address the professors by So and So Teacher (Lines 11- 13) is to caution the students to give at least the minimal amount of face to the professors so that they will not feel culturally shocked.

If the chair introduces the professors in a neutral tone, allows the students to address them by their first names, and invites the students to critique their scholarships or to debate with them on equal terms, three consequences may appear: (1) the three professors would feel regretful that they had agreed to come, although in appearance they would try to look pleased and try to sit through the event; (2) they would argue in their mind that they came simply to give face to the chair who had invited them without paying attention to the fact that the chair encourages the students to make them lose face; or they would decide not to be close friends of the chair any

more through various means such as not collaborating with him on research projects or not having any small talk with him in the future; and (3) they would seek revenge for the harm the chair had done to them.

Face threatening moves are a primary source of conflicts among Chinese.

However, if the moves are immediately cued and skillfully transformed into face-enhancing skills, conflicts are usually avoided and the relational harmony is developed. If not, the moves would generate bad feelings, cause face loss and threaten the harmony. In this interactive episode, only one face threatening move occurs which is cued and transformed skillfully, thus the relational harmony is maintained. This occurs in Lines 47- 50 when Liny interrupts Wang and expresses her great admiration towards Gu, the youngest professor among the three speakers for his being prolific. She says to Gu: "You really deserve our genuine admiration and respect, for you have written so many books in such a short time". The professor, being humble and pleased, immediately attributes his academic achievements to his former M. A. and Ph.D. advisor, Professor Xue who happens to be one of the three guest speakers (Lines 51- 56). "Teacher Xue is my advisor. He has advised me through both my MA and Ph.D. studies," chanted Gu. Hearing Gu's words, Xue seems recognized and pleased. Thus, the compliment is shared by both the professors. Liny's words intended as a face-giving compliment to Gu is shrewdly perceived by Gu as a move violating the Chinese cultural norm of paying tribute to the old first. Without his redress, he would perceive this violation as a source for a future cleavage between him and his advisor. Moreover, he would perceive himself as being looked bad in the eyes of the audience who would think that he is too aggressive if he does not relegate the compliments he receives to his advisor.

Self-trivialization or self-face effacing is not only the consequential action of a general cultural force that everyone should be modest, it may also consist of everyone's private invitation for a customary redress by the other. Since self-face effacing is most likely to be less than a realistic self-assessment and one is culturally legislated to demonstrate modesty to each other, people are supposed to ritualistically redress each other's self-trivialization so that the potential face loss can be avoided. If the listener does not redress this self-trivialization, s/he is most likely to be perceived as an incompetent actor and may produce a serious threat to lose his/her counterpart's face. Several self-trivialization cases accompanied with a ritualistic redress in the episode.

The first one case happens to the chair. On the one hand, the chair is establishing the three guests' prestige and authority in the process of laying out the ground rules for the upcoming activity in the beginning of the episode (Lines 1-15, 17-24); on the other hand, as one of the participants in the middle of the episode, the chair introduces himself by saying that he can only say that he knows nothing (Lines 62- 63). Professor Xue immediately takes the chance to reciprocate the chair's compliments for the three guests including himself: "That means you know everything" (Line 64). Xue's move is better understood as a shrewd redress of the chair's self-trivialization to give the chair face and elevate the chair's position. However, the chair continually demonstrates his self-humbleness by denying Xue's interpretation (Line 67) to retain the prominent positions of the three guests.

The second case happens to Professor Xue. Regardless of his prominent position symbolically placed by the chair, Professor Xue, being the most senior professor who obviously

occupies a distinguished academic position (President of a Chinese national academic society), still shows his modesty. He introduces himself as a “*jiao yuan*,” a humble way of addressing a professor in Mainland China (Line 68). This redress is done when Professor Zheng speaks (Lines 75-77). In the very beginning of his remarks, Zheng states: “I am happy to be here. Sir Xue has been a member of the senior scholarly generation of mine. For several decades, I have received his teachings.” Thus, Xue’s addressing himself as “*jiao yuan*” is complemented by Zheng’s uplifting remarks about him. Xue’s self-trivialization has been appropriately responded to by Zheng so as to maintain Xue’s face.

The last instance occurs to Professor Zheng. Breaking his own rule of not introducing the speakers before they speak, the chair introduces Zheng as a scholar who is an expert in many fields (Lines 71-72), in sharp contrast with his own self-introduction, “I can only say I know nothing.” Laughing out of self-humbleness as a response to the chair’s face-giving, Professor Zheng positions himself below all the three professors and puts Professor Xue above the other two: “Sir Xue has been a member of the senior scholarly generation of mine. For several decades, I have

received his teachings” (Lines 75-77); “Chang Teacher and Gu Teacher have been my senior scholar-brothers” (Lines 81- 82). Here, Zheng does not seem to mean what he says literally, but a Chinese ritual to rhetorically place others above oneself so that others would accept him or her as a Confucian gentleperson, or *junzi*. Zheng’s display of self-trivialization, however, is ritualistically denied by the chair by pointing out that Xue is not that old and Zheng is not that young. As a result, he compliments Xue for his youthfulness (a typical Western middle class type of compliment which appreciates youth) and insists that Zheng is senior and seasoned enough as a scholar (Lines 78-80).

To Westerners all these may sound like a false modesty, a waste of time and even funny. However, this ritual of other-face giving and self-face effacing functions as an effective means to fulfill the relational needs of each participant in Chinese culture. It is an effective cultural mechanism that functions to dissipate bad feelings and ease relational tensions. It can prevent potential conflicts and act as a discursive pattern systematically to develop and keep a harmonious order in interactions. Thus, this originally intended rational activity, supposed to be a highly academic and contestable one, was carried out in unwanted suspense and in a harmonious and emotionally appealing fashion.

#### **Postponing the Discussion before Hierarchical Construction and the Situated Reconstruction of Social Hierarchy.**

The chair, facing the three well known guests, finds that it is hard to decide whom he should introduce first and so simply leaves it for the speakers to decide for themselves. None of the speakers is willing to initiate (Line 19). He then turns to the student participants, hoping that through the students’ specific questions towards a specific guest speaker who will break the ice first (Lines 19-24).

The students do not follow the suggestion quickly, but seems not to be bold enough to leave the responsibility to either the speakers or the chair. Heng (Line 25), noticing that the group remains silent for too long, blames the students themselves (including himself) by saying that they have not understood the rules well (Line 25). The action avoids the inference that



neither the chair nor the speakers is willing to initiate the speaker self-introduction. However, Li wants to have this long silence ended. She invents a way to get the activity restarted by saying: "Does not Lin Gang have a question" (Line 26). Lin, (Lines 27- 28), still avoiding targeting a specific question to a specific speaker, raises a question to the three professors collectively (lines 27-28). Heng (Lines 29- 30) reminds Lin of the chair's final rule for the students to raise a specific question to a specific speaker. But, Lin still resists asking a specific question. Wang, an older student, noticing that none of his student fellows is willing to take the turn to initiate, plucks up his courage to ask a specific question to the youngest, not necessarily less successful, speaker (Lines 32- 33). Thus, the real interaction starts. Liny, interrupting Wang and building on his question, compliments Gu (Lines 47-50). Gu's responses to Wang and Liny (Lines 51-57) indicate that Wang and Liny have violated the cultural norm of social hierarchy by having asked specific questions to Gu and having complimented Gu who turns out to be the most junior among the professors.

This tense negotiation on who should take the initiative among the three parties - the chair, the guests, and the students - is better understood as being due to the parties' fear of losing one's own and the other parties' face in the situation where one is unable to figure out what is the appropriate position s/he should occupy. In other words, each member is uncertain about how to establish proper relationships among the group members without sufficient information regarding the speakers' backgrounds. Such information usually consists of questions about what academic positions they hold, how old they are, from which university they graduated, where they are teaching, and so on. These questions are usually asked by the Chinese in the initial social encounter. However, such information about the three speakers has neither been provided to the students by the chair nor by the format of the discussion. As a consequence, the real discussion has not started until after a well-intended compliment to Gu poses a serious face threat to the most senior member of the three (Lines 47-50).

In this episode, the hierarchy within the group is constructed through various interactive moves. First, Professor Xue seems to have received the most compliments among the professors. At the beginning Professor Gu attributes his academic achievements to Xue, his former academic advisor after Gu has received a big compliment from one of the students (Lines 51-57). Xue does not reciprocate, instead he responds nonverbally by scratching his head with his eyes beaming behind his spectacles and displaying a mixture of satisfaction and slight modesty. The chair, also a professor, compliments Xue by stressing his youthfulness for such an old age (Line 78). What is more interesting is that the student's admiration to Gu for his achievements is relegated by Gu to his former advisor. This is crucial to fully establish the hierarchy within the group. Moreover, one cannot ignore the scene that the chair has successfully managed to "coerce" the students to speak first at the moment of hierarchy uncertainty which contains many risks of face threatening or face losing after some resistance to the chair (Lines 17-21). Finally, Professor Zheng's self-introduction reinforces the hierarchical structure of the group (Lines 75-77). In his initial remarks he positions Xue as the most senior and puts himself at the bottom and the other two in the middle. Here, we see the pyramid structure being established within this group: Xue is on the top with the three other younger professors in the middle and the students are at bottom.

### **Rectification of Names as a Fundamental Basis of Interaction.**

According to Cheng (1986), the Confucian version of society is conceived as a network of positions, places and relationships that are all properly named. Inappropriate names must be rectified so that one's face can be maintained. I would argue that the Confucian proper naming of positions, places and relationships constitutes the most basic discursive structure of the harmonious social order. It also functions as a basic guarantor of a conflict free and harmonious society.

In the episode the proper naming has been done to every member of the group to create a fundamental structure for the interaction. At the beginning of the episode the teacher-student relationship has been "properly" established when the chair clearly states to the audience: "Though equal, we should not address them by their names only-the foreign style address. We should address these three honored professors as Gu Teacher, Zheng Teacher and Xue Teacher,..."(Lines 11-13). Further differentiation of positions, places and relationships is done among the professors. For example, Professor Gu refers to Professor Xue as "my teacher" (Line 55). Such differentiation is accomplished when he positions Xue above himself and others by calling him "Xue Gong" (Line 75), a Chinese equivalence of "Your Highness," and puts the other two professors above himself and below Xue by naming the two professors as "my *xue zhang*" (Lines 81-82) meaning his senior scholar-brothers.

The proper naming is believed to be capable of establishing the proper reality. For example, naming can give others face, make others lose face, and pose a face threat. In the episode naming is used to give others face, including what the chair has done to the three professors (Lines 1-15, 17-24), Gu to Xue (Lines 51-57), and Zheng to Xu, Gu, and the chair (Lines 75-77). Naming is also used to do self-effacing, including what Gu does to himself while he is giving face to his advisor (Lines 51-57). Names such as student, teacher, professor, *jiaoyuan*, advisor, *gong* (Your Highness) and *xuezhang* (scholar-brother) constitute the basic structure of the episode that specifies the academic, relational but hierarchical communication.

### **Analysis**

The various functions of facework displayed in the episode formulate the Chinese conflict prevention in action. The above analyses of various facework strategies used in the episode demonstrate that facework can (1) proactively create a harmonious relationship in which human conflicts are minimized; (2) deactivate, disintegrate or decompose the emergent sources of human conflicts at any cost (which, for example, keeps away conflicts at the price of maintaining hierarchy) as soon as such sources are identified; and (3) actively trivialize big conflicts and eliminate the existence of small conflicts. As the Chinese framework of face suggested, to passively wait for the emergence of conflicts and to actively put them under control run counter to the fundamental Chinese notion of social harmony. Confucianism views this practice as being morally and emotionally unacceptable and would be shameful and face-losing. In other words, to be a competent member of Chinese culture is to be able to prevent, avoid, tolerate, and ignore conflicts and to cultivate harmony through the application of facework everyday. Therefore, to prevent conflicts and treat them as though they do not exist through the use of facework strategies rather than legal interventions is afforded and encouraged in Chinese society.

### **Implications of Chinese Facework as Conflict Prevention for the Theoretical Development of Conflict Management in the West**

In the West conflict is typically viewed as natural, inevitable, and neither good nor bad. Conflicts arise when parties have incompatible goals or compete for scarce resources. Although it is costly to manage conflicts, they are potentially productive if managed well (Cooks, 1995). According to Rabi (1994), the management of a conflict is to contain and regulate rather than to work towards ending it. Rabi points out, "In fact, conflict management may serve as a tool to keep conflict from being resolved" ( p. 50). The Western models of conflict management including domination, capitulation, inaction, withdrawal, negotiation, or intervention by the third party reflect Rabi's view.

From the Chinese point of views as shown in the above analyses, the Western perspective of conflict management and resolution appears to be utilitarian, expedient, and superficial and thus ineffective and even detrimental. Thus, the Chinese perspective of conflict management may complement the Western views in three aspects. First, the Western notion of conflicts as economic and utilitarian could be expanded to integrate the Chinese relational, emotional and moral model. Second, the notion of conflict management as a formal, elite, and discrete but institutionalized practice could be broadened to include the ideas of conflict prevention as an omnipresent voluntary individual self-cultivation and everyday practice of facework, Finally, the Chinese perspective could also provide the idea of conflict prevention as an alternative of conflict management the "conflict-ridden culture" (Gadlin, 1994) that is excessively individual-based and adversarily-structured .

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**Appendix A:** Transcript of the Panel Discussion on New Confucianism

- Chair: 1 .... We've just met each other. I won't spend time introducing us one by one  
2 here. But, I suggest that everyone, including our invited professors, before  
3 speaking for the first time, introduce oneself. Then, raise any question about  
4 what you want to know such as: what do these professors do? Why are you  
5 so famous? How have you climbed so high? [immediately followed with  
6 laughter among the audience and the invited speakers]. We do not have  
7 lectures nor any other preparations, except that: Not only are their  
8 publications here, but also they are here in person. They are here for us to  
9 observe, study, and inquire. But they have their rights not to answer some of  
10 your sensitive questions. We are all very free and completely  
11 equal [here]. Though equal, we should not address them by their names  
12 only- the foreign style address. We should address these three honored  
13 professors as Gu Teacher, Zheng Teacher, Xue Teacher, but call me Fan  
14 Jiangwen [audience laughter], Jiangwen. Does everyone agree we'll  
15 begin this way?
- Wang. 16 Good.
- Chair: 17 Then, I won't introduce us first. I'll let Zheng Teacher et al. introduce  
18 themselves first. If their self- introductions are not enough, I'll add.  
19 [Long silence]. I say, shall we begin? [Chorus: "Ok", which is followed  
20 by  
21 a long period of silence among both the invited speakers and the  
22 audience]. If one asks one of the guest speakers a specific question, he  
23 will speak. Since this is the first time for him to speak, he will have to  
24 introduce himself. Therefore, the best method is to ask a specific person a  
25 specific question so that he will have a chance to introduce himself.
- Heng: 25. Perhaps we have not digested the rules.
- Li: 26 Has Lin Gang just asked a question?
- Lin: 27. I felt that I should know what their research concentrations are and what  
28 types of works they have had published. I am not clear about these.
- Heng: 29. You might as well raise these questions directly to one of them so that he  
30 will be obliged to introduce himself.
- Chorus: 31. Yeah, hhhhhh...
- Wang: 32. How about this? I am raising a question first, a comparatively specific  
33 question. It is for Teacher Gu.
- Chair: 34 [Interrupting] You should have introduced yourself to our guests.
- Wang: 35 Oh, yeah. I am, I am from S University. Like Lingang, I used  
36 to be a foreign language major.
- Chair: 37 [Interrupting] I would like to add that Wang was a teacher there and now a  
38 student here.

- Wang: 39 You are right. And when I came here, first I studied History of Political  
40. Thought. Then, at NEU, I studied The American Social History at the MA  
41. level. I would like to ask Teacher Gu a question. Teacher Gu, you are  
42. an expert on Xiong Shili. Xiong is said to be so famous. But what is his  
43. major theory? He is also a neo-Confucianist representative. How do you  
44. position him in Neo-Confucianism? Could you please give us some clear  
45. idea? But of course it is not easy to summarize in a few words because you  
46. have written a book on him.
- Liny: 47. [Interrupting] He's written a lot. Last night, I bought a book by you [To Gu]  
48. which is called *The Biography of Xiong Shili*. You really deserve our  
49. genuine admiration and respect, for you have written so many books in  
50. such a short time.
- Gu: 51. Oh, hhhh... I am from Philosophy Department of Weihua University.  
52. [Turning to his former MA and Ph.D adviser Professor Xue who is now  
53. his colleague, with his arm stretched to Xue along the desk, in his humble  
54. voice and with a smile of shyness and slightly bent back], Teacher Xue has  
55. been my teacher. He has advised me through both my MA and Ph. D  
56. studies [in Philosophy Department of Weihua University]. My current  
57. research concentration is the modern New Confucianism.
- Xue: 58. [While his former student is identifying his intellectual roots from Xue, Xue  
59. straightens his head and brooms his hair with his fingers, with smiling eyes  
60. behind his spectacles but a serious face]
- Chair: 61. I am introducing myself since I am speaking for the first time [as a  
62. participant]. I am Fan Jiangwen [followed by the audience laughter]. I  
63. can only say that I know nothing.
- Xue: 64. That means you know everything [half jokingly].
- Students: 65. Right. [in chorus]
- Chair: 66. That does not make sense. It [Professor Xue's interpretation of knowing  
67. nothing as knowing everything] does not fit in the Chinese philosophy. ...
- Xue: 68. I am a *jiao yuan* [instructor] from the Department of Philosophy of Weihua  
69. University. ...
- Chair: 70. [Referring to Professor Zheng] Besides being a historian and a philosopher,  
71. he is an expert in many other fields. So, let him introduce himself.  
72. Professor Zheng: [laughter of humbleness]
- Chair: 73. Let's hear different perspectives from him. We have not come to any  
74. conclusions yet.
- Zheng: 75. I am happy to be here today. Xue Gong has been a member of the  
76. senior scholarly generation of mine. For several decades, I have received  
77. his teachings.

- Chair: 78. [jokingly] You are exaggerating. Xue Teacher is not that old. You should  
79. not be pretending to be young. You are ready to retire and leave the  
80. position for young people.
- Zheng: 81. [continuing] Chang Teacher and Gu Teacher are my  
82. senior scholar- brothers. ...