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A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Honorifics in Modern Chinese and American English

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Abstract

This paper draws a cross-cultural comparison of the honorifics in modern Chinese and American English. It first discusses how they are used in different socio-cultural situations, and then explores the cultural sources of the differences between them. It is found that communication is essentially a social process influenced by the orientations of interpersonal relationships, which in turn are underpinned by philosophical foundations and value orientations.

Key words: Honorifics; Cultural values; Interpersonal relationship

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the propensity of the increasing globalization poses unique challenges to the issue of how people from diverse cultural backgrounds attempt to effectively communicate on a daily basis. Cross-cultural communication has become more and more important.

The need for effective communication in conjunction with cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding thus is intensified. As one of the elements that affect cross-cultural communication effectiveness, honorifics act as a window through which we can view what is valued in a particular culture.

1. HONORIFICS

Honorific is an expression or title that is used to show respect for the person you are speaking to (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2008, p.943). Honorifics are a particular group in both modern Chinese and American English, which are employed by people in their daily communication for the purpose of establishing and maintaining various interpersonal relationships.

1.1 Chinese Honorifics

According to its functions, Chinese honorifics can be mainly divided into two classes: appellative honorifics and expressive honorifics.

1.1.1 Appellative Honorifics

Appellative honorifics are those addressed to persons. According to the part of speech, they can be divided into pronoun appellative honorifics and noun appellative honorifics.

1.1.1.1 Pronoun Appellative Honorifics

“Nin” (您) is the most commonly used honorific for the singular form of the second person pronoun “ni”(你) in Standard Chinese. It is used when speaking to a superior, such as children to parents, students to teachers, and employees to employers.

“Nin er wei” (您二位), “zhu wei” (诸位) and “ge wei” (各位) are the honorifics for the plural form of the second person pronoun “ni men” (你们).

1.1.1.2 Noun Appellative Honorifics

The noun appellative honorifics include general appellative honorifics, kinship appellative honorifics, sub-

kinship appellative honorifics, rank appellative honorifics, aged appellative honorifics, professional appellative honorifics, and diplomatic appellative honorifics.

(a) Ggeneral appellative honorifics

Ggeneral appellative honorifics are addressed to persons generally. “Tong zhi” (同志), applies to not only members of the Communist Party but also members of labor unions and certain other organizations. “Shi fu” (师傅) is widely used as a general form of address for people in various occupations, for both men and women. “Lao shi” (老师) which used to be only directed towards teachers is being applied to more and more people of other professions and become more fashionable. Nowadays “Xian sheng” (先生) already becomes the most general title for men in modern society. “Xiao jie” (小姐) is for unmarried women, “tai tai” (太太) for married women, “nui shi” (女士) for both married and unmarried women. “Fu ren” (夫人) is used somewhat like ‘madam’ in English to express “respect” particularly to foreign ladies or to imply glamour.

(b) Kinship appellative honorifics

The kinship appellative honorifics refer to those which express “respect” to the addressee’s relatives. The commonest kinship terms can be divided into four groups: those of one’s father’s family, one’s mother’s family, one’s husband’s family and one’s wife’s family. These kinship appellative honorifics often carry a honorific morpheme such as “zun” (尊), “xian” (贤), and “ling” (令) which mean “your” in English.

“Zun” (尊) is often used when referring to the addressee’s directly-related members of his family who rank as his senior in the clan or the same generation as him and the non-directly-related members of his family who are the same generation as him but much older than him. “Zun chun xuan” (尊椿萱), “zun da ren” (尊大人), and “zun fu mu” (尊父母) are used to refer to the addressee’s parents; “zun ci” (尊慈), “zun xuan” (尊萱), and “zun tang” (尊堂) for the addressee’s mother; “zun fu” (尊甫), “zun fu” (尊府), “zun gong” (尊公), “zun jun” (尊君), and “zun weng” (尊翁) for the addressee’s father; “zun fu” (尊夫) for the addressee’s husband; “zun ge” (尊阁), and “zun juan” (尊眷) for the addressee’s wife; “zun sao” (尊嫂) for the wife of the addressee’s elder brother; “zun xiong” (尊兄) for the addressee’s brother; “zun yue” (尊岳) for the father of the addressee’s wife; and “zun zu” (尊祖) for the addressee’s grandfather.

“Xian” (贤) is often used when addressing the hearer’s relatives who rank as his junior in the clan or the same generation. Occasionally “xian” (贤) is addressed to the hearer. “xian cong” (贤从) is for the hearer’s cousin; “xian zun” (贤尊) for the hearer’s father; “xian lang” (贤郎) or “xian si” (贤嗣) for the hearer’s son; “xian niu” (贤女) for the hearer’s daughter; “xian shu” (贤叔) for the hearer’s uncle; “xian tan” (贤坦) for the hearer’s son-in-law; and “xian nei zhu” (贤内助) for the addressee’s wife.

For referring to a stranger’s relatives, the most common honorific prefix is “ling” (令). It is used to address the members of the addressee’s relatives or family members no matter whether they are the same generation or not. “ling zun” (令奠) is for the addressee’s father; “ling tang” (令堂) for the addressee’s mother; “ling ai” (令爱), “ling qian jin” (令千斤), “ling xiao jie” (令小姐) or “ling yuan” (令媛) for the addressee’s daughter; “ling gong zi” (令公子), “ling lang” (令郎), or “ling si” (令嗣) for the addressee’s son.

Chinese has evolved a much more complex system of kinship appellative honorifics to designate specific relationships than American English has. The Chinese family members address each other by their family relationships and people expect to be addressed according to family relationships and not by a name. The age difference of the same generation and the difference between paternal and maternal relationship are reflected in kinship address terms in Chinese but not in American English. The “prefixes” such as “zun” (尊), “xian” (贤), “ling” (令) are used to denote “*honorable, esteemed, respectful*”. However, no such prefixes or equivalents are used in American English. In translating the above terms from Chinese to English, it would probably be better to use the simple terms without any modifier. “Your respectful father” sounds very stiff and unnatural in American English.

During the last few decades, with the growing emphasis on equality and the gradual de-emphasis on highly formal and mainly ceremonial trappings in everyday life, many of the formal kinship appellative honorifics have gradually passed out of use. Some are still heard, but are mainly among older, more educated people on very formal occasions.

(c) Sub-kinship appellative honorifics

In China, where blood relationship is of great importance, people tend to address non-relatives with terms of family relationships. They are called sub-kinship appellative honorifics. From an early age Chinese children are taught by their parents to address adults outside their family with terms such as “ye ye” (爷爷), “nai nai” (奶奶), “da ye” (大爷), “da shu” (大叔), “da ma” (大妈), “da shen” (大婶), “shu shu” (叔叔), and “a yi” (阿姨). This is quite common in China while not in America.

(d) Rank appellative honorifics

Official ranks are often used to address persons who are in certain social status. “Shu ji” (书记), “zhu xi” (主席), “zong li” (总理), “bu zhang” (部长), “ting zhang” (厅长), “si zhang” (司长), “ju zhang” (局长), “shi zhang” (市长), “chu zhang” (处长), “ke zhang” (科长), “xiao zhang” (校长), “zhu ren” (主任), “zong jing li” (总经理), and “dong shi zhang” (董事长) etc. Military titles are also used as honorifics, such as “si ling” (司令), “jun zhang” (军长), “tuan zhang” (团长), “lu zhang” (旅长), “lian zhang” (连长), and “pai zhang” (排长) etc. are all rank appellative honorifics.

When addressing one's superiors, Chinese have traditionally used language that is more respectful than that used for people of "lower status". To use the same language could be interpreted as disrespectful. This matter of honorifics is especially troublesome for Americans trying to communicate in Chinese. The reason is that American English has very few such terms, and of these, even fewer are commonly used in present times. In America, speaking or writing to one's superiors might call for a more respectful tone, but not for any special expressions. You is you, me is me, no matter what the other person's rank or position is. For Chinese, on the other hand, even when communicating with Americans, the idea of using more or less the same language, direct and unadorned, for people of importance is hard to accept and even harder to abide by. The natural tendency of Chinese is to use honorific language.

(e) Aged appellative honorifics

In Chinese, "lao" (老) is widely used in everyday conversation to form direct and indirect terms of address for the sake of respect.

"Lao _" (老_), "_ lao" (_老), "_ weng" (_翁), "_ gong" (_公), "yuan lao" (元老), "nin lao" (您老), "Lao ren jia" (老人家), "lao xian sheng" (老先生), "lao shou zhang" (老首长), "lao jiao shou" (老教授), "lao zhong yi" (老中医), "lao gong cheng shi" (老工程师), "lao ke xue jia" (老科学家), "lao jiao shi" (老教师), "lao da ge" (老大哥), "lao da ye" (老大爷), "lao da ma" (老大妈) etc are often used to address people who are either old in age or senior in experience, which is not the case in American English.

(f) Professional appellative honorifics

Professional titles are used more widely and more frequently in Chinese than in American English. Chinese has evolved a set of honorific terms of direct address for persons of various professions. The frequent form of address in Chinese is the use of the surname with the person's profession, for example, "li jiao shou" (李教授), "wang gao gong" (王高工), "zhao zong bian" (赵总编), "sun gong" (孙工), "zhou jiao lian" (周教练), and "ma zhi dao" (马指导) etc.. The profession can also be used on its own, such as "lao shi" (老师), "yi sheng" (医生). In English, this can sometimes be done, but usually not. One of the most frequent errors of this kind is in the use of the word 'teacher'. Chinese textbooks train pupils from an early age to use English phrases like "Good Morning, teacher". In fact, this is unacceptable English, and the usual forms of address for teachers are as follows:

Primary & Secondary Schools: Title (Mr, Mrs, Miss)
+Surname
or
Sir or Miss
University or College: Title (Dr, Prof.) + Surname
or
Given Name

(g) Diplomatic appellative honorifics

In dealing with foreign affairs Chinese always follow their way of addressing, such as "zong tong xian sheng" (总统先生), "ge xia" (阁下), "bi xia" (陛下), "da shi ge xia" (大使阁下), "xian sheng" (先生), "xiao jie" (小姐), "fu ren" (夫人), and "nui shi" (女士) etc..

1.1.2 Expressive Honorifics

Expressive honorifics cover a wider range than appellative honorifics. They include all the other honorifics except appellative honorifics. From the angle of language unit, appellative honorifics only relate to some honorific morphemes, honorific words, and occasionally honorific phrases such as "nin lao ren jia" (您老人家) and "lao xian sheng nin" (老先生您) etc. while expressive honorifics include some honorific sentences besides honorific morphemes, honorific words and honorific phrases.

1.1.2.1 Expressive Honorific Morphemes

Different from the appellative honorific morphemes which are used to modify persons, expressive honorific morphemes are used to modify things or actions. Among the three appellative honorific morphemes mentioned above only "zun" (尊) can be used as an expressive honorific morpheme to modify things, such as "zun xing" (尊姓) and "zun fu" (尊府) etc.. There are some other expressive honorific morphemes used to modify things: "gui" (贵), such as "gui guo" (贵国) and "gui bao" (贵报) etc.; "gao" (高), such as "gao jian" (高见) and "gao men" (高门) etc..

Expressive honorific morphemes used to modify actions are mainly the following: "feng" (奉), such as "feng quan" (奉劝) and "feng gao" (奉告) etc.; "bai" (拜), such as "bai tuo" (拜托) and "bai du" (拜读) etc.; "chui" (垂), such as "chui xun" (垂询) and "chui wen" (垂问) etc.; "guang" (光), such as "guang lin" (光临) and "guang gu" (光顾) etc..

1.1.2.2 Expressive Honorific Words

Some expressive honorific words are with honorific morphemes, such as "yang da" (仰答) and "yang hou" (仰候); "ci huan" (赐还) and "ci jia" (赐驾); "fu ci" (俯赐) and "fu cong" (俯从); "qing jiao" (请教) and "qing wen" (请问); "jing qing" (敬请) and "jing zhu" (敬祝); "jin fu" (谨复) and "jin shang" (谨上); "xing lin" (幸临) and "xing jiao" (幸教) etc..

There are also some expressive honorific words that are without honorific morphemes, such as "tu ya" (涂鸦), "kuan yi" (宽衣), "yong shan" (用膳), "dou dan" (斗胆), "ming jiao" (明教), "hai han" (海涵), "guo jiang" (过奖), "guo yu" (过誉), and "ding li" (鼎力) etc..

1.1.2.3 Expressive Honorific Phrases

Expressive honorific phrases are mainly the following: "chong lun hong yi" (崇论宏议), "zun xing da ming" (尊姓大名), "peng bi sheng hui" (蓬荜生辉), "jia bin hui lin" (嘉宾惠临), "jing bei fei zhuo" (敬被菲酌), "bai du da zuo" (拜读大作), "yang tun yu yan" (仰吞玉言), "huan ying guang lin" (欢迎光临) etc..

1.1.2.4 Expressive Honorific Sentences

Some expressive honorific sentences are as follows: “nin you he gao jian?” (您有何高见?); “wo men xi wang dao gui chu fang wen” (我们希望到贵处访问); “qing ti bao gui yi jian” (请提宝贵意见) etc..

1.2 American English Honorifics

How do parents and children, teachers and students, bosses and subordinates, siblings, neighbors, colleagues in U.S. tend to address each other? In most cases, speakers of American English address each other by first name, title (or rank) and last name or kin term. Generally speaking, American English honorifics can also be classified as appellative honorifics and expressive honorifics.

1.2.1 Appellative Honorifics

Appellative honorifics are of two classes: pronoun appellative honorifics and noun appellative honorifics.

1.2.1.1 Pronoun Appellative Honorifics

The choice of the personal pronouns may also indicate an individual's social position with respect to others. Brown and Gilman (1960) studied the use of the pronoun “you” in many European cultures. This pronoun in most languages has a formal form (“vous” in French, “Sie” in German, “usted” in Spanish) and a familiar form (“tu”, “du” and “tu” in these three languages). This was also the case in English in the past (“you” and “thou”). English once had the thou/you distinction. They used to have “you” for distance, “thou” for closeness. The non-reciprocal use of “you” commonly signaled a difference in power; the formal form was used in the upward direction and the familiar form was used in the downward communication. These days, the formal form of “you” tends to be used to signal a formal relationship (for example, doctor-patient, lawyer-client or work colleagues) while the familiar form signals more intimate relationships (family members or close friends).

1.2.1.2 Noun Appellative Honorifics

(a) General appellative honorifics

“Sir” is originally a title used before the name of Knight or Baronet (i.e. Sir Peter Brown or Sir Peter). It may be formally used at the beginning of a formal letter, such as “Sir, Dear Sir(s) or My Dear Sir”. Now “Sir” is addressed to men generally. It is often used alone when the junior is speaking to the senior, the younger to the older, students to teachers, soldiers to military officers, common men to policemen, shop-assistants to customers etc. For example, “Your ticket, please, Sir?” (at railway station); “Will you have anything to drink, Sir?” (at a restaurant); “Excuse me, Sir, can you direct me to Bond Street?” (in a street). In speaking to men whose surname you do not know you should address them “Sir”.

“Madam” is the English form of the French word “Madame.” “Dear Madam” is used for the salutation of a business letter to a woman, as “Sir” is used to a man. It is often used alone as a honorific to a woman by shop-assistants, waiters and servants etc., for instance,

“Do you want a porter, Madam?” and “Can I help you, Madam?” It is often followed by some professional titles or surname, i.e. “Madam Smith”, “Madam President”, “Madam Chairman”, “Madam Ambassador”, and “Madam Chairperson”. In speaking to women whose surname you do not know you should address them “Madam”.

“Lady” is addressed to a woman of good manners and refined behavior. It corresponds to gentleman i.e., “Lady Smith”. It can be used alone, i.e. “Good morning, ladies!” or “You dropped your handkerchief, lady!” “Lady” can also be followed by professional titles, such as “Lady President”.

“Mr + LN” (lastname) is a general term to man, i.e. “Mr. Smith” or “Mr. John Smith”. One can also say “Mr + official (or military) titles”, such as “Mr Senator”, “Mr Ambassador”, “Mr President”, “Mr Chairman”, “Mr Manager”, “Mr Major”, “Mr Colonel”, and “Mr Captain” etc.

“Mrs +LN” is a general term for a married woman, i.e. “Mrs Jones” or “Mrs Mary Jones”.

It is vulgar to use “Mr” or “Mrs” alone. When they are so used by an uneducated person, they may be written, as in “Here you are, mister!” or “Look out, missus!”

“Miss + LN” is addressed to an unmarried girl or woman i.e. “Miss Smith”.

“Ms +LN” is addressed to single or married women and it is a useful form of address if you don't know whether to employ “Mrs” or “Miss”.

(b) Kinship appellative honorifics

There are much fewer kinship appellative honorifics in American English than in Chinese. The words that indicate family relationship were formerly more frequently used as terms of address than they are today.

“Father” continues to be much used, either in that form or as: Da, Dad, Dada, Daddy, Pa, Pap, Papa, Pop, Poppa, and Pops. The term used by a young child, such as “Dddy”, is likely to be changed as the child grows older to “Dad” or “Father”.

“Mother” also has many colloquial forms that are well used: Ma, Mam, Mamma, Mammy, Maw, Mom, Momma, Mum, Mumma, and Mummy.

Grandparents are usually acknowledged as such when their grandchildren address them as “Grandpa, Granddad, Grandma, Granny” etc. Fathers, especially, may use “Son” or “Sonny” to address a son, but “Daughter” is now rarely used by either parent. Twin children may collectively be addressed as “Twins”. Parents are also likely to address their offspring collectively as “children, tribe, troops” etc. Individual children will usually be addressed by their first names, nicknames or by endearments.

Grandparents normally use first names to address grandchildren, not terms like “grandson, grand-daughter”.

Aunts and uncles are also acknowledged by those terms, which are used alone or followed by the first name of the person concerned. In former times “aunts”

or “uncles” followed by a last name was also possible, and those so addressed would have answered with “nephew” and “niece”. These terms are now never heard as vocatives, other than in period drama.

Some brothers and sisters may remind themselves of their relationship by using those words in direct address. They are more likely, especially at working-class level, to abbreviate them to “bruv” and “sis”. Few people today would address a cousin by that term, though it was once very common. Cousins, however, and indeed other family members, may be recognized in some regions by the formula “our + first name”.

Relationships brought about by marriage can create problem areas in vocative usage. Husbands and wives are now rarely “husband” and “wife” in direct address, as they once were, and the middle-class fashion that once prevailed of using “Mr (Mrs) + LN” to one another would now only be resuscitated as a joke. First names and endearments are normal, but it is a matter of individual choice.

That choice can become embarrassing when husbands and wives have to address each other’s parents, and when children are confronted with stepparents. “Father-in-law”, “mother-in-law”, “step-father”, and “step-mother” may accurately describe the relationships, but those terms are seldom, if ever, used vocatively.

(c) Sub-kinship appellative honorifics

While it is true that words indicating family relationship are less used than in previous centuries to the relations concerned, some of the kinship terms continue to be well used in other ways. Non-relatives may also be addressed with terms of relationships. The terms remain basically family terms, but their meanings have been considerably extended.

“Sister”, for example, may be used in a friendly way to a woman who is passing a workman in the street.

“Brother” may be used to a trade union colleague.

“Brother Joseph” or “Sister Mary” would commonly be understood as referring to persons belonging to a Catholic group or some religious or professional society.

“Boy” is usually addressed to service personnel: busboy, bellboy, and messenger boy.

“Auntie” or “Uncle” is occasionally addressed to parents’ good friends, such as “Auntie Mary”, and “Uncle Johnson

“Uncle Sam” is the nickname for American government.

(d) Rank appellative honorifics

Title plus first name or full name is not normally used in American English conversations, so one seldom hears Americans addressing others as “Bureau Director Smith”, “Manager Jackson”, and “Principal Morris”. In English, only a few rank appellative honorifics would be used.

In America, rank appellative honorifics can be divided into three classes: government official ranks such as “President Roosevelt”, “Governor Smith”, “Mayor

Johnson”, “Congressman Jackson”, “Senator Fulbright”; military ranks such as “General Patten”, “Captain John”, “Colonel Quail”, “Admiral Benjamin” and religious ranks such as “Bishop Gray”, and “Father White” etc..

(e) Aged appellative honorifics

For Americans, “old” means something to be thrown away, useless or worthless, so the word “old” is avoided mentioning. They would not be particularly pleased to have their old age stressed. They would like to use “senior citizens”, “elderly people”, “aged”, “veteran”, and “advanced in age” to refer to the old. Besides. It is common to hear a child calling a much older person — Joe, Ben, May, Helen, etc.. This may even include the child’s parents or grandparents. This, of course, is quite counter to Chinese custom. One can imagine the reactions of adults if a child were to call a grandparent by his or her first name. A quick reprimand and possibly even a spanking for the child would be sure to follow.

(f) Professional appellative honorifics

In American English, certain professions can be used as titles, such as Professor, Doctor, Judge and Nurse. “Doctor_” is common for those who have qualified in the medical profession and the same with professor. One may say “Dr. Davis” (戴维斯医生), “Dr. King” (金博士), or “Professor Brown”. These ones can be used either singly or with the person’s surname. In America, people with academic ranks would like to be addressed “Dr. _” or “Professor _” rather than “Mr _”. “Judge _” is for those authorized to try cases in law courts. Other professional appellative honorifics are “waiter”, “boy”, “conductor”, and “usher”.

(g) First naming

First name is used more widely in America than in China. In America, the name alone, whether it is for man or woman, would ordinarily be enough. Americans tend to use just the first name and leave out the term of relationship.

In general, the first-name address form is used reciprocally by speakers of American English when two individuals are of similar age and social status. The reciprocal title-and-last-name pattern is characteristic only of formal exchanges. The nonreciprocal pattern—when someone addresses another person by first name but is addressed in return by title and last name—is used in exchanges between individuals who differ significantly either in age or social and occupational status. But departures from these general rules are commonly found in individual practice as well as regionally. For example, either reciprocity or non-reciprocity in address forms may be heard between a cleaning woman and her woman employer. In fact, there is an increasing tendency among American young people to use their first name in all but the most formal situations.

In recent years, the trend of many American people has been to address others by using the first name—Tom, Michael, Linda, Jane, etc.—rather than calling the person

“Mr Summers, Mrs Howard or Miss Jones”. This is especially common among Americans, even when people meet for the first time. This applies not only to people of roughly the same age, but also of different ages. People of different social status do the same. It is used to address parents and superiors in English but not in Chinese. The percentage of the use of first names to children, wife or husband, and inferiors is also higher in American English than in Chinese. For example, many college students call their professors by their first names. The professors do not regard this as a sign of disrespect or familiarity, but rather, as an indication that the professor is considered affable and has a sense of equality.

(h) No naming

In American English, forms of address are often omitted, especially among close friends or relatives (as in “Quit nagging me, will you?”) or when addressing a stranger (as when saying to an airline passenger in the adjacent seat, “Would you mind if I had a look at that magazine when you are finished with it?”)

1.2.2 Expressive Honorifics

In American English, there are no expressive honorific morphemes, no expressive honorific words and honorific phrases. But there are some expressive honorific sentences formed by some modal auxiliary verbs (“will”, “would”, “can”, “could”, “may”, “might”, “should”), such as “Could you tell me your name?”, “Would you please close the door?”, “Would you mind if I use your pen?”, “Pass me the ball, will you?” “May I come in?” and “Might I make a suggestion?” etc..

In terms of a means-and-end analysis, honorifics in modern Chinese and American English are readily understood as a means. We know only too well that in being respectful we have an end to achieve—to show our good feelings, our friendliness, and our intention to maintain harmonious relationships with others. To maintain the kind of smooth, harmonious interpersonal relationships called for by any human community, honorifics serve as a ready means.

Although honorifics in modern Chinese and American English are similar in function, they differ considerably in lexical system. Such differences should be traced to the origin of the notion of the specific values in different cultures.

2. CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS UNDERLYING THE HONORIFICS IN MODERN CHINESE AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

2.1 Ren (仁) and Li (礼) vs. Humanism

Interpersonal relationship in the Chinese context is underpinned by Confucianism, especially Ren (仁) and Li (礼). Ren (仁) and Li (礼), which can hardly be

appropriately translated into English, have become the collective unconsciousness for the Chinese programming their social behavior including speech acts such as compliments, addressing, etc. as well as interactional rules, such as conversational principles, politeness principles, face work, etc..

Ren (仁) means, on the one hand, the ideal manhood, defining all the fine qualities that make up an ideal man, on the other hand, the ideal reciprocal relationship that should pertain between people. Men should be warm and benevolent to others or love and respect them. Ren (仁) advocates reciprocity. However, unlike Western humanism, the love and reciprocity Ren (仁) advocates has never been symmetrical in the Chinese context. It is based on the kinship relationships in the patriarchal Chinese society or rather it is a symbol of patriarch.

Li (礼) is the way to exercise benevolence. It serves as a norm or a means for people to achieve ideal manhood or good relationships. It specifies Five Constant Relationships that constitute the warp and woof of social life. The relationships are those between ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, elder sibling and junior sibling, elder friend and junior friend. These relationships are asymmetrical. Rulers should be benevolent, subjects loyal; parents be loving, children reverential; elder siblings gentle, younger siblings respectful; husbands good, wives obedient. Three of these five relationships pertain within the family while two are the extensions of family relationships, which are indicative of the importance of family institution.

Ren (仁) and Li (礼) in fact are a system of moral codes in the Chinese context predisposing a society in which the relationship is complementary, asymmetrical, and reciprocally obligatory. The relationships are asymmetrical in that behavior that is appropriate to one party in each pair of the five relationships is not identical with what is appropriate for the other party. It is just this asymmetry that predisposes role differentiation and details its specifics.

Unlike Chinese culture, Ren and Li find no place in the American philosophy and religion. In America, God and religion are sacred. “God helps those who help themselves”, so what is highly valued by Americans is individualism and humanism, as a result, equal or horizontal relationship is highly valued. And therefore what is advocated is not the obligations and responsibilities ascribed to each member of the society according to his or her social position but humanitarianism and human rights. The love and benevolence advocated by humanitarianism is not selective or asymmetrical but symmetrical in nature. The relationships are symmetrical in that behavior that is appropriate for one person in each pair is identical with what is appropriate for the other person. This symmetry presupposes role equality rather than differentiation, as is the case in China.

2.2 Collectivism vs. Individualism

Hofstede (1991, p.51) defines individualism and collectivism as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

In more collectivist Chinese cultures, the individual is given security by the group, whether it is the security of employment in a life-long job or the guarantee of help and protection of the family. Just as in individualist cultures, the obligations of individuals to the group, and of the group to them, are enshrined in the legal system and other social institutions, as well as in individual interaction. Chinese people often find it hard to deal with the open conflict, competitiveness, and aggressiveness of Americans, because they have a much stronger value of maintaining harmony and good relations in the group.

Americans have been trained since very early in their lives to consider themselves as separate individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life and their own destinies. While growing up the American is surrounded, maybe even bombarded, by the propaganda of self-fulfillment and self-identity. They, then, consider the ideal person to be an individualistic, self-reliant, self-made, independent person. Self-improvement and self-help-doing my own thing seem at the core of American ideology. But these are quite unfamiliar ideas to the Chinese, who are accustomed to individual subservience to the family and the community.

2.3 Interdependent Self vs. Independent Self

At the individual level, individualism and collectivism tend to produce different kinds of self-construal: Independent self-construal and Interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People from individualist cultures are likely to have independent self-concepts, reflecting the culture in their sense of separateness from others. Those from more collectivist cultures, on the other hand, are likely to reflect their cultures in an interdependent self-concept, in which their sense of self is tied up with their relations to their group (family, work group, class at school).

Chinese tend to have interdependent self or "we" orientation. In this light, dependence or interdependence accompanied by obligations, responsibilities or commitment are highly valued in China. For them, groups comes first, so that the emphasis is only on loyalty, promoting harmony, and improving the lot of the greatest number of people.

"Interdependent construal of self" or "Connected self" is almost a negative concept in America. Americans lay

importance on "I" rather than on "we". Individual identity, individual rights, individual needs are emphasized over "we" identity and the interest of the group or in-groups, and obligations and commitment. As some scholars have pointed out, there is only one principle in America that regulates interpersonal relationship and that is individualism. The core building block of individualism is the collective unconscious of "Independent self" or "autonomous self".

2.4 Harmonious vs. Instrumental (Relationship)

As a result of the strong influence of relationship orientation and the achievement of harmony as the ultimate goal in the interaction, the maintenance of ever-lasting relationship based upon good feelings or expressive relationship between self and others has become common practice among the Chinese people. For Chinese, maintaining relationships is an integral part of communication because the Chinese self is defined by relations with others, and the self would be incomplete if it were separated from others. The self can attain its completeness only through integration with others and its surroundings. The ultimate goal of communication in Chinese culture is to preserve harmony. Chinese are inspired ideally to live in harmony with family members, to be on good terms with neighbors, to achieve unity with the surrounding environment, and to make peace with other nations. Seeking harmony thus becomes a primary task in the self's relational development and interpersonal communication. The appropriateness of any communication event thereby is influenced by the notion of harmony.

Influenced by individualism and equality orientation in the Western culture, relationship, loyalty, and harmony are perceived as less important and the practice of the maxim of indebtedness is seldom made. For Americans, instrumental interaction is highly valued and fair play in social interactions and transactions is regarded as the standard between the strong and the weak, the aged and the young, etc. Instrumental relationship and fair play are just as prescriptive of the Western behavior as the norms of the maintenance of good feelings between people in the Chinese culture.

The instrumental orientation and the concept of fair play in America and the hierarchical or asymmetrical relationship orientation in China are so extremely different that the approach of the young, the inferior, the low social positioned, etc. towards the old, the superior, the high social positioned in the American context may incur negative reactions among the Chinese people. The style of directness and confrontation, fair play, and equality may quite likely make the Chinese annoyed.

2.5 Status Identity vs. Equality

Ever since the ancient time China has long had an operating system of so-called status identity which

defines the specifics of the status for each member in the society and accordingly the obligations and commitment each member must fulfill. Every member's appropriate behavior (including what a person says) is thus specifically detailed according to what family and social status an individual has. If everybody knows his or her place, every member behaves as his or her status identity dictates, social order or harmony is achieved. If one violates this norm, one says something inappropriate, for example, then one may run the risk of losing face and dignity, or even worse, one is breaking the social order. This can partly help explain why the Chinese are so much concerned about face and face work and why we say that speech behavior is markings of social identity and social status, especially in China. This can also help explain why in China what counts in communication is not what you say but who you are and how you say what you intend to say.

In contrast to the system of status identity in the Chinese society, equality and freedom have long replaced the so-called system of status identity. *Independence Declaration* officially guarantees the rights of equality, freedom, etc. for every member of the society. In America, relationships are symmetrical rather than that asymmetrical—even if they are bound with an institution or organization, the relationship is contractual. That is, the obligation and responsibility are contractual in nature. Or even though Americans get involved, they are also committed to equality and individualism—they can cut free from anybody they are involved and define their own self.

2.6 Power vs. Solidarity

Power and solidarity relationships are a universal phenomenon in all the societies. However, different societies generally have different attitude towards these two. People in one culture may be sensitive to power while people in a different culture may be sensitive to solidarity.

The Chinese society, traditionally speaking, is hierarchical in nature. If people in lower social positions are obedient to and respect those in higher positions and the humble respect the venerate, the younger respect the elder as Li (礼) advocates, the society will be in order. As a matter of fact, Li (礼) advocates nothing but vertical or hierarchical relationship and its essential function is to build social order upon this hierarchical relationship. It functions in the society as the law does in the Western society. Logically, in terms of interpersonal relationship, it has become an unwritten rule that power relationship should be valued in daily transactions. Power relationship is best demonstrated in the use of titles or honorifics when addressing occurs. Power in case of point here is associated with age, education, social class, sex, social positions and ranks and family relations, etc. today.

Solidarity is a sociolinguistic term not only referring to the equal and informal relationship, but also the desire for the setting up of equality, intimacy, common interest, sharing, etc.. Whatever it may possibly mean, its core notion is equality. The emphasis of solidarity over power on the Western side can best be demonstrated in the use of first names in everyday interaction. Nessa Wolfson (1989) observes that in modern America, first names are exchanged symmetrically between strangers and between people of asymmetrical age and status. It is now quite common to hear employees first naming their bosses, students their professors, and young people their seniors. Another striking change has been taking place in the frequencies with strangers introducing themselves by first name alone. Store clerks and waiters may introduce themselves by their first names and treat customers in a casual, friendly manner. The movement away from title and last name appears widely spread in the United States. Tone of voice, the order of speaking, choice of words—such is the means by which Americans acknowledge status differences among themselves. People of higher status are more likely to speak first, louder, and longer. They feel free to interrupt other speakers more than others feel free to interrupt them.

Chinese who are accustomed to more obvious displays of respect (such as using honorific titles) often overlook the ways in which Americans show respect for people of higher status. They think, incorrectly, that Americans are generally unaware of status differences and disrespectful of other people.

2.7 Extended Family vs. Nuclear Family

The extended family, which is common in China, includes grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and in-laws. In the United States, the nuclear family, which consists of the father, mother, and their unmarried children, is considered “the family.”

In China, where family is the basic unit of the social structure, family surname comes first and only thereafter comes the given name. The Chinese extended family is authority-centered. Generation difference in China was and still is a very important factor in determining the use of address forms. On account of this, elder members of a family such as grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, etc. can generally first name family members of the younger generation, yet the latter can not reciprocate.

The increasingly popular American practice of children calling their parents and grandparents by first names, would be quite unpleasantly surprising to most Chinese. A person's Chinese given name, which often consists of two words, is generally used only within the intimate circle of their friends or family, and it feels quite embarrassing when someone from outside of that group uses that name. For example, one word of the given name is only used between lovers or between husband and wife.

Age difference can also force an asymmetrical pattern on members of the same generation within a Chinese family. We find, therefore, elder brothers, elder sisters and elder cousins can first name their younger brothers, younger sisters and younger cousins, but the latter can't reciprocate unless the family allows a symmetrical use.

Given name comes first in America only thereafter is family surname added. In the U.S., children often take their parents, or grandparents' names, while in China, that is forbidden. Most Americans do not display the degree of respect for their parents that Chinese in more traditional or family-oriented societies commonly display. They have the conception that it was a sort of historical or biological accident that put them in the hands of particular parents, that the parents fulfilled their responsibilities to the children while the children were young, and now that the children have reached "the age of independence" the close child-parent tie is loosed, if not broken, as is reflected in the well-known expression: "God gives us our relatives; thank God we can choose our own friend."

The Chinese are culturally trained to be deferential. They do not think it appropriate or polite enough to address a person with whom he has no close relationship by first naming him or her in their encounter. Traditional Chinese values teach people to respect the old and repress the young. This also prevents young people from addressing the elderly by first names.

2.8 Respect for the Old vs. Indifference to the Aged

In ancient China, "age" and "hierarchy" stand for "authority" and "wisdom". As time goes on, "age" and "hierarchy" do not represent "authority" and "wisdom" absolutely but "respecting the old and loving the young" is still very influential today. Young people show respect to the old people. Old people receive honor, privilege and satisfaction. Seniority is a compliment in Chinese society. So old people would not feel offended when being addressed "老".

For Americans, old age is not a very happy time. Glorification of youth and indifference to the aged have left many older people alienated and alone. In a rapidly changing industrial society, the skills and knowledge of the elderly often become obsolete. They lack the important psychological forms of support—a feeling of being respected, wanted, and needed. It follows that mature Americans have no desire to grow old or to look older than they are. So Americans would like to use the euphemism terms when addressing the aged or simply first name them.

CONCLUSION

The use of the honorifics in Chinese and American English manifests the different patterns of interpersonal relationships in China and America and interpersonal communication is essentially a social process, which is underpinned by diverse value orientations and philosophical foundations, so it is important to remember that communication rules are both culturally and contextually bound. Understanding each culture's values and adapting to each other's value systems are the key to successful communication across cultures.

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