

# Professional Relationships in a Bilateral Sino-Swedish Context

A Cross-Cultural Communication Study from a Chinese Perspective

Nicklas Junker

Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies  
Chinese Studies – Bachelor's Degree Course FS2016  
Paper 15 HE  
Supervisor: Pollacchi Elena



Stockholms  
universitet

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## 摘要

本文的目的在于从中文的视角来研究跨文化交际。中瑞双边关系在政治、经济和文化等领域都十分关键。因此，在中瑞双边语境下，正确理解和应用不同的交际习俗也变得非常重要。本文通过总结社会语言学领域的研究成果，参考中文报刊杂志的语言材料，结合问卷和访谈，得出了以下结论：中瑞交际习俗的差异在某些特定方面影响显著，其原因在于文化和社会方面。在中文的视角下，直接交际的交际风格被认为是具对抗性的和缺乏情感的，而在西方文化中，“面子”的贬义概念并不适用于中国的情况。在中瑞双边语境下，正确理解高语境和低语境、集体主义和个人主义、直接交际风格和间接交际风格等因素对于更好地理解双边关系、避免语用失误有着极其重要的意义。

## 关键词

交际、跨文化、高语境、低语境、直接交际、间接交际、面子、协商

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# 1 Introduction

Swedish enterprises have increasingly invested in China in recent years, and the occasions when communication is done on site in China with Chinese staff have increased in line with the investments. It is, therefore, important for Swedish enterprises as well as their Chinese counterparts to appreciate and understand each other's cultural differences/similarities regarding communication practices. The differences between the two cultures may, if not properly understood, lead to ineffectiveness and misunderstandings.

Furthermore, professional relationships with China have become pivotal not only for the private, but also for the public sector. The need to understand each other on a deeper level is growing in pace with the intensifying relations in the political, economic, and cultural domains. An enhancement in the mutual understanding of the particular context that social and communication practices is embedded in, as well as in the values and beliefs that it is connected to, may improve how communication is conducted between the Chinese and the Swedish private and public sector.

This paper draws upon studies in the field of sociolinguistics, which was pioneered in Europe and America by linguists such as William Labov and Basil Bernstein in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Sociolinguistic research focus mainly on how communication works in and between groups and how communication changes in the interaction between groups.

In today's global society, when it is increasingly common to work with people from, and to work within, different cultures, it is particularly important to exam-

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Basil Bernstein and Basil Bernstein (ed.), *Class, codes and control. Vol. 1, Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language* (London: Routledge, 1971). William Labov, *Sociolinguistic patterns* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

ine how cross-cultural communication affects the prospects of mutual understanding in and between groups from different cultures. Although scholarly debate on this topic is extensive, this paper will focus on the case of Sino-Swedish professional relationships on the basis of a review of academic articles combined with a survey.

## 1.1 Background

Much has been written on cross-cultural communication between the “East” and the “West”. The large amount of academic texts and literature on the subject clearly shows that the topic is of great importance. However, an overview also clearly shows that much of the work has been done from a Western perspective. The terminology, which in many ways defines and clarifies the ideas behind a theory, establish and maintains the idea of “us” and “them”. To use the established terminology means, in one or another way, to inherit, repeat and pass on the idea of people as different. Furthermore, to take on a Western view remarkably often means, to use a term from Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, that “The Other” (i.e. those not from the West) becomes the one who are different.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, and being fully aware of the obstacles being raised by being part of that Western tradition, it would be of interest to examine cross-cultural communication from a Chinese perspective. Without referring to any specific study in postcolonial approaches, this research harks back on such analytical perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1979]).

## **1.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

The main purpose of this paper is to examine cross-cultural communication from a Chinese perspective and to better understand pragmatic failures regarding professional relationships in a bilateral Sino-Swedish context. This means, basically, that Chinese papers, journals and other texts will be read, analyzed and compared with European and American theories in relation to communication practices as seen in the field of sociolinguistics.

The following questions are then being raised: What are the main differences between the Chinese culture and the European and American culture regarding communication practices as seen in the research material? What kind of examples are put forward in Chinese papers, journals and other texts regarding pragmatic failures? In what way do cross-cultural differences affect intercultural communication in a bilateral Sino-Swedish context?

## **1.3 Outline**

The introductory chapter on the background, purpose and research questions will be followed by the materials and methods section, in which the materials and the methods used in this paper are accounted for as well as some relevant analytical dimensions and concepts in the field of sociolinguistics.

In the subsequent chapter three, the findings are divided into the analytical dimensions as discussed earlier in the materials and methods section.

A discussion and some conclusions in relation to the main purpose of this paper is then drawn in the final chapter. A brief comment on the theoretical and methodological framework as well as some perspectives regarding intercultural communication in public and private sector in a bilateral Sino-Swedish context is also provided.

# 2 Materials and Methods

This chapter briefly introduces and explains the kind of materials and methods used in this paper. Furthermore, some of the limitations in the research are also discussed. A list of definitions is included at the end of the chapter.

## 2.1 Data Collection and Procedure

In this paper, which aims to research cross-cultural communication from a Chinese perspective, the most suitable materials turned out to be articles, papers and other texts written by Chinese scholars, journalists and authors. The articles were selected by searching different Chinese databases such as China Academic Journals (CAJ) with keywords relevant to the subject, such as intercultural communication (kuà wénhuà jiāojiè 跨文化交际), cultural differences (wénhuà chāyì 文化差异), business negotiations (shāngwù tánpàn 商务谈判), pragmatic failure (yǔ yòng shīwù 语用失误), and Western culture (Xīfāng wénhuà 西方文化) et cetera. The articles were published in the period 2002–2016.

The main materials for the intercultural communication research are gathered through interviews and questionnaires.<sup>3</sup> Eight respondents participated as follows:

- Three respondents born in and living in China filled out questionnaire A.
- Three Swedish respondents, two of them living in Sweden and one of them working and living in China, filled out questionnaire B.
- Two respondents were interviewed, one born in and living in China and the other born in and living in Sweden.

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<sup>3</sup> The questionnaires and the interview questions are attached in the appendices.

The respondents were aged from twenty-two to fifty-four years. Five of the respondents were female, three were male. The interviews were done via Skype and lasted for approximately forty-five minutes each.

The respondents participating in the interviews and/or answering the questionnaires are engaged in professional relationships across the two countries.

However, the focus remains on the Chinese journals, papers and other texts collected for this paper, so that the respondents should rather be seen as a valuable complement to this material.

In the field of sociolinguistics, there are a variety of analytical tools and dimensions to clarify and expose the cultural diversity that forms the background for the differences in communication practices (as well as the similarities). This paper focuses mainly on four different analytical dimensions: high and low context, collectivism and individualism, direct and indirect communication style and face. The reason being the major focus in the material is on these four analytical dimensions, hence of interest to this research.

The main argument in this paper for a cross-cultural communication research would be that it clarifies and discusses the differences – as seen in the included Chinese papers, journals and other texts – between China and the “West” regarding communication practices as specified in the research questions.

## 2.2 Terms and Concepts

The terminology applied in the material is generally very similar to the terminology as applied in the field of sociolinguistics and others. A list to clarify some of the terms included in the paper might be of help to review major concepts.

**Cross-cultural communication** involves comparisons of communication across cultures.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William B. Gudykunst and Bella Mody (ed.), *Handbook of international and intercultural communication* (2. ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002), 19.

**Intercultural communication** includes communication between people from different cultures.<sup>5</sup>

**High context culture** refers to cultures in which members are likely to refer to contextual aspects of the communication, such as background knowledge, setting, and the relationships among participants more than verbal messages.<sup>6</sup>

**Low context culture** refers to cultures in which members are likely to rely on the information encoded in verbal messages.<sup>7</sup>

**Direct communication style** refers to the meaning of a message communicated mainly via words.<sup>8</sup>

**Indirect communication style** refers to the meaning of a message communicated not only in words, but mainly in the surrounding context of a conversation.<sup>9</sup>

**Collectivism** refers to people being more aware of the connections they have as members of their social groups.<sup>10</sup>

**Individualism** refers to people emphasizing their independence.<sup>11</sup>

**Face** refers to “an image of the self which depends on both the rules and values of a particular society and the situation the social interaction is embedded in”.<sup>12</sup> Face is in the Chinese terminology divided into two parts: miànzi 面子 and liǎn 脸. Miànzi 面子 refers to social prestige, the status of the individual; liǎn 脸 signifies personal moral integrity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gudykunst and Mody (ed.), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Edward T. Hall, *Beyond culture*, ([New ed.] Garden City, New York: Anchor P., 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Hall, *Beyond culture*.

<sup>8</sup> Catrin Norrby and Gisela Håkansson, *Introduktion till sociolingvistik* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2012), 323.

<sup>9</sup> Norrby and Håkansson, 323.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Scollon, Suzanne B. K. Scollon and Rodney H. Jones, *Intercultural communication: a discourse approach* (3 ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Scollon, Scollon and Jones, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Erving Goffman, “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction”, in Goffman, E. (ed.), *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Practices* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 5–46.

<sup>13</sup> Hú Hsiên Chín 胡先縉, “The Chinese Concepts of ‘Face’”, *American Anthropologist* 46:1 (1944), 45-64.

**Pragmatic failure** refers to “the result of an interactant imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behaviour in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate”.<sup>14</sup>

This paper follows the guidelines for “Basic Rules for Hanyu Pinyin Orthography” as set by the Commission for Pinyin Orthography, State Language Commission, People’s Republic of China.<sup>15</sup> Exceptions are done when names et cetera are standardized according to other orthography rules (e.g. Hú Hsiēn Chìn 胡先缙).

## 2.3 Ethical Principles

The following ethical principles has been taken into account during this research: (a) obtain informed consent from potential research participants; (b) minimise the risk of harm to participants; (c) protect their anonymity and confidentiality; (d) avoid using deceptive practices; and (e) give participants the right to withdraw from this research. This paper thus follow the ethical principles as set by Vetenskapsrådet (Swedish Research Council).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Riley, “Well don't blame me! - On the interpretation of pragmatic errors”, in Wieslaw Oleksy (ed.), *Contrastive pragmatics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988), 231-249.

<sup>15</sup> John DeFrancis (ed.), *Abc Chinese-English dictionary* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Vetenskapsrådet, retrieved 2016-11-03 from <<http://www.codex.vr.se/texts/HSFR.pdf>>.

# 3 Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Communication

This chapter briefly introduces some of the differences between the Chinese and the European and American way of thinking in historical perspective. Furthermore, some of the differences that occur in the Chinese and the European and American way of communication will be examined, compared and contrasted.

When the words “West” and “Westerners” are used, they correspond to the words Xīfāng 西方 and Xīfāngrén 西方人 as used in the material.

Some of the answers given by the respondents will be included to give an authentic and/or alternative voice to the findings. The chapter begins with a broad perspective on the subject to be then narrowed down to the Swedish-Chinese case.

## 3.1 High and Low Context

The American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher Edward T. Hall popularized the terms high-context and low-context in the 1970s. The two terms are generally used to describe cultural differences between societies, though Hall originally used the terms to distinguish cultures on the basis of their way of communicating.<sup>17</sup>

High-context cultures refers to societies with strong interpersonal relationships. Members of high-context cultures usually have close connections over a long period of time, and they tend to communicate in a non-explicit way verbally, as most of the meanings are embedded in the cultural context; years of interaction with each other and training in cultural practices makes explicit information rather otiose, as the persons involved in the communication are presupposed to

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<sup>17</sup> Hall, *Beyond culture*.

have knowledge of the explicit conditions. Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 suggests this type of communication to be frequent in China, and he furthermore defines China as a high-context culture.<sup>18</sup>

Low-context cultures refers to societies where relationships and roles are less fixed than in high-context cultures. People in low-context cultures tend to have many relationships lasting for a shorter period of time. Hence, communication has to be clear, accurate and easy to understand, as the meaning is embedded in the words spoken rather than in the cultural context.<sup>19</sup> According to Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红, members of low-context cultures have strategies to make conversation in order to avoid silence, as silence in low-context cultures is being regarded as awkward/embarrassing (gāngà 尴尬).<sup>20</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 states Western European and American cultures to be classified as low-context cultures.

## 3.2 Collectivism and Individualism

Western culture is, as argued by Duàn Sānfú 段三伏, characterized by individualism and alienation.<sup>21</sup> The concept of individualism in the West generates a society in which paying attention to oneself becomes more important than paying attention to others. It is argued by Zhāng Zhìyuān 张知渊 and Yán Zhìjūn 阎志军 that Western people have a strong driving force to realize themselves and to create personal wealth, which leads to Westerners taking initiative, being frank

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<sup>18</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红, “Shì lùn rúhé zài gāo yǔ jìng yǔ dī yǔ jìng jiān jìnxíng chénggōng de kǒuyǔ jiāojiè” 试论如何在高语境与低语境间进行成功的口语交际 (On the Successful Oral Communication between High Context Culture and Low Context Culture), *Sichuān Lǐgōng Xuéyuàn Xuébào (Shèhuì Kēxué Bǎn)* 四川理工学院学报(社会科学版) (Journal of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (Social Sciences Edition)) 25:1 (2010), 134–136.

<sup>19</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 134–136.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Duàn Sānfú 段三伏, “Zhōng-Xī wénhuà lǐmào yòngyǔ bǐjiào jí kuà wénhuà jiāojiè zhōng yǔ yòng shīwù fēnxī” 中西文化礼貌用语比较及跨文化交际中语用失误分析 (Thought on Sino-Western Cultural Differences Through the Failure of Politeness Pragmatics in Intercultural Communication), *Húnán Gōngyè Zhíyè Jìshù Xuéyuàn Xuébào* 湖南工业职业技术学院学报 (Journal of Hunan Industry Polytechnic) 10:3 (2010), 100–102, 164.

and straightforward, energetic and willing to take risks, not least when it comes to entrepreneurs.<sup>22</sup> Duàn Sānfú 段三伏 illustrates the concept of individualism by quoting Benjamin Franklin's famous statement "God help those who help themselves" (Zìzhùzhě tiānzhù 自助者天助).<sup>23</sup>

It is further argued that Western people are focused on privacy and personal space even to an extent where it is fully normal not to help, for example, friends or relatives in need.<sup>24</sup> The thought of not helping a friend or a relative in need is unfamiliar to most Chinese people, according to Wēn Jīn 温锦.<sup>25</sup>

The contemporary Chinese writer and filmmaker Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橹 uses alienation and identity as a major theme in her works. Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橹 was born in 1973 in China, but has lived in London since 2002. In her novel *A concise Chinese-English dictionary for lovers*, which is written in deliberately bad English as the main character is a Chinese sent to London by her parents to study English, Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橹 writes regarding collectivism and individualism that

In China, every family live together, grandparents, parents, daughter, son and their relatives too. Eat together and share everything, talk about everything. Privacy make people lonely. Privacy make family fallen apart.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Zhāng Zhìyuān 张知渊 and Yán Zhìjūn 阎志军, "Zài huá kuàguó gōngsī de kuà wénhuà guǎnlǐ tànxi" 在华跨国公司的跨文化管理探析 (Analyse on the Cross-Cultural Management of Transnational Corporations in China), *Jīngjì Yánjiū Dǎo Kān* 经济研究导刊 (Economic Research Guide) 9:2 (2007), 108–110.

<sup>23</sup> Duàn Sānfú, 101.

A digression perhaps, but as Mò Yán 莫言 puts it: Huā kāi liǎng duǒ, gè biǎo yīzhī 花开两朵，各表一枝 [Two flower buds on each branch, we'll take them one by one] (see Mò Yán 莫言, *Sìshíyī Pào* 四十一炮 (Pow!), 284). Although the phrase "God help those who help themselves" (and the idea) is commonly attributed to B. Franklin, it appears as early as in ancient Greek tragedies. Sophocles used the phrase (and the idea) in *Philoctetes*, a tragedy that was first performed at the Festival of Dionysos in 409 BC. Sophocles' tragedy won the first prize. It could further be argued that the fact that the idea has such a long history in the West makes the Chinese argument when characterizing Western culture even stronger, though the argument in the paper is not taken that far. B. Franklin originally used the phrase in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1736.

<sup>24</sup> We have to keep in mind that the material in this paper comes mostly from Chinese sources. We may not agree with what is being said, but the main point in this paper is to research cross-cultural communication from a Chinese perspective.

<sup>25</sup> Wēn Jīn, 157–158.

<sup>26</sup> Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橹, *A concise Chinese-English dictionary for lovers* (London: Vintage, 2008), 106.

In the questionnaire related to this paper, one of the respondents, a Chinese living in China, answered as follows to one of the questions:

West is more focused on themselves. They don't care too much about other people.

In a collectivist society on the other hand, as stated by Zhái Xuéwěi 翟学伟, people are usually born into extended families (i.e. not just the parent/s and other children, but aunts, uncles, grandparents etc. living under the same roof) that continue protecting them in exchange for loyalty.<sup>27</sup> The ties in the extended family is normally very strong. As Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橹 puts it:

I can't imagine what like to break up with my family. Even though my mother very bad temper and make me pain, my life relies on them, and I can't survive without them.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, collectivist societies consists of in-groups, which is an extension of the extended family. An in-group normally consists of friends and other persons that has a mutual dependence relationship. The Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defines an in-group as: "A cohesive group that offers protection in exchange for loyalty and provides its members with a sense of identity."<sup>29</sup> Members of the in-group think of themselves as "we", and the in-group is "the major source of one's identity and the only secure protection one has against the hardships of life".<sup>30</sup> Doing harm, or breaking loyalty, to the in-group is not acceptable and leads to shame and guilt. Naturally, a person's own in-group is thought of as "we", while other in-groups are thought of as "they". One could argue that

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<sup>27</sup> Zhái Xuéwěi 翟学伟, "Shì 'guānxì', háishì shèhuì zīběn" (Guanxi or Social Capital?), *Shèhuì 社会 (Society)* 1 (2009), 109–121, 226.

<sup>28</sup> Guō Xiǎolǚ, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind : [intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival]* (Rev. and expanded 2. ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 401.

<sup>30</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede, 75.

the extension of an in-group could be very broad and include, for example, the Communist Party of China (Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng 中国共产党) but this line of reasoning moves away from the focus of this research.

A common thought in a collectivist society is that resources should be shared within the extended family.<sup>31</sup> Children growing up in extended families (and in-groups) learn to think in terms of “we”, whereas children growing up in an individualistic society with a nuclear family structure (i.e. parent/s and other children) learn to think in terms of “I”. It is argued by the Chinese-American anthropologist Francis Hsu that there is no equivalent for personality in the Chinese language. In the Western sense, personality is a separate entity, distinct from culture and society. Personality is an attribute of the individual. “Rén” 人 (person) is the closest translation into Chinese of the “individual”, according to Hsu, but rén 人 includes not only the individual but also the intimate cultural and societal environment that makes the existence meaningful.<sup>32</sup>

It is argued by Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 that the Buddhist concept of anattā (non-self) has had, and still has, a major impact on the Chinese culture.<sup>33</sup> The concept of anattā or non-self (wú wǒ 无我) means, briefly, that there is no soul, no self in living beings. When the idea of a permanent metaphysical self or soul is seen to be an illusion then one will cease to suffer and also cease to inflict suffering on others.<sup>34</sup> There is no “I” and no “mine” according to Buddha. Thus, Xiè Yùróng

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<sup>31</sup> Mǎ Xiǎojiān 马晓娟 and Hán Rùn'é 韩润娥, “Guānxì yíngxiāo jí Zhōng Xīfāng guānxì wénhuà bǐjiào yánjiū” 关系营销及中西方关系文化比较研究 (Comparison between Chinese and Western Relationship Marketing and Cultures), *Shāngyè jīngjì* 商业经济 (Business Economy) 11 (2011), 84–85.

<sup>32</sup> Francis L. K. Hsu, “Psychosocial Homeostasis and Jen: Conceptual Tools for Advancing Psychological Anthropology”, *American Anthropologist* 73:1 new series (1971), 23–44.

<sup>33</sup> Anattā is often translated as “not-self” or “ego-less” in English literature, but according to Peter Harvey, Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland, a more correct translation would be “non-self”. See Harvey, Peter, *The selfless mind: personality, consciousness and nirvana in early Buddhism*, (Richmond: Curzon, 1995), 31–32 for further information.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Harvey, *The selfless mind: personality, consciousness and nirvana in early Buddhism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1995).

谢玉荣 states, the Chinese culture is characterized by a mindset in which the collective (jí tǐ 集体) takes precedence over the individual.<sup>35</sup> This leads to a holistic concept (zhěng tǐ guān niàn 整体观念) in which the parts are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.<sup>36</sup> Paying attention to others becomes more important in such a concept than paying attention to oneself.<sup>37</sup> This is emphasized by, for example, Guō Xiǎolǚ 郭小橧:

We Chinese are not encouraged to use the word “self” so often. The old comrades in the work unit would say, how can you think of “self” most of the time but not about others and the whole society? The “self” is against “group” and “collectivism.” The “self” is the enemy of the Communist party. In middle school we were taught “the most admirable person” should forget about himself, shouldn’t satisfy his own needs.<sup>38</sup>

Wēn Jīn 温锦 furthermore suggests that the strong sense of collectivism among the Chinese people leads to a collective (jí tǐ 集体) identity.<sup>39</sup> To be part of a group (qún tǐ 群体) – and to show solidarity to the group – is therefore essential in the Chinese culture and mindset. To emphasize the individual is not in accordance with the thought of the collective identity. Additionally, there is a strong sense of solidarity due to the holistic concept. Duàn Sānfú 段三伏 is suggesting that this leads to a herd mentality, a will “to follow the crowd” (cóng zhòng 从众).<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly enough, according to Zhāng Zhīyuān 张知渊 and Yán Zhìjūn 阎志军, this furthermore leads to a non-initiative and conformist way of thinking,

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<sup>35</sup> Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣, “Zhōng Xīfāng wénhuà jiàzhíguān de chāyì duì guójì shāngwù tánpàn de yǐngxiǎng” 中西方文化价值观的差异对国际商务谈判的影响 (The Influence of Differences between Chinese and Western Cultural Values on International Business Negotiations), *Zhíyè* 职业 (Occupation) 10 (2007), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Xiè Yùróng, 43.

<sup>37</sup> As, for example, the American journalist Edgar Snow got to experience in 1936–37 when he was interviewing leading representatives and other people from the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army during his work with Red star over China. Many of the interviewees were reluctant to speak about themselves, but rather spoke of the bigger picture.

<sup>38</sup> Guō Xiǎolǚ, 268.

<sup>39</sup> Wēn Jīn, 157–158.

<sup>40</sup> Duàn Sānfú, 100–102, 164.

coupled with a lack of energy and a lack of risk-taking spirit among Chinese entrepreneurs.<sup>41</sup>

The above mentioned leads to significant differences in communication practices between Chinese people and Westerners, as adduced by Wēn Jǐn 温锦. For example, when introduced to each other, Chinese people often talk about marital status (hūnyīn zhuàngkuàng 婚姻状况), income (shōurù 收入), age (niánlíng 年龄) and occupation (zhíyè 职业).<sup>42</sup> This is partly due to the holistic concept and the strong sense of collective identity as discussed earlier. Western people, on the other hand, often feel uncomfortable when a topic like the above-mentioned is being brought up, and Duàn Sānfú 段三伏 among other, strongly recommends to avoid them when communicating with Westerners, especially when negotiating.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the common Chinese negative response to praise or compliments (e.g. nǎlǐ 哪里哪里 [not at all], hái chà dé yuǎn ne 还差得远呢 [on the contrary]) could be argued to derive from the thought of not emphasizing oneself (which, in turn, is to a certain degree based on anattā).<sup>44</sup> A clear picture between a collective (“we”) versus an individualistic (“I”) worldview regarding communication practices could be drawn from the following example (from the material):

A: zhè jiàn yīfú zhēn hǎokàn 这件衣服真好 [what a beautiful dress]!

B: shì wǒ jiějie gěi wǒ mǎi de 是我姐姐给我买的 [my sister bought it for me].<sup>45</sup>

This is clearly a collectivistic worldview. B is responding to A by turning the compliment over to her sister. There is no “I” being emphasized, in contrast, B is emphasizing “we” by including, and giving tribute, to her sister.

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<sup>41</sup> Zhāng Zhìyuān and Yán Zhījūn, 108–110.

<sup>42</sup> Wēn Jǐn, 157–158.

<sup>43</sup> Duàn Sānfú, 100–102, 164.

<sup>44</sup> Words in square brackets [...] in running text are translations of my own.

<sup>45</sup> Duàn Sānfú, 100–102, 164.

The following example is from an intercultural communication and English learning book in Chinese (following example written in English, though).

A: Chinese: (to an elderly foreigner) You must be very tired. You are old.....

B: Foreigner: Oh, I'm NOT old, and I'm NOT tired.<sup>46</sup>

This could be regarded as a communication and a culture clash. A is acting in accordance with his or her cultural habits (i.e. a collectivistic worldview) by being substantive and paying attention to the elderly. B is, apparently, acting in accordance with his or her individualistic worldview. B is responding by strongly emphasizing him- or herself. B is also responding (implicit) in anger that there has been an invasion of privacy. The most valuable contribution in the example above may be the perspective one though. Not many Westerners would respond as in the given example, but the example clearly gives an idea of the Chinese perception regarding the individualistic mindset as shown in some of the material.

Chinese greetings, as another example, are argued by Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 to originate from different layers of life, and therefore has become of substantive character (e.g. nǐ zài chīfàn 你在吃饭/xǐyī 洗衣/kànshū 看书阿 [are you eating/doing the laundry/reading?]), while Western greetings are social and/or evaluative (e.g. "I am pleased to meet you"/"Hello").<sup>47</sup>

Another example of Chinese greetings of substantive character is given by Duàn Sānfú 段三伏:

Fāfúle 发福了 [you have put on weight].

Pàngle 胖了 [you look fat].<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 134–136.

<sup>47</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 134–136.

<sup>48</sup> Duàn Sānfú, 101.

According to Duàn Sānfú 段三伏, the above examples are considered as compliments, highlighting the fact that personal living conditions appears to be excellent (and, one could argue, the greetings being deeply connected to the different hardships and famines that the Chinese people has experienced over time; this argument being attested by the fact that Duàn Sānfú 段三伏 states that there is a shift in the language usage as an effect of better living conditions in China. The expressions fāfúle 发福了 [you have put on weight] and pàngle 胖了 [you look fat] are often replaced with shòu 瘦 [thin] in contemporary China. Both expressions reflecting living conditions rather than body shape, though).

What is often considered as invasion of privacy in the West, is in China often considered as common courtesy and consideration, as Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 clearly shows in his article.<sup>49</sup>

The individualistic mindset can appear as rude and impolite to Chinese people, and it can clearly be seen in the material that the gap between an individualistic mindset and a collective mindset is considered large and difficult to bridge. Furthermore, the collective mindset in Chinese society versus the individualistic mindset and the associated sense of right to privacy in Western societies is a common cause for pragmatic failures in intercultural communication between Chinese people and Westerners; negotiations are particularly sensitive to this kind of cultural differences, according to Wēn Jīn 温锦.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 134–136.

<sup>50</sup> Wēn Jīn 温锦, "Zhōng-Xī kuà wénhuà jiāojiè zhàng'ài jí duìcè" 中西跨文化交际障碍及对策 (Chinese and western cross-cultural communication problems and countermeasures), *Xué Lǐlùn* 学理论 (Theory) 32 (2011), 157–158.

### 3.3 Direct and Indirect Communication Style

The use of an indirect/direct communication style is one of the dimensions that differs notably between Chinese people and Westerners regarding communication practices, and as Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 and Zhū Fēi 朱飞 points out, indirect communication style is characterized by ambiguous and vague expressions, whereas direct communication style is characterized by straightforward expressions.<sup>51</sup>

The difference between China and the West regarding communication style is considered immense, and Zhū Fēi 朱飞 derives the difference in communication style from a disparate way of thinking, based on cultural diversity.<sup>52</sup> Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 suggests that the use of indirect communication style is significant for Chinese speakers, whilst the use of direct communication style is significant for Westerners.<sup>53</sup> It is furthermore argued by Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 that the Western way of communicating is confrontational (duìkàngxìng 对抗性) and emotionless (duànrán 断然), with little to no care for interpersonal relationships. As Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 puts it:

Tāmen rènwéi guāndiǎn de fēnqí bù huì yǐngxiǎng rénjì guānxì 他们认为观点的分歧不会影响人际关系 [They argue that differences of opinion do not affect interpersonal relationships].<sup>54</sup>

Apparently, from a Chinese perspective and in a Chinese context, to consider differences of opinion not to affect interpersonal relationships is a most absurd

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<sup>51</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 134–136.

Zhū Fēi 朱飞, “Wàizī qǐyè wénhuà chāyì huà guǎnlǐ” 外资企业文化差异化管理 (Cultural differences between foreign-funded enterprises management), *Shìchǎng Yánjiū* 市场研究 (Marketing Research) 1 (2014), 62–63.

<sup>52</sup> Mainly based on Confucianism in China and in the West on Aristotle’s formal logic and later on rationalism. See Zhū Fēi 朱飞, “Wàizī qǐyè wénhuà chāyì huà guǎnlǐ” 外资企业文化差异化管理 (Cultural differences between foreign-funded enterprises management), *Shìchǎng Yánjiū* 市场研究 (Marketing Research) 1 (2014), 62–63.

<sup>53</sup> Xiè Yùróng, 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

way of thinking. An aversion against the direct communication style frequently used by Westerners can clearly be seen in much of the material.

In the questionnaire related to this paper, one of the questions given reads as follow:

What do you perceive as the greatest difference in communication style regarding China and the West?

One of the respondents, a Chinese living in China, gave the following answer:

The West express themselves more directly than Chinese [sic].

Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 further suggests the disparate ways of thinking may lead to difficulties in, for example, negotiations, as Chinese people attach great importance in creating a harmonious atmosphere and to create and maintain long-term interpersonal relationships, being modest, respectful and courteous at the negotiation table, whereas Westerners are considered frank and straightforward, regarding the economic contract as the ultimate aim of the negotiation.<sup>55</sup> As Lǐ Xiǎohóng 李晓红 points out:

Zhōngguó rén shuō huà xǐ huān guǎi wān mò jiǎo, hán xù, zǒng xǐ huān duì fāng néng tīng dǒng zì jǐ de àn shì 中国人说话喜欢拐弯抹角，含蓄，总喜欢对方能听懂自己的暗示 [Chinese people like to beat around the bush when talking, being subtle, always appreciating when their counterpart has the ability to understand their hints].<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, Xiè Yùróng 谢玉荣 suggests that the use of an indirect communication style is tightly connected to face (miànzi 面子):

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<sup>55</sup> Xiè Yùróng, 43. The article was published in 2007 and the influence of the “Harmonious Society” (Héxié Shèhuì 和谐社会), which was a key feature of the ideology of President (2003–2013) and General Secretary (2002–2012) Hú Jǐntāo 胡锦涛, can be seen. See for example “China Publishes ‘Harmonious Society’ Resolution” at <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/2006/Oct/184810.htm>> for further information on the “harmonious society” (Héxié Shèhuì 和谐社会).

<sup>56</sup> Lǐ Xiǎohóng, 135.

Zhōngguó rén wéi le bǎoquán qúntǐ de miànzi huò gèrén de miànzi, jīngcháng shǐyòng àimèi de, jiànjiē de yǔyán, jǐnliàng bìmiǎn mócā 中国人为了保全群体的面子或个人的面子，经常使用暧昧的、间接的语言，尽量避免摩擦 [Chinese people are, in order to save the face of the group, or one's personal face, frequently using an ambiguous, indirect language, doing their utmost to avoid disharmony].<sup>57</sup>

The point of using indirect communication style is to let those involved in the conversation interpret the meaning of what is actually being said, without the risk of hurting the emotional feelings of those involved. Chē Yúnfāng 车云芳 and Zhèng Juān 郑娟 gives an example of indirect communication style (the speaker wishing to borrow some money):

Damn, I'm out of cash. I forgot to go to the bank today.<sup>58</sup>

The main point in the above example is not that of the participant's bad planning, but rather the participant's lack of money. There is no request for a loan in the utterance, and there is an easy way out for everyone involved in the conversation. One of the participants could, by interpreting what have been said correctly, lend the money needed, though not asked for, thereby showing both good understanding as well as kindness in front of the other participants. If no money is lent, one could still argue that no request for a loan has been asked, and the participants can leave without emotional feelings being hurt. Integrity is kept in good standing.

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<sup>57</sup> There are in fact, as seen in the material, several keywords associated with the Chinese culture and mindset in the quotation: qúntǐ 群体 (group), miànzi 面子 (face) and mócā 摩擦 (disharmony).

Xiè Yùróng, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Chē Yúnfāng 车云芳 and Zhèng Juān 郑娟, "Zhōng-Xī miànzi guān chāyì jí wéihù miànzi fānglüè" 中西面子观差异及维护面子方略 (Differences between China and the West Regarding Face Perception and Face-saving Strategies), *Zhōngguó Diànlì Jiàoyù* 中国电力教育 (China Electric Power Education) 1 (2009), 149. Originally from Brown, Penelope and Levinson, Stephen C., *Politeness: some universals in language usage* ([Rev. ed.] with corr., new introd. and new bibliogr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 69. This example is given in English in the article by Chē Yúnfāng 车云芳 and Zhèng Juān 郑娟.

Another example given by Chē Yúnfāng 车云芳 and Zhèng Juān 郑娟, this time regarding direct communication style, reads as follows:

Pass me that salt.<sup>59</sup>

In this case, there is no need for those involved in the conversation to interpret what the speaker is saying, as it is all very clear. Direct communication style is an effective way of getting things done, as the speaker demonstrates efficiency, clear expression and sincerity of intention. Self-image is of less importance in direct communication style. Thus, self-image is threatened, and integrity is in danger.

An indirect speaker would, on the other hand, leave it up to the listener to fill in the blanks and make out the meaning by correctly reading the contextual clues (e.g. non-verbal communication, status and/or age of people involved in the conversation, attire, etc.).

A theory that has attracted much attention among Chinese linguistics is the Fuzzy language theory. The theory derives from the American cognitive linguist George Lakoff's work on fuzzy concepts.<sup>60</sup> Lakoff argues that truth and falsity are a matter of degree, and that hedges make natural language sentences either more or less true, or more or less false. Lakoff states that hedges are "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy".<sup>61</sup> Hedges are words like: very, really, a true, a regular, a typical, sort of, technically, loosely speaking, strictly speaking et cetera. Hedges do not only weaken the speaker's commitment to a proposition, hedges may also intensify her commitment.<sup>62</sup>

The Fuzzy language theory was introduced and developed in China in the 1990s by Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平, a professor in Chinese at Beijing Normal University

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<sup>59</sup> Chē Yúnfāng and Zhèng Juān, 149. This example is given in English in the article.

<sup>60</sup> George Lakoff, "Hedges: a study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts", *The 8<sup>th</sup> Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society* (1972), 183-228.

<sup>61</sup> Lakoff, 195.

<sup>62</sup> Reiko Itani, "A relevance-based analysis of Lakoffian hedges", retrieved 2016-10-12 from <<http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/publications/WPL/95papers/ITANI.pdf>>.

(Běijīng Shīfàn Dàxué 北京师范大学), and has gained widespread attention due to the theory's applicability to Chinese conditions.<sup>63</sup> According to Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平, fuzzy language refers to the uncertainty of the boundary of a word or a concept.<sup>64</sup> Hedges are a universal language phenomenon, although Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平 has taken the theory one step further and made it into an intercultural communication strategy. Basically, Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平 argues that by using hedges one can express uncertainty or possibilities (e.g. for example when negotiating) while maintaining a harmonious atmosphere.<sup>65</sup>

The strategies connected to the Fuzzy language theory are well suited for Chinese speakers, as they are based on ambiguity, and as seen in this chapter, ambiguity and indirect communication are tightly interwoven.

### 3.4 Face

The idea and concept of face (miànzi 面子) has a very long history in China and is, as far as we know, first mentioned in the *Guǎnzi* 管子 (*Writings of Master Guan*) as early as fourth to third century BC.<sup>66</sup> It was originally introduced in the West by the Chinese anthropologist Hú Hsiēn Chèn 胡先缙 in 1944, and carried a range of meanings based upon the concept of "honour".<sup>67</sup>

The American sociologist Erving Goffman in turn established the Western term *face* in the late 1960s. Goffman defines face as

*An image of the self* which depends on both the rules and values of a particular society and the situation the social interaction is embedded in. [Emphasis added]<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平, *Móhú Yǔyán Xué* 模糊语言学 (Fuzzy Linguistics), (Shànghǎi: Shànghǎi wàiyǔ jiàoyù chūbǎn shè, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> Wǔ Tiěpíng, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Zhāng Cuībō 张翠波 and Jì Hán 计晗, "Móhú yǔ zài kuà wénhuà shāngwù Yīngyǔ tánpàn zhōng de yìngyòng yánjiū" 模糊语在跨文化商务英语谈判中的应用研究 (The Application of Fuzzy Language in Cross-cultural Business Negotiation), *Hǎiwài Yīngyǔ* 海外英语 (Overseas English) 4 (2013), 254–256.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Robinson, *The Dao of Translation: An East-West Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Scollon, Scollon and Jones, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Goffman, 5–46.

During interactive communication it is thus important to say and do things that are consistent with the image the participants want to give of themselves, while the participants care so that no other participant falls out of his role. According to Goffman's reasoning, we attempt to preserve both our own and others' face in order not to jeopardize the role of those involved in the interaction.

The Hong Kong social scientist Ho David Yau-Fai defines losing face as follows:

Face is lost when the individual, either through his action or that of *people closely related to him*, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies. [Emphasis added]<sup>69</sup>

There is a significant difference in the two definitions of face. The Western definition of face as defined by Goffman is clearly oriented towards the individual, while the definition by Ho David Yau-Fai is clearly oriented towards the group. The Chinese scholar Zhāng Yàngē 张彦鸽 argues that the Western definition of face has no relevance in the Chinese cultural context, since it is self-centered and not group-oriented.<sup>70</sup> The Chinese concept of face is much broader and includes among other things

[...] shēnfèn, quánlì, yìwù, zérèn, róngyù, miànzi dàxiǎo hé xíngwéi, gēnjù bùtóng de shèhuì dìwèi hé shēnfèn, lǚxíng shèhuì yìwù 身份,权利,义务,责任,荣誉,面子大小和行  
为,根据不同的社会地位和身份,履行社会义务 [status, rights, obligations, responsibility, honour, face capital and practices, according to the social status and identity, fulfilling social obligations].<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> David Y. Ho, "On the Concept of Face", *American Journal of Sociology* 8:4 (1976), 867.

<sup>70</sup> Zhāng Yàngē 张彦鸽, "Zhōng Xīfāng 'miànzi' wénhuà chāyì yǔ kuà wénhuà jiāoji" 中西方“面子”文化差异与跨文化交际 (The Intercultural Communication and Differences of Face Perception in Chinese and Western Culture), *Sānménxiá Zhíyè Jìshù Xuéyuàn Xuébào* 三门峡职业技术学院学报 (Journal of Sanmenxia Polytechnic) 6:2 (2007), 92–94.

<sup>71</sup> Liú Xīn 刘欣, "Zhōng-Xī wénhuà zhōng miànzi guān chāyì jí yǔ yòng cèlüè tàntǎo" 中西文化中面子观差异及语用策略探讨 (An Exploration of Face Perception and Pragmatic Strategies in Chinese and Western Culture), *Húnán Gōngchéng Xuéyuàn Xuébào (Shèhuì Kēxué Bǎn)* 湖南工程学院学报(社会科学版) (Journal of Hunan Institute of Engineering) 15:2 (2005), 26.

Liú Xīn 刘欣 is making use of the very well-known modern Chinese writer Lǔ Xùn 鲁迅 and one of his characters, Ah Q 阿 Q, to exemplify the above mentioned. Ah Q 阿 Q is in the novella *The True Story of Ah Q* (*Ā Q Zhèng Zhuàn* 阿 Q 正传) losing dignity again and again in order to save face of his group and himself (one of the major theme being that Ah Q 阿 Q does not even belong to, or is included in, the group he is so hard trying to maintain face for). Liú Xīn 刘欣 then contrasts this by making use of the “Lewinsky scandal”, in which the President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton, had a sexual relationship with a White House intern. Clinton may have lost face, but the United States of America and its peoples did not. In China though, Liú Xīn 刘欣 suggests, people would on the contrary have felt ashamed, collectively losing face.

In the Chinese society, Liú Xīn 刘欣 further argues, a person not living up to his or her standard, breaking social norms or doing damage to the group will lose face. Furthermore, face will not only be lost to oneself, but rather to the group as a whole. Face originates from the social unit and leads to all the specific individuals whereas in the Western society, the loss of face is individual, not group-oriented.<sup>72</sup> Face can not only be lost in the Chinese concept, it can also be given or earned. To earn face (*liǎn* 脸) is tightly connected to personal moral integrity.<sup>73</sup>

Xiaoyan Zhang and Lan Huang states that “[Chinese] people seldom say ‘No’ so as not to make the other person lose face or embarrassed [sic]”.<sup>74</sup> In the questionnaire related to this paper, one of the respondents, a Chinese living in China, gave an answer in accordance with the above:

As a Chinese, we usually hide our negative feelings. We are afraid to say no. [...] it's just hard to say no.

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<sup>72</sup> Liú Xīn, 26–28.

<sup>73</sup> Chē Yúnfāng and Zhèng Juān, 147.

<sup>74</sup> Xiaoyan Zhang and Lan Huang, “Cross-Culture Influences on Interpersonal Relationship in Communication Management: A Case Study: Foreign Supervisors PK Chinese Employees in Foreign-Invested Enterprises”, *International Journal of Business and Management* 8:12 (2013), 121.

The answer may very well be compared and contrasted to an answer given in one of the interviews done in relation to this paper. The respondent, a Swede living in Sweden, gave the following expression when asked of Sino-Swedish professional relationships:

They [Chinese people] can't say "no". If I am asking if it can be done, they say "yes", and then it is in any case not done. It is very frustrating, but during the years I have come to understand when "yes" simply means "no".

Aside from the very interesting fact that the Chinese person is responding in a collectivistic way whilst the Swedish person is responding in an individualistic way, using "we" and "I" respectively, it also appears that a lack of mutual cultural understanding – which clearly affects professional relationships – is at hand. The Swedish respondent is not fully aware that the reluctance to communicate "no" bear upon, to a certain degree, the Chinese concept of face. Furthermore, as argued by Xiaoyan Zhang and Lan Huang, by not communicating "no" face is actually not being saved to oneself, but rather to the counterpart (i.e. the Swedish respondent). An enhancement in the cultural understanding can be seen, as the Swedish respondent "have come to understand when 'yes' simply means 'no'" (not yet connecting it to face, though). It may be added that the respondent has had over ten years of professional relationships with Chinese people living in China.

The *politeness theory* developed by the British scholars Gillian Brown and Stephen Levinson is based on Goffman's face theory, and their core argument is that an assessment is being made of how face-threatening the speech act is – to the speaker as well as to the one being spoken to – and that the linguistic form is chosen based on that assessment (e.g. to say "are you stupid or something?" to a

sibling or to a an employer that you barely know has a very different degree of face-threat).<sup>75</sup> The above are referred to as *politeness strategies*.

Brown and Levinson distinguishes two kinds of politeness strategies: *positive* and *negative*. In the former case there is a positive starting point; it is assumed that we have a lot in common with the interlocutor, our reasoning is implied, since we assume that the interlocutor share our world of experience and therefore understand what we mean. In the latter case there is a negative starting point in which distance and independence are emphasized. From a Chinese perspective, as suggested in some of the material, parts of the politeness theory is not viable to Chinese conditions. It is suggested by Chē Yúnfāng 车云芳 and Zhèng Juān 郑娟 that

Xīfāng wénhuà zhōng de xiāojí miànzi zài Zhōngguó wénhuà zhōng shì bù cúnzài de [...] 西方文化中的消极面子在中国文化中是不存在的 [Western culture's negative face does not exist in the Chinese culture].<sup>76</sup>

This statement is further argued by Zhāng Yàngē 张彦鸽:

Xīfāng “miànzi” wénhuà yǐ xiāojí miànzi wéi zhǔ, Zhōngguó “miànzi” wénhuà yǐ jījī miànzi wéi zhǔ, Xīfāng wénhuà zhōng de xiāojí miànzi zài Zhōngguó wénhuà zhōng shì bù cúnzài de, Zhōngguó “miànzi” wénhuà zhōng suǒ bāohán de dàodé yīnsù zài Xīfāng wénhuà zhōng yěshì méiyǒu de, wǒmen yīng liǎojiě zhè zhǒng chāyì, yǐbiàn néng shùnlì dì jìnxíng kuà wénhuà jiāojiè. 西方“面子”文化以消极面子为主, 中国“面子”文化以积极面子为主, 西方文化中的消极面子在中国文化中是不存在的, 中国“面子”文化中所包含的道德因素在西方文化中也是没有的, 我们应了解这种差异, 以便能顺利地进行跨文化交际. [The negative face in the Western culture does not exist in the Chinese culture, while the moral factor contained in the Chinese "face" culture does not exist in the Western culture. We should understand these differences so as to successfully carry on intercultural communication].<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: some universals in language usage* ([Rev. ed.] with corr., new introd. and new bibliogr. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> Chē Yúnfāng and Zhèng Juān, 149.

<sup>77</sup> Zhāng Yàngē, 92.

What Zhāng Yàngē 张彦鹤 is accentuating is the fact that there is no negative starting point in which distance and independence are emphasized in the Chinese culture. This is well in line with the findings discussed earlier in this paper regarding communication practices as seen from a Chinese perspective.

## 4 Discussion: Some Concluding Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Communication

The perspectives on cross-cultural communication introduced in this paper clearly show that the differences between Chinese people and Westerners regarding communication practices are considered significant also from a Chinese perspective; the reasons at large being argued as cultural and societal.

The findings show that the concept of *anattā* (non-self) and being part of extended families and in-groups leads to a reluctance to talk and think in terms of “I” among Chinese, whereas Europeans and Americans are fostered and trained to talk and think in terms of “I”. This could lead to pragmatic failures when, for example, being introduced to each other, when praising, greeting, and similar occasions.

Furthermore, the findings also show that direct communication style is often regarded as confrontational and emotionless from a Chinese perspective. Silence is regarded as awkward/embarrassing in low-context cultures such as Western European and American cultures and members of low-context cultures have strategies to make conversation in order to avoid silence.

Last but not least, the findings show that the European and American concept of face is at large not applicable in a Chinese environment. The main reason being that the concept of face within Western cultures is oriented towards the individual whereas the Chinese concept of face is oriented towards the group.

The above mentioned examples are regarded as common and can lead to misunderstandings and ineffectiveness when negotiating.

It would be of interest for further research in the field of sociolinguistics and cross-cultural communication to embark on research discussing the Fuzzy language theory as developed by Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平, especially as the theory is used among Chinese scholars to create conditions for a better exchange of intercultural encounters between Chinese people and Westerners, predominantly in the private and public sector. The Fuzzy language theory as developed by Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平 is not used to any great extent by European and American scholars, one of the reasons probably being that the main work of Wǔ Tiěpíng 伍铁平, *Móhú Yǔyán Xué* 模糊语言学 (Fuzzy Linguistics) has not yet been translated into English. The theory could be used as an interface regarding communication practices.

Some of the potential cultural clashes and common pragmatic failures in communication practices can efficiently be avoided by an enhancement in cultural understanding. For example, Europeans and Americans are normally straightforward and act independently when negotiating. This is often regarded as rude and impolite in the Chinese culture. Ineffectiveness and misunderstandings based on this kind of cultural differences are rather seen as a symptom of reluctance to adapt to circumstances than high demands on cross-cultural adaptation being put forward.

Learning to master aspects of the Chinese concept of face and the meanings embedded in indirect communication style requires a more thorough understanding and adaptation to sociocultural factors. The knowledge of how to bridge the gap – as shown in the set of examples of common pragmatic failures discussed in this paper – can be improved by means of workshops, seminars, and similar activities which could be implemented in work contexts. Whereas, adaptation to sociocultural factors would in most cases require personal experience and situated learning.

The four dimensions used as analytical tools in this paper – high- and low-context, collectivism and individualism, direct and indirect communication style

and face – has shown to provide applicable explanations and/or reasons for the significant differences in communication practices as seen in the material.

The impact of different ways of thinking regarding sociocultural practices inevitably affects communication practices and must be taken into consideration in the context of professional relationships.

# Appendices

Attached are two different questionnaires and the questions for the interviews.

## **Appendix 1: Questionnaire, Chinese Respondents**

### **Questionnaire A**

In today's bilateral society, when it is increasingly common to work with people from, and to work within, different cultures, it is particularly important to examine how cross-cultural communication affects the prospects of mutual understanding in and between groups from different cultures. This questionnaire is designed to investigate various aspects of communication in a Sino-Swedish context. All answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The study is conducted by Nicklas Junker, Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies, as a part of a Bachelor's Paper.

1. What do you perceive as the greatest difference in communication style regarding China and the West?
2. What do you find most easily when communicating with Western people?
3. What do you perceive as the most difficult when communicating with Western people?
4. How would you describe the differences (if any) concerning face – 面子 – between China and the West?
5. What do you perceive as the biggest difference (if any) between China and the West in terms of talking to people in positions of responsibility?
6. Who do you think makes the biggest adjustment in terms of intercultural communication? Why?

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire, Swedish Respondents

### Questionnaire B

In today's bilateral society, when it is increasingly common to work with people from, and to work within, different cultures, it is particularly important to examine how cross-cultural communication affects the prospects of mutual understanding in and between groups from different cultures. This questionnaire is designed to investigate various aspects of communication in a Sino-Swedish context. All answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The study is conducted by Nicklas Junker, Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies, as a part of a Bachelor's Paper.

1. What do you perceive as the greatest difference in communication style regarding China and the West?
2. What do you find most easily when communicating with Chinese people?
3. What do you perceive as the most difficult when communicating with Chinese people?
4. How would you describe the differences (if any) concerning face – 面子 – between China and the West?
5. What do you perceive as the biggest difference (if any) between China and the West in terms of talking to people in positions of responsibility?
6. Who do you think makes the biggest adjustment in terms of intercultural communication? Why?

## Appendix 3: Interview Questions, Professional Relationships

### Interview Questions

1. What do you find most easily when communicating with Chinese/Western entrepreneurs?
2. What do you perceive as the most difficult when communicating with Chinese/Western entrepreneurs?
3. What do you perceive as the greatest difference when negotiating?
4. How would you describe the differences (if any) concerning face – 面子 – between China and the West?
5. What do you perceive as the biggest difference (if any) between China and the West in terms of talking to people in positions of responsibility?
6. Who do you think makes the biggest adjustment in terms of intercultural communication?

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Stockholm University  
SE-106 91 Stockholm  
Phone: 08 – 16 20 00  
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