Cross-cultural Pragmatic Analysis of Evasion

Strategy at Chinese and American Regular Press Conferences – with Special Reference to the North Korean Nuclear Issue

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Abstract: Press conferences of different countries can be perceived from a cross-cultural pragmatic perspective. This study investigated evasion strategies employed by Chinese and American spokespersons in the routine press conferences held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and the US Department of State to sidestep challenging questions from aggressive journalists on the issue of North Korean Nuclear during the period of 4 months in 2006. Evasion can be categorized into two types: **overt evasion** and **covert evasion**. Findings demonstrated that: 1) Evasion strategy was the frequently adopted strategy by both Chinese and American spokespersons; 2) comparatively speaking, the American spokesperson turns to overt evasion strategy more often while the Chinese spokesperson adopts covert evasion strategy more frequently. 3) the differences of evasion strategies used by Chinese and American spokespersons largely lie in their different verbal styles typical of their respective national characteristics in protecting different national interests.

Key words: Evasion Strategy, Cross-cultural Pragmatics, North Korean Nuclear Issue, Regular Press Conferences

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1. Introduction

The press conference, as an effective channel for governments to release official information, is considered as a very important bridge of mutual communication and cooperation with other countries, conducive to building a good image of a country in a global arena. In the west, it is one of the key research objectives in the fields of journalism, sociology and linguistics. It's generally held that the regular press conference, which shares some similarities with broadcast interviews or parliamentary debates, turns out to be more professional and tactical than the presidential press conference. With regard to the content, political language at the regular press conference, often in the form of questions and answers, can be analyzed from any holistic perspective of the social, social-historical, ideological, textual and other levels or layers (John Wilson, 1990). The political press conference is an apparent context for the use of evasive language, just as said, "Journalists are renowned for asking questions and politicians are renowned for evading them" (Wilson 1990:131).

Evasion is the intended use of unclear messages, that is, vague, ambiguous, or non-straightforward communication (Bavelas, Black, Chovil & Mullett, 1990; Turner *et al.,* 1975), frequently occurring in response to difficult or awkward situations. It has become a burgeoning research topic in many disciplines like broadcasting, language, diplomatic science, and it is also worthy of the further research from a cross-cultural perspective. As culturally different countries, Chinese and American spokespersons adopt their respective evasion strategies typical of their national characters on press conferences to safeguard their respective interests and realize their respective diplomatic objectives when facing questions from aggressive journalists who are adept at soliciting implied information from political figures. This study intends to unveil what specific evasion strategies are actually utilized to deal with questions from professional journalists, and perceive culture-bound reasons for the existence of different evasive answers and the high incidence of certain evasive answers used by either Chinese spokespersons or their American counterparts.

Regular press conferences are routine activities of official agencies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China is responsible for holding Chinese regular press conferences that disseminate information about foreign affairs and further demonstrate the standpoints of foreign affairs taken by the Chinese official side through answering questions posed by journalists. The U.S. Department of State as a counterpart takes responsibilities of communicating diplomatic voices of the American official side. These regular press conferences are held about twice a week in China and three times a week in the U.S. with some uncertainties in the virtual frequency due to the ever-changing international political atmosphere. Among various internationally influential issues in the world from September to December of 2006, the new development of the North Korean nuclear issue can't be emphasized more because of its significant nature and accordingly worldwide shock waves of the event. This topic has become the focal issue for analysis of this study.

This study takes an integrated approach in analyzing evasion strategy employed spokespersons at press conference. Specifically it draws upon previous literature on evasion theory in political interviews (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Galasinski, 2000) and cross-cultural pragmatic theory (Hall, 1977; Grice, 1975; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). The findings of comparative study should provide information for a deeper exploration of different evasion strategies adopted by Chinese and American spokespersons and a better understand of spokespersons'

discourse at press conference. They are thus conducive to the cross-cultural communication in diplomatic field.

2. Evasion Strategy

The Definition of Evasion

The concept of evasion, although frequently referred to in the literature of deception (Bradac, 1983; Bradac *et al*, 1986; Ng & Bradac, 1993), has until now attracted lots of attention from researchers. There is little agreement as to what is evasion in spite of much literature on evasion as a communication strategy (see J. Bradac et al., 1986; Hopper & R. A. Bell, 1984; P. Gibbons et al., 1992; J. Wilson, 1990 and D. Galasinski, 2000). However, the concept of evasion is often treated without adequate conceptualization, and its analysis is full of conceptual pitfalls because evasion connotes moral impropriety and hence a contestable perspective. The definition becomes clearer when Orr and Burkins (1976) advise that evasion has to do with equivocation and ambiguity (also Bull, 1994), and Harris (1991) writes that a response is evasive if it doesn't answer the question directly or challenges the question. Evasion is relevant to the realm of question-answer exchanges (Galasinski, 2000: 56), and evasion is defined in relation to a specific theory of questions and answers" (Wilson, 1990:171).

Evasion has been sufficiently treated in the work of Bradac (1983), who proposes that evasions are messages that the speaker believes will fail to inform the addressee about a relevant belief A or will inform the addressee of matters rather than A (also Bull & Mayer, 1993). Later, this concept has been amended. Sik Hung Ng and James J. Bradac (1993) argue that evasive messages are those intended as irrelevant and that can be interpreted unambiguously. The definition of evasion given by Sik Hung Ng and Bradac introduces the idea of intention in the description of evasion. Firstly, it is necessary to distinguish between irrelevances in general and irrelevances that can count as evasions. An interlocutor who does not realize that he or she is making an irrelevant remark (e.g., after failing to understand a question) can't be held responsible for evasion. Secondly, not all intended irrelevances are counted as evasion. An irrelevant remark that is made to make interlocutors laugh or to disrupt the conversation is not evasive, only because there is nothing to evade. Galasinski (2000: 59) further argues, "Semantic irrelevance is universal in acts of evasion."

Based on the previous ground, we can summarize the characteristics of evasion as follows: evasion is pertains the realm of **question-answer exchange**; evasive utterances are **semantically irrelevant** to the questions to be responded; the irrelevance is **intentional**; evasion can be categorized into two types: **overt evasion** and **covert evasion**.

Overt evasion is much easier to identify, because the speaker more or less will signal that he or she is not going to be cooperative through straightforward oral refusals. However, in acts of covert evasion, the speaker attempts to conceal that he or she doesn't give a cooperative answer. The response is made by the speaker to pretend that it answers the question, whereas actually it does not. Therefore, covert evasion deserves special concern in political discourse.

There are various linguistic strategies for politicians or spokespersons to adopt to evade journalist' sharp questions. Among them, the functional approach by Bull and Mayer (1993) and the semantic-structural approach by Galasinski (2000) are most representative and they provide a comprehensive category of evasion strategy for the present study.

The Functional Approach

Bull *et al.* devised a coding system for identifying various forms of evasion. The so-called typology was based on eight interviews with Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock from 1987, and seven interviews with John Major from 1990/ 1991 (Bull, 2003). Before the typology was constructed, criteria were firstly established for identifying what made up questions, replies, non-replies and intermediate replies (Bull, 1994). **Questions** were defined functionally as requests for information, while **replies** as responses in which the information requested could be obtained. The term "**non-reply**" was coined to mean those responses in which the politician or spokesperson failed to provide any of the information requested in the question. There were also some situations which, for different reasons, fell somewhere between replies and non-replies; these were regarded as "**intermediate replies**" (Bull, 2003: 101). These criteria were applied to conduct an assessment of the extent to which politicians failed to answer the question. Next was to investigate the various means in which politicians equivocated.

A typology of evasion was developed on the basis of responses in which politicians failed to provide the information requested by interviewers. The results of the 15 political interviews showed an overall reply rate of 46%, intermediate replies 14% and non-reply rate 43% (Bull, 2003: 112). These results are similar to those of a study by Harris (1991), who found out that politicians gave direct answers to just over 39% of questions. From the perspective of functions of replies, Bull (2003) identified 12 forms of evasion: 1) to ignore the question; 2) to acknowledge the question without answering it; 3) to question the question; 4) to attack the question; 5) to attack the interviewer; 6) to decline to answer; 7) to make political point; 8) to give incomplete reply; 9) to repeat answer to previous questions; 10) to state or imply that the question has already been answered; 11) to apology; 12) literalism. In using the evasion typology, it is important to bear in mind that one response to a question can be coded in terms of several forms of evasion.

Bull and Mayer's typology, though enlightening and useful as a functional approach, has some problems as to how the units within the typology may interact with each other in evasion strategies. They didn't pay much attention to any of the work on the formal analysis of questions and answers. Indeed, Bull and Mayer (1988: 4) comment, "there has been little if any systematic study of question evasion in political interviews...we have no idea of the extent to which this occurs, nor of how they manage to be evasive" (Wilson, 1990).

We also argue that the 12 forms have some overlaps, such as "to repeat answer to previous questions" and "to state or imply that the question has already been answered". As a matter of fact, in real practice, each evasive answer is not of such a particular type as suggested by Bull and Mayer. Sometimes there is no clear-cut margin between one type and another, rather an answer is a mixture of several types.

The Semantic-structural Approach

Galasinski (2000) exemplified three types of **overt evasion** –– to state openly; to imply and to present oneself as the one who should not be asked the question, and he further offered the typology of acts of **covert evasion** based on the semantics of questions and answers. The speaker trying to evade the question covertly gives an answer that manipulates the semantic content of the question. The addressee, although pretending to answer the question, virtually

answers a different one. In other words, the speaker manipulates the focus of the question (Galasinski, 2000: 61).

Galasinski (2000) identifies three types of covert evasion. The first type of covert evasion is changing the textual context of the question, which consists in the speaker/answerer's reference to the focus. The speaker has several options within this category. The speaker may speak of the issue in question yet say things that are not warranted by the question's content. The speaker can also "reformulate the demand of the question" (Galasinski, 2000: 63). While maintaining a close relationship between the question and the answer, the speaker may broaden the scope of utterance. The second type of covert evasion involves the speaker's changing the focus of the question. It means that the focal argument, which is changed, is talked about within the textual context demanded by the question. The last type of covert evasion refers to change both the focus and the textual context of the question. Also, there are a number of other strategies which the speaker can adopt. The speaker can issue an utterance that includes a proposition that is not coherently related to the question. This speaker may address a proposition presupposed by the question. In this way, the speaker covertly answers the question in a different perspective.

Cross-cultural Pragmatic Reasons behind Different Evasion Strategies

With high frequency of evasion in political interviews and press conferences, people can't help wondering why politicians or spokespersons equivocate. In the eyes of the public, politicians or spokespersons are often depicted as evasive, even deceptive: they are the sort of people who will not give a straight answer to a straight question. What accounts for their failing to provide a straight answer from the cross-cultural pragmatic perspective?

From the perspective of pragmatics, Grice's cooperative principle, Leech's politeness principle and Brown & Levinson's face theory are basic principles guiding communication even when people employ evasion strategies. The Cooperative Principle serves as an important criterion for identifying evasive use of language as generating implicatures by overtly violation of a conversational maxim. Another important reason that explains the existence of the intentional use of equivocation is that people are attached to politeness. Therefore, being evasive or indirect is a linguistic option chosen to comply with the Politeness Principle and to achieve the goal of effective communication. Political communication is rather complicated. There will be no cooperation or politeness in the case of criticizing or ridiculing one's opponents, but at regular press conferences, it is common practice to maintain a certain degree of cooperation and politeness. Resorting to the positive politeness principle, the spokesperson takes the initiative to use evasion in stating his opinions, with respect to either his own or his country's face or the journalist's face. By adopting the negative politeness principle, the spokesperson's evasive utterances are given out of consideration for either party's face. In this case, by giving an evasive answer, the spokesperson is maintaining the minimum cooperation and politeness.

However, these principles are culture-specific, as has been approved by researchers both home and abroad. Taking face theory as an example, the concept of "negative face" in China is quite different from that in the west, and face in Chinese has a much broader scope than face in English in that Chinese face comprises lian and mianzi while English face only centers around certain aspects of the Chinese notion face (Mao, 1994: 457). What constitutes a desirable face may vary across cultures. Americans are less constrained by face concerns in performing their actions than are Chinese, for whom face is likely to a consideration

of utmost importance. As Gao, Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst (1996: 289) put it, "the notion of face permeates every aspect of interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture because of the culture's overarching relational orientation."

Hall's high-context and low-context cultural orientation can as well provide a rationale of China's implicit and indirect feature and America's explicit and direct characteristic of verbal communication at regular press conferences.

The anthropologist Edward Hall categorizes culture as being either high or low-context orientated, depending on the extent to which meaning originates from the settings or from the exchanged words. As Hall (1977) defined in his *Beyond Culture*, "A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message. A **low context** (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (Samovar & Porter, 2004: 76). All cultures contain some features of both high and low variables, and they can be placed along a high-context and low-context dimension scale demonstrating their high or low ranking (see Table 1).

Table 1:
Cultures Arranged Along the High-context and
Low-context Dimension

High-Context Cultures

Japanese

Chinese

Korean

Arab

Greek

Spanish

talian

English

North American

Scandinavian

German

Low-Context Cultures

Based on the work of Edward T. Hall (Samovar & Porter, 2004: 77)

From Table 1, it is obviously seen that China is placed on the comparatively high ranking just after Japan, while the U.S. on the opposite indicating a low-context dimension only followed by Scandinavia and Germany. In high-context culture, very little information is factually coded in the verbal communication; hence, the most apparent characteristic of the Chinese mode of communication (high context) is often vague, indirect and implicit, whereas in low-context culture such as American, most of the information is contained in verbal messages; hence, American communication (low context) is inclined to be direct and explicit. We can see the major differences of cultural variations of high-context and low-context cultures in the following Table 2:

Table 2: Contrasting High-context and Low-context Cultural Variations

High-context Culture	Low-context Culture
1)Implicitly embed meanings at different levels of the soci-cultural context	1)Overtly display meanings through direct communication forms
2)Value group sense	2)Value individualism
3)Tend to take time to cultivate and establish a permanent personal relationship	3)Tend to develop transitory personal relationship
4)Emphasize spiral logic	4)Emphasize linear logic
5)Value indirect verbal interaction and is more able to read nonverbal expressions	5)Value direct verbal interaction and is less able to read nonverbal expressions
6)Tend to use more "feelings" in expressions	6)Tend to use more "logic" to present ideas
7)Tend to give simple, ambiguous, non-contexting messages	7)Tend to emphasize highly structural messages, give details and place great stress on words and technical signs

(**Source**: http://www.cba.uni.edu/buscomm/nonverbal/Culture.htm)

Table 2 shows a clear comparison of high-context culture and low-context culture, and all of the above-mentioned differences can typically reflect the primarily different characteristics of Chinese culture and American culture.

The present study

On the basis of the criteria of identifying questions, replies, non-replies and intermediate replies mentioned earlier, we will typically probe into the application of evasion strategy in non-replies and intermediate replies given by spokespersons at regular press conferences. Due to the wide prevalence of evasion phenomenon in political discourse, we assume that some common evasion strategies adopted by spokespersons may exist at the regular press conferences of both China and the U.S. Then, considering different cultural characteristics of China and the U.S., spokespersons might resort to some different evasion strategies at the regular press conference. Lastly, given the cross-cultural pragmatic reasons behind various evasion strategies, comparisons are made to show why Chinese and American spokespersons employ different evasion strategies to protect their national interests. Therefore, I put forth the following three research questions which the present study will typically address:

Question 1: What are the common evasion strategies Chinese and American spokespersons employ at the regular press conferences?
Question 2: What are the differences of evasion strategies adopted by Chinese and American spokespersons?
Question 3: What are the reasons for the existence of different evasion strategies employed respectively by Chinese and American spokespersons?

3. Methodology

On the whole, both quantitative and qualitative analysis approaches are adopted in the present study. By quantitative analysis, we mean that the research is to provide some insights into the evasion strategy from the numerical analysis. Meanwhile, it is necessary to investigate into actual instances of different evasion strategies employed by Chinese and American spokespersons at the regular press conference in order to explain the cross-cultural pragmatic reason, that is, the qualitative analysis.

Data Collection

The actual data for this study are transcripts of regular press conferences found on the official websites of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Department of State. It is a fact that some questions posed at Chinese regular press conferences are in Chinese, but the transcripts provided here are in the English version provided by the official website of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The issue of the North Korean nuclear crisis started in October, 2002, when North Korean officials admitted the existence of a clandestine program to enrich uranium for use in nuclear weapons and declared the Agreed Framework of 1994 nullified. Then North Korea took some proactive actions, such as restarting Yongbyon nuclear reactor, disabling International Atomic Energy Agency (**IAEA**) surveillance devices at Yongbyon and expelling IAEA inspectors, to demonstrate its defense of the sovereignty in face of the U.S. threat. After North Korea's withdrawing from the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (**NPT**) in January 2003, tensions between the U.S. and North Korea ran higher and higher.

Against the backdrop, until the time when this study is conducted, five rounds of six-party talks on the nuclear issue, involving North and South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the U.S., have been held accordingly from August, 2003 to December, 2006 in Beijing. In July 2006, the test-launch of several missiles conducted by North Korea caught wide attention of the world. Three months later, North Korea shocked the world again in a much more intense manner, that is, its conducting of the underground nuclear test near P'unggye on October 9th, 2006. In response, the Security Council passed 1718 resolution which prevented a range of goods from entering or leaving the DPRK and imposed an asset freeze and travel ban on persons related to the nuclear-weapon program. Surrounded by intense pressure, North Korea, in a surprising turnabout, agreed to return to stalled six-party disarmament talks.

The above-mentioned brief introduction constitutes the political background knowledge of the collected data for this study which cover a period of four months starting from September 5th, 2006 to December 28th, 2006. During these four months, the topic of the North Korean nuclear issue was frequently put forward at regular press conferences of both China and the U.S., obviously becoming a focal issue in the international political environment due to the extremely

shocking move that North Korea took on October 9th, 2006. This event not only forced the U.S. to put the nuclear issue in the first place of its foreign affairs, but also stirred up Northeast Asian security. There was a lot of new information presented at each regular press conference, reflecting the fact that China and the U.S. showed great concern about the new development of the North Korean nuclear issue.

Since a regular press conference covers many topics that might be interesting to journalists, the information on the North Korean nuclear issue is scattered among other topics. We read through all the transcripts of every individual regular press conference falling in the time period in order to collect useful data. The following process is how we managed to collect appropriate data for this study. We firstly ruled out those regular press conferences at which there was no questions relevant to the North Korean issue brought up. The result is shown in Table 3:

Table 3: the Number of Regular Press Conferences after the Rule-out

C \ M \ N	September		October		November		December		CN	
	TN	AN	TN	AN	TN	AN	TN	AN	**TN**	**AN**
China	8	7	7	7	9	9	8	8	**32**	**31**
U.S.	16	10	18	17	16	13	15	12	**65**	**52**

M=Month
C=Country
N=Number
TN=Total Number of Regular Press Conferences

AN=Actual Number of Regular Press Conferences Mentioning the North Korean Nuclear Issue
CN=Combined Number of Regular Press Conferences of These Four Months

It is shown from Table 3 that almost all the regular press conferences held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China have mentioned the North Korean nuclear issue except one regular press conference of September, and only 13 out of 65 regular press conferences (80% of the total) held by the U.S. Department of State haven't touched upon this issue. This fact demonstrates that the North Korean unclear issue is indeed the hot issue among the international political topics concerning China and the U.S. during these four months.

Reading through all the transcripts of 31 regular press conferences of China and 52 of the U.S., we then picked out question-answer sequences relevant to this nuclear issue by typically searching some key words or phrases such as the *DRPK, the six-part talk, the nuclear test and the Korean peninsula.* Those question-answer sequences which didn't contain such key words and were irrelevant to the North Korean nuclear issue were ruled out. In this step, we noticed that there are many multiple-turn interactional sequences centering around one focal argument, and such sequences will be considered as the fundamental units for conversation organization (Sacks, 1995). However, all question-answer sequences in transcripts of Chinese regular press conference are standard single-turn interactions. The number of units of analysis in the form of question and answer is presented in Table 4:

Table 4: the Number of Units of Analysis

C \ M	September	October	November	December	TN
China	25	74	45	39	183
U.S.	28	221	77	64	390

M=Month C=Country TN=Total Number

Based on the criteria of identifying replies and non-replies mentioned earlier, attention will be focused on the answers to the questions. Those replies to questions will be identified and then excluded out, and those remaining, either in the form of non-replies or intermediate replies, will become the data for further analysis of various evasion strategies. The distribution of replies and non-replies (including intermediate replies) to questions are demonstrated in Table 5:

Table 5: the Distribution of Replies and Non-replies (including intermediate replies)

RT \ M \ C	September		October		November		December		TN	
	China	US	China	US	China	US	China	US	China	US
Replies	1	9	0	52	1	25	4	14	6 (1,6%)	100 (25,6%)
Non-replies	24	19	74	169	44	52	35	50	177 (96,7%)	290 (74,4%)

M=Month C=Country TN=Total Number RT=Reply Type

On one hand, Table 5 shows that the U.S. spokespersons reply 100 questions while their counterparts only 6 questions, so the reply rate of the U.S. (25.6%) exceeds that of Chinaÿ1.6% ÿ by a large margin, which indicates that American spokespersons are more straightforward than Chinese ones even faced with politically challenging questions at regular press conferences. On the other hand, these non-replies (including intermediate replies) to questions with **177 for** Chinese data, and **290 for** the U.S.data constitute the data for the focus of the analysis of the application of evasion strategies at regular press conferences.

Units of Analysis

In order to answer three research questions, the fitful data obtained need to be analyzed quantitatively according to the typology of evasion strategies we established by combining Bull and Mayer (1993) and the semantic-structural approach by Galasinski (2000) as follows. We firstly identify two broad categories of evasion strategies: **overt practices** and **covert practices**; and then each broad category includes some sub-categories of evasion strategies. That is, **to decline to answer, to question the question, to state or imply that the question has already been answered, to attack the question or the**

journalist and **to apologize** are included in the category of **overt evasion**; and **to make political positions**, **to ignore the question** and to **give incomplete answers** belong to the category of **covert evasion**. Before the data is decoded, the eight sub-categories of evasion strategy have to be illustrated by some samples for the purpose of precisely identifying these eight types of evasion strategies. (J–journalist; CS – Chinese spokesperson; AS – American spokesperson)

1) To decline to answer

Six ways of declining to answer a question can be distinguished as follows:

a.   unwillingness to answer, e.g.:

> **J:** U.S. Embassy statement said that the U.S. delegation shared ideas and the North Koreans promised to study those ideas back in North Korea. Would those **ideas** include, for example, allowing IAEA inspectors back into North Korea or like immediate suspension of all activities?
> **AS:** *Again, they'd include a full range of ideas on how to make this round productive, but I'm **not going to** go into any specifics on that. That's for the negotiators and the people involved in the discussions to work on.* (U.S., 2006-11-29)

In this example, Mr. Casey declined to provide the specific answer as to connotations of "ideas" by saying "not going to go into any specifics on that". Here, "not going to" reflects the unwillingness of Mr. Casey to answer the question.

b.   refusals due to inability or lack of knowledge : admitting inability, e.g.:

> **J:** Does the U.S. have any independent intelligence that shows that in fact they're getting close to a test?
> **AS:** *David, I certainly **can't comment on** any intelligence issues. We know that they have made this statement that they intend to do this and that's what our reaction is based on here.* (U.S., 2006-10-03)

In this example, Mr. Casey used the phrase "can't comment on" to show that he was unable to answer the question specifically as to whether any independent intelligence showed North Korea was getting close a test.

c. not in the position to give some kind of information, e.g.:

> **J:** Could China accept the US proposed draft resolution of the UN Security Council? Does China support the condemnation of DPRK by the United Nations?
> **CS:** *I think it is necessary that the UN Security Council makes appropriate response to the DPRK's nuclear test. Now, the UN Security Council is conducting intense consultation on the proposals. China is making thorough study of the issue with parties concerned. In this context, I'm afraid I am **not in the position** to offer you more details.* (China: 2006-10-12)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson first presented the position of China with regard to the DPRK's nuclear test, but he didn't continue to provide any answer by evading that he was "not in the position to offer your more details".

d. deferred answer, not possible to answer the question for the time being, e.g.:

> **J:** Will China hold bilateral talks with any party to the Six-Party talks during the APEC meeting?
> **CS:** *Please raise your question in the briefing **later**.* (China, 2006-11-07)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson wouldn't like to make any comments on this question by directly saying it was not the correct time to answer the question for the time being. He deferred the answer to the question to the briefing.

e. lack of new information at this point, e.g.:

> **J:** Two things. One, the South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon told us last Friday at UNGA that the United States was working – South Korea was working with the United States on some kind of way to entice the North Koreans to come back to the table, and he talked about looking for creative solutions. Can you give us any kind of a sense of what those creative ideas or inducements might be?
> **AS:** *At this point I have nothing I can share with you. We're talking with the South Koreans as well as others about how to accomplish this. But fundamentally, it comes down to the North Koreans making a strategic choice and trying to appeal to their interests in making that choice and to talk about how to encourage them to make that choice while remaining in – within the context of and the principles of the Six-Party Talks.* (U.S., 2006-09-27)

In this example, the American spokesperson declined to answer the yes-no question by admitting the lack of new information at this point. Here, "I have nothing I can share with you" is a typical sentence to demonstrate his refusal.

f. uncertain about the information but willing to check on it, e.g.:

> **J:** So in other words, three-way and then two-way?
> **AS:** *Yeah, in theory, that's the way – yeah, that's the way that it worked today. He had a meeting – I don't know if he – **I'll check for you**. I **don't know** if he had a meeting separately with the Chinese, but there was a meeting with the Chinese, the North Koreans and the United States. Then there was a meeting with U.S. and North Korea. And then I think the idea is that we'd replicate that tomorrow.* (U.S., 2006-11-28)

In this example, the American spokesperson acknowledged that he didn't know this exact situation as to the three-way or two-way meeting, but he literally expressed his willingness to check this situation for the journalist. Such ways of declining to answer have high frequency in American data, reflecting American people's positive politeness strategy which will be elaborated later.

2) **To attack the question or the journalist**

The spokespersons attack or criticize the question or the journalist; and several reasons for attacking the question can be identified:

a. The question is actually inaccurate, e.g.:

> **J:** It is reported that when Hill visited Beijing shortly ago, he offered to hold bilateral talks with the DPRK, only to be rejected by the DPRK. Please confirm. Why did the DPRK reject this proposal?
> **CS:** *The report you mentioned is **inaccurate**. China encourages and supports the US and the DPRK in their direct contact, through which they can have an in-depth exchange of views on their own concerns. We hope the US and the DPRK will show a flexible and practical attitude, so as to find a proper solution.* (China, 2006-09-14)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson directly attacked the inaccuracy of the question in the first sentence when giving his response.

b. The question is based on a false premise, e.g.:

> **J:** Why did you decide to say yes? What made you change your mind about separate discussions?
> **AS:** *Well,* **we didn't change our mind about separate discussions**. *We have done this in the past, as I pointed out, in July of 2005. And Secretary Rice talked about this on her trip, so this is not out of our past pattern of behavior. I tried to draw a distinction between discussions and negotiations. This was not a negotiation, but we have from time to time found it useful to sit down with the North Koreans in a variety of configurations. We have the New York channel. We have done this – we have had this kind of meeting in the past. And it has on occasion proven useful.* (U.S., 2006-10-31)

In this example, the American spokesperson straightforwardly attacked the question by stating that the question was based on a false premise because the fact that whether the U.S. changed its mind about separate discussions didn't stand.

c. The question is hypothetical or presumptive, e.g.:

> **J**: Should any military conflict occur in the DPRK, what obligation does China have for the DPRK?
> **CS**: *Your question is a* **presumptive** *question.* (China, 2006-10-10)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson directly attacked the question due to the presumptive nature of the question.

d. The question includes some misused words or phrases, e.g.:

> **J**: China is a neighbor and close ally of the DPRK, and is a nuclear weapon state. It is assumed that China hoped the DPRK nuclear test to be a safe one.
> **CS**: *I don't agree with your* **phrasing that China is an ally of the DPRK**. *China adheres to the non-alliance policy, and does not enter into an alliance with any country. China-DPRK relations are normal state-to-state relations based on the norms governing international relations.* (China, 2006-10-10)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson stated that the word **"ally"** was misused, so he didn't agree with the journalist's phrasing that China was an ally of the DPRK. In this way, he attacked the question severely.

3)   To question the question
The spokespersons ask for further information about the question. e.g.:

> **J:** North Korea had (inaudible) is unwilling to talk between the United States and North Korea. Does the United States agree with that?
> **AS: They want to hold talks**?
> **J:** Yeah, they ask you proposed to hold disarmament talks between U.S. and North Korea.
> **AS: Disarmament talks**?
> **J:** Yes. Nuclear disarmament.
> **AS:** *Aha. Well, first of all, we don't consider, you know, although they have tested a nuclear device we consider that a reversible state of being. Second of all, the United States doesn't have nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. We have said that before. This is a backdoor way of trying to get the – have the international community recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapon state, which we don't.* (U.S., 2006-12-19)

In this example, the American spokesperson questioned the question posed by a journalist by continuously asking further information to confirm his understanding or expressing his doubts. One feature of the way of questioning the question is that it often occurs in multi-turn question-answer sequences, so it's no wonder that American data abound in such kinds of evasion strategy.

4) To state or imply that the question has already been answered, e.g.:

> **J:** Weren't some of those elements already embodied in the September 19th agreement which, if they're coming back on the basis of that, then presumably they're accepting those terms.
> **AS:** Well, as **I've said before in answer to an earlier question,** they haven't walked away from the September 19th framework agreement. And the agreement is, while a very good agreement, it is a framework agreement. It does not flesh out specifically how to achieve objectives and the commitments that are laid out in there. It's a series of commitments in essence on the part of the members of the six-party talks, and also a statement of objectives, what are we trying to do in the six-party talk round. There are a lot of different things that can be discussed in that context. We are focused on how to achieve the first of those objectives, a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. (U.S., 2006-10-31)

In this example, the American spokesperson stated that he had answered this question before in the first sentence. The following statements made by him were still beside the point, evading the question intrinsically.

5) To apologize, e.g.:

> **J:** Since you read the commentary, the thrust of it is that sanctions are going to be counterproductive, perhaps cause the North Koreans to test a weapon and that there's hardly any support in the region for them –
> **AS:** Well, you know, look, as for support in the region, we're now discussing with folks in the region as well as elsewhere. But I always find it very interesting this argument that somehow it is the fault of the United States or others when somebody else takes a step that is deeply provocative. **So excuse me if I don't necessarily buy that argument** that it is somehow – that somehow these actions are somehow caused by the United States or the international community, when in fact it is some of these other states like North Korea that happen to be the outliers in terms of their behavior. So it's, again, up to those states like North Korea to change their behavior.
> The international community has spoken with one voice; in this case 15-0 on the Security Council resolution. So it's pretty clear where the modification in behavior is needed. (U.S., 2006-09-06)

In this example, the American spokesperson apologized for not buying the argument that was provided by the journalist. In this way, he excused himself from answering the question.

6) To make political positions, eg.:

> **J:** Follow-up: The US hopes to see power changeover in the DPRK. Do you deem Kim Jong-il a fit leader for that country?
> **CS:** The Chinese government has **consistently followed the policy** of non-interference in other country's internal affairs. We **maintain that** the UN Charter, the international law and the norms governing international relations should be abided by in handling state-to-state relations. (China, 2006-10-10)

This example demonstrated that it was the common practice that the Chinese spokesperson made political points or diplomatic policy clear by such phrases as "to follow the policy of", "maintain that" and "to make the position clear".

7) To give incomplete answers
Several different forms of insufficient answers are distinguished.
a. minimal answer supported by some elaboration, e.g.:

> **J:** The DPRK delegation to the Six-Party Talks said that the next round of the talks can not be held until the DPRK and the US finished their financial dialogue. Does China concur with that? It is said that the DPRK has expressed its willingness to make concession. It is ready to abandon the nuclear facility in Nyongbyong if the US lifts the financial sanction. Can you confirm?

> **CS:** Regarding the financial sanction, financial experts of the US and the DPRK have communicated on this issue at this session of Six-Party Talks. Now, the two sides better understand each other's concern. We **welcome and support** their dialogue and consultation in order to properly solve this issue at an early date.
> *The Joint Statement of September 19 clearly stipulated that the six parties should take coordinated steps to implement the joint statement in a phased manner and in line with the principle of "commitment for commitment, action for action". They should endeavor for the goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. We hope the parties concerned will bear in mind the overall situation and do more to push forward the Six-Party Talks.* (China, 2006-12-26)

In this example, the journalist asked the Chinese spokesperson about the confirmation of the two-part question concerning the financial sanction issue, but the spokesperson failed to provide a complete answer and only roughly presented a minimal answer combined with its elaboration of China's constant position towards the settlement of the financial sanction issue.

b. insufficient answer which provides partial replies, e.g.:

> **J:** What views are expounded during the close-door meeting by the heads of the delegations? Will there be any progress out of today's meeting?
> **CS:** *All parties* **expounded on** *their views on the implementation of the Joint Statement and raised specific suggestions during the meeting of the heads of the delegations this morning.* (China, 2006-12-19)

In this example, the Chinese spokesperson merely answered the first part of the question about the views expounded at the close-door meeting by all parties, but didn't provide any clue towards the second part of the question; hence, he just gave insufficient answers.

8) **To ignore the question**

The spokespersons just ignore the question without attempting to answer it. e.g:

> **J:** Is the U.S. urging China to cut food and energy?
> **AS: Our focus now is on the sanctions resolution**. *(Inaudible) tied that to getting back to the six-party talks.* **Our focus now** *is getting the Security Council resolution and talking to UN member-states about how to enforce that Security Council resolution. And certainly we're also talking to them about the wider political security situation in the region as well. So those are – that's really the focus of our discussions right now with them.* (U.S., 2006-10-10)

In this example, the American spokesperson just ignored the question about cutting food and energy but to focus on the sanction resolution. By means of shifting the focal topic, the spokesperson achieved the goal of ignoring the question.

In the process of identifying the typology of eight sub-categories of evasion strategy, it is important that one response to a question can be classified into several categories. In this case, I, based on my own understanding and judgment, will code this response into the most obvious strategy that the spokespersons adopt. The following example can demonstrate this point, and the evasion strategies are given in square brackets.

> **J**: *Will China's banks prevent Chinese businessmen from remitting to the DPRK?*
> **CS**: Resolution 1718 of the UN Security Council has explicitly stipulated on the scope of the financial sanctions against the DPRK. I suggest you read through that part.;ÿto give incomplete answer-minimal answers supported by some elaboration=ÿAll countries should fulfill their obligations in compliance with the Resolution.;ÿto make political positions=ÿ You may consult with competent financial authorities of China about our normal financial and business exchanges with the DPRK.;ÿto decline to answer–not in the position to give some kind of information=ÿ (China, 2006-10-17)

In this example, three evasion strategies have been adopted by the Chinese spokesperson to evade the question. In terms of the Resolution 1718 passed by the UN Security Council on October 14th, 2006, China, as usual, is earnest and responsible to deal with relevant issues in compliance with the Resolution, but China also holds some reserved opinions about some parts of the Resolution, and China's relevant financial authorities still haven't voiced their decrees. Thus, it is much better for the spokesperson to give insufficient answers to equivocate the question. Therefore, I coded this response in terms of the most obvious strategy–to give incomplete answers.

Coding of the Corpus

The quantitative analysis of two broad categories and eight sub-categories of evasion strategy are conducted for both countries. The results will shed some lights on and roughly answer the first two research questions.

Excluding the replies to questions, we have got the data of non-replies and intermediate replies which fall into the target of our analyzing two broad categories of evasion: **overt evasion** and **covert evasion**. For the convenience of analysis, I come to the following integrated Table 6, which includes eight sub-categories of evasion strategy:

Table 6: the Distribution of the Typology of Evasion Strategy

ES \ C / D		China		U.S.	
		Occurrence	% of CN	Occurrence	% of CN
Overt	DTA	27	15.3%	157	54.1%
Evasion	AQJ	10	5.6%	22	7.6%
	QTQ	1	0.6%	15	5.2%
	SOI	3	1.7%	17	5.9%
	TA	1	0.6%	1	0.3%
Total number		**42**	**23.7%**	**212**	**73.1%**
Covert	MPP	47	26.6%	1	0.3%
Evasion	GIA	78	44.1%	65	22.4%
	ITQ	10	5.6%	12	4.1%
Total number		**135**	**76.3%**	**78**	**26.9%**
Combinade number		177	100%	290	100%

C=Country

D=Data

ES=Evasion Strategy

DTA=Decline to Answer

AQJ=Attack the Question or the Journalist

QTQ=Question the Question

SOI=State or Imply That the Question has Already Been Answered

As is shown from Table 6, both Chinese and American spokespersons turn to evasion strategy when faced with political **"avoidance-avoidance conflicts"**. In the part of data collection, I have collected 183 units of analysis for China and 390 units for the U.S., and Chinese spokespersons equivocate **177** (96.7%) of them, while American counterparts equivocate **290** (74.4%) of 390 units. From the percentages, it is conspicuous that both sides choose to evade the majority of questions posed by aggressive journalists at regular press conferences. This fact upholds the common sense that political figures are frequently evasive under questioning from members of the press given the adversarial feature of contemporary journalism (Clayman, 2001). The violation of the **Cooperation Principle** out of the consideration of the **Politeness Principle** as well as the influence of the nature of politics on political language can explain the application of common evasion strategies by both Chinese spokespersons and their American counterparts at regular political press conferences.

It is clear from Table 7 that the common evasion strategies that both Chinese and American spokespersons adopt at regular press conferences are **overt evasion** consisting of declining to answer, attacking the question or the journalist, questioning the question, stating or implying that the question has already been answered, and apologizing; and **covert evasion** strategy made up of making political positions, giving incomplete answers and ignoring the question. The American spokesperson turns to **overt evasion** strategy more often than his Chinese counterpart, which is evidenced by the data from Table 7–the percentage of overt evasion with American coded data accounting for **73.1%** of the total number of answers selected for this paper, and the percentage of overt evasion with Chinese coded data accounting for a mere **23.7%** of the total number of answers selected. On the contrary, the Chinese spokesperson adopts **covert evasion** strategy more frequently than the American spokesperson, which is proven by the following two percentages–the percentage of covert evasion with Chinese coded data accounting for **76.3%** of the total number of answers, and the percentage with American data accounting for a tiny **26.9%**.

Probing the depth of two broad categories, I come to the detailed differences of evasion strategies employed by Chinese and American spokespersons. These sub-categories of evasion strategies occur with different frequency in Chinese and American coded data. As to the American typology of evasion strategies, the strategy of **declining to answer** takes up 54.1% of the total number of answers, and this percentage indicates that this evasion strategy occurs with the highest occurrence. With regard to the Chinese typology of evasion strategy, the strategy of **giving incomplete answers** constitutes 44.1% of the total number, followed by the strategy of making political positions accounting for 26.6%. Therefore, the main differences lie in the application of the strategy of declining to answer on the U.S. side and the prevalent use of the strategy of giving incomplete answers on the Chinese side. Furthermore, the strategies of making political positions and ignoring the question are used more frequently by the Chinese spokespersons than by their American counterparts; while the strategies of attacking the question or the journalist, questioning the question, and stating or implying that the question has already been answered in the U.S. data occur more often than those in the Chinese data.

4. Discussions

To addressing research question three, although the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle can account for the existence of evasion in daily communication, and are also applicable in political communication to some

extend, Hall's high-context and low-context cultural orientation will be particularly employed to elaborate the existent differences of various evasion strategies adopted at Chinese and American regular press conferences. It must be noticed that national interests always come prior to pragmatic reasons at such kind of political occasions and therefore are taken into consideration in the following analysis..

The Reasons of China's Covert Evasion Strategy

Chinese culture is characterized by a collectivist-based concept, which encourages non-assertiveness in interpersonal communication. Harmonious in-group interaction is the goal of communication. One obvious feature of Hall's high-context culture is its interdependence upon each other, emphasis upon indirect verbal interaction, and inclination to give ambiguous and non-contexting messages shown by Table 2. When the Chinese spokesperson imprinted with such cultural characteristics speaks at regular press conferences, it is no wonder that he or she might set the desired image of China's diplomacy symbolizing the creation of harmonious international environment in the first place to manifest China's constant diplomatic position in the world arena. With respect to the North Korean nuclear issue, China is no exception in that China sticks to safeguarding the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula, the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue through political and diplomatic means, and the aim of denuclearization on the Korean peninsula. China's position and attitudes towards this issue are indicative of its constantly held view that China is an unswerving strength to safeguard the world peace and create a harmonious world, let alone the security of Northeast Asia that matters a lot to China's interests.

Besides, Chinese culture is renowned for its implicit and face-oriented way of communication. As Brown and Levinson (1987) said, refusals are a kind of **face-threatening act,** and implicitness or indirectness assists in mitigating the possible damage caused by direct confrontations. In answering questions concerning the complicated North Korean nuclear issue, the Chinese spokesperson's avoiding direct refusals or just giving insufficient answers at sensitive juncture, except the consideration of political and diplomatic interests, is also rooted in maintaining the "face" of his or her public image from the cultural perspective. Acknowledging lack of knowledge or uncertainty about information which spokespersons are assumed to know is also face-threatening to Chinese spokespersons. The consideration of his or her "face" results in the scarcity of the strategy of directly declining to answer. Consequently, such ways of directly declining to answer as "unwillingness to answer", "not in the position to give certain kind of information", "uncertain about the information but willing to check on it" have much fewer occurrences in Chinese data. Considering the difficulty in admitting their "shortcomings", Chinese spokespersons often resort to **covert evasion** strategies such as giving incomplete answers in the form of minimal answer supported by some elaboration and insufficient answers by giving partial replies.

Moreover, the Chinese spokesperson representative of the Chinese official diplomatic image has to uphold the "face" of the government, the Chinese people and even the country, so he or she wants to be respected, and their utterances to be appreciated and justified. China, which has been exerting great influences upon North Korea in terms of politics, military, economy and culture, has great leverage over North Korea with respect to the nuclear disarmament and need its "face" to be enhanced and diplomatic points respected by North Korea. Hence, in this case, it is wise for the spokesperson to resort to **covert evasion** either by making political points, stating political positions or by giving incomplete

replies to spare the journalist's feelings, especially when faced with hard and tough questions. Therefore, for Chinese spokespersons, it is necessary for them to preserve their own face, the face of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the face of Chinese government and the face of China to leave enough room for maneuver at regular press conferences.

To better understand the above-mentioned reasons behind the covert evasion strategy employed by Chinese spokespersons, the following chosen examples from coded Chinese data will be used to elaborate these reasons:

> 1) *Q: Do you think the DPRK's possession of nuclear weapon will make Northeast Asia more dangerous? What's the source of the danger and who should be blamed?*
> *CS: Since the DPRK conducted a nuclear test, **the tension is aggravated** in Northeast Asia and on the Korean Peninsula. In such circumstances, we think all parties should respond in a calm way. Meanwhile, we require the DPRK to honor its commitment to denuclearization, stop any action that may worsen the situation and come back to the track of the Six-Party Talks as soon as possible. As for the nuclear issue on the Peninsula itself, we deemed it a painstaking and complicated issue from the very beginning. To solve this issue demands the joint efforts of all parties concerned, in particular the principal parties. In the current context, all parties should observe the important consensus reached by the six parties on last September 19, resume the Talks and honor their common commitment in the Joint Statement, so as to realize the lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.* (China, 2006-10-10)

In example 1), it is clearly seen that the journalist asks two questions in one time, one being a yes-no question which needs a positive or negative confirmation, the other being an interrogative question which asks for the specification of kind and which persons. However, no direct answers can be found in the according response. The Chinese spokesperson just gives incomplete answers to the first question by only making the political position of China towards the North Korean nuclear issue, and completely ignores the second question. Probing the depth of these two questions, we can find why the Chinese spokesperson fails to provide the journalist with clear and direct information. The spokesperson uses the phrase "**tension aggravated**" instead of answering directly that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons will make northeast Asia more dangerous, because the meaning of the vague phrase "tension aggravated" is more general and abstract, and less subjective than the descriptive word "**more dangerous**". The underground nuclear test conducted by the DRPK indeed made the security situation of northeast Asia more unstable, but China, as the only nuclear state in this area, should be prudent with its choice of words for the sake of security. Meanwhile, the phrase "**tension aggravated**" by the Chinese spokesperson just coincides with the utterances of "**aggravate tensions in northeast Asia**" given by White House Press Secretary Tony Snow. At this sensitive juncture, it's not mature to show its subjective attitudes towards this shocking event so early. Therefore, China's making political positions would be a safe choice for such diplomatic policy positioning of China's independent foreign policy of peace is well-known in the international community. It is no harm to repeat this position in front of the press at the sensitive time. On one hand, such acts will strengthen China's image as a peace-maintainer and six-party talk supporter. On the other hand, such lengthy policy presentation of China shows that the spokesperson takes the initiative to equivocate the question by so-called **positive politeness strategy**.

The second question is more detailed and challenging, and should be handled with special attention. As a responsibly big country in the word, and a permanent member of the Security Council, the Chinese spokesperson's answering such a specific question must be supported by solid evidence, let alone the

impossibility to judge so sensitive event at so sensitive time. Out of the consideration of the responsible image China has always cultivated in the international community and as a stern upholder of creating a harmonious world, it's wise for the spokesperson to protect the "**face**" of the country by ignoring the challenging question.

> 2) *Q: Will China continue to implement the sanction resolution against the DPRK adopted by the UN Security Council since the DPRK has agreed to come back to the Six Party Talks? What measures should the DPRK take to lift the sanctions?*
> *CS: Now the biggest concern to the six parties and the international community is how to push forward the Six Party Talks and gain positive progress. **With respect to** the impact of the Six Party Talks on the implementation of Resolution 1718 adopted by the UN Security Council, it is not an issue to be decided by the Talks.* (China, 2006-11-02)

In example 2), the journalist puts forward a double-barrelled question (including two sub-questions) to the Chinese spokesperson; and from the response given by the spokesperson, no direct response can be found. The spokesperson turns to the strategy of covert evasion while giving some background information that can be regarded as **partial replies**. The spokesperson diverges from the sanction problem first but sticks to the six-party talk issue, and furthermore, the subtle form of covert evasion is embodied in the response of "with respect to the impact of the Six Party Talks on the implementation of Resolution 1718 adopted by the UN Security Council" that the spokesperson makes some operation on. When the spokesperson is asked whether China will continue to implement the sanction against the DPRK adopted by the Security Council, the spokesperson makes an **agenda-shift**, talking about the impact of the six-party talks on the implementation of Resolution 1718, and this slightly changes the topic of the question. The Chinese spokesperson's caution is not difficult to understand: any confirmation would presumably demonstrate that China has totally supported the sanction against the DPRK adopted by the Security Council, but actually China and the U.S. have some differences about how to enforce the U.N. sanction that they voted to impose on the DPRK on Oct.14, 2006, and China said it would not interdict North Korean cargo ships at sea as the U.S. and Japan have recommended. Under such circumstances, a direct answer may be unsupportable and may even contradict with what China has insisted on with regard to the sanction issue. The spokesperson manages to answer the question in a rather subtle way, and even makes a slight agenda-shift. He presents himself as if he were dutifully responsive, but he winds up giving a answer that is not the requested information which the journalist wants to seek. Moreover, the spokesperson never gets around to the second part of the question, regarding what measures the DPRK should take to lift the sanction. It's obvious that the specific measures taken by the DPRK are hard to present by the Chinese official side, and are even too early to be summarized by the Chinese spokesperson. For the sake of maintaining the desired "**face**" of China, the covert evasion of ignoring this part of the question would be feasible.

The Reasons of the U.S.'s Overt Evasion Strategy

Individualism is phenomenal in the American culture. It lies at the core of the English world's social ideology. Its most direct reflection in real life is individuals' assertive behavior in normal social interactions. One fundamental assumption of assertiveness is that individuals are more likely to establish the atmosphere of cooperation rather than confrontation by respecting the rights, needs and priorities of others. In communicating with assertive people, in Hulbert's

words, "One usually knows where they stand; they say what is on their minds rather than beat around the bush" (Hulbert, 1982: 75). However, Hulbert continues, assertiveness doesn't mean one can do or say anything to anyone under the guise of "openness" or "honesty"; mature and assertive people should take the responsibility of one's actions. If the assertive people have rights, so do others, and this is to be responsibly assertive. Due to this, we can find that at American regular press conferences spokespersons treat those journalists very casually and intimately by calling their name directly; and some expressions like "laugh" in the coded American data as well appear.

Besides, in a typical low-context culture, the American people would like to overtly display meanings through direct communication forms, value direct verbal interaction and tend to emphasize highly structured messages and give details demonstrated by Table 2. When the American spokespersons characterized by such cultural traits are faced with challenging questions and aggressive journalists, they can still, to a great extent, be frank and direct in face-to face confrontation.

As illustrated in Literature Review, the face concern and politeness strategy are universal in all cultures. However, it is a fact that there are cultural differences of politeness which exactly reflect different cultural values in various countries. The Chinese people place stress on maintaining or preserving the **positive face**, while Americans focus on the preservation of the **negative face**. The protection of the negative face of journalists will surely leave more independent and free room for them to ask back, which explains the frequent occurrence of multi question-answer sequences in the American coded data. The face concern in America is based on the concept of equality, so the American spokesperson will talk in a frank, direct and honest way and even openly admit their inability or lack of knowledge about relevant information. Therefore, such phrases as "*can't comment*" "*don't want to predict*" "*not going to*" "*not aware of*" and "*would like to check on*" usually occur when American spokespersons overtly decline to answer questions. Further, the American spokesperson chooses to attack the question or the journalist, question the question for further information and state or imply that the question has been answered more often than his Chinese counterpart in direct confrontations. Adopting these overt evasion strategies, the American spokesperson can facilitate the effective communication and take steps to minimize the damage that covert evasion otherwise cause. Some examples will be provided here to indicate how overt evasion strategies are employed by the American spokesperson to achieve the goal of effective verbal communication.

> 3) *Q: We are talking about the North Korean and Iran. Are you seeing similarity between these two countries? Because usually they're coming at the same time, they're in the middle – in July North Korea regarding the missiles of North Korea launching missile, and at the same time Iran supposed to go the Security Council. Right now Iran supposed to go to Security Council and North Korea coming with a nuclear test. Are you seeing any similarity between these two countries or maybe some kind of cooperation?*
> *AS: Well, in terms of what coordination or cooperation they have between them, **I'd leave it to officials in both those countries to talk to**. In terms of our view of the issue, obviously they are unique and distinct problems. We are treating them as we see fit for each individual issue. We, though, are committed in both instances to trying to find a diplomatic resolution to these crises and do so in a way that frankly serves not only the interests of the United States and the broader international community but the people of those countries themselves.* (U.S., 2006-10-05)

In example 3), the American deputy spokesperson of State Department is posed by a challenging question concerning about the similarity between the DPRK and Iran which are both considered as "axis of evil" countries by the U.S. From the response, Mr. Casey directly refers the question to who are supposed to provide answers–officials of both countries; this brief and overt answer is reasonable and smart. For one thing, realistically, the U.S. can't know whether

such coordination or cooperation exist between the DPRK and Iran, so to answer the question would be inappropriate and can be taken to imply that the question soliciting this answer is inappropriate; the refusal to answer is compliant with factual reasoning. For another thing, though trouble-makers and "axes of evil" the two countries are, the U.S. smartly shifts the responsibility of showing its subjective attitudes. Such overt decline to answer by alleging not in the position to provide information minimizes the damage that direct answer might cause. Then Mr. Casey further states the view of the U.S. which can varnish the alleged diplomatic image of the U.S. in the international community.

> 4) *Q: One more thing. Last week Assistant Secretary Hill said that the U.S. and its allies would not live with a nuclear North Korea. I mean today aren't we – although you're taking steps to adjust the program, I mean, isn't North Korea in fact a nuclear state right now?*
> **AS:** Well, they have – our estimates, for some time, and you can go back and looking at the intelligence estimates even prior to this Administration were that they at least had the capability to produce nuclear weapons and that likely, in fact, possessed some number of them. They actually – the exact numbers on the estimates varied – they varied over time. ***We have made it clear that this is an unacceptable state of being****. It is a destabilizing situation in which you would have a* **nuclear-armed North Korea** *and that is not something that is in dispute. That is something – an opinion that is shared by not only the people in the neighborhood, but also people worldwide.* (U.S., 2006-10-10)

In example 4), the American spokesperson is faced with the question whether the DPRK is in fact a nuclear state. The U.S. is opposed to admitting the DPRK's being a nuclear state; hence the spokesperson must evade this question by indirectly stating that "this is an unacceptable state of being" and carefully choosing the phrase "a nuclear-armed North Korea". This overt evasion strategy of implying that the question has been made clear not only indicates the position of the U.S. towards the DPRK's possession of nuclear weapons that the U.S. will never allow the DPRK to return to the six-party talks as a nuclear state, but also helps to ensure that the refusal will not be taken as an act of defiance against the journalist per se.

> 5) *Q: Are the '05 financial sanctions against North Korea still a sticking point?*
> **AS: You mean the Banco Delta Asia measures?**
> Q: Yes.
> **AS:** *Well, again,* **as we have said previously***, we know this is something that's of concern to the North Koreans and we've talked about establishing a working group in which, you know, we would be able to discuss those issues in the context of the six-party talks. But you know, I assume that's still a valid issue and concern of theirs and, again, we have a proposal in terms of how we would be able to address those.* (U.S., 2006-11-29)

Example 5) shows that the multi-turns of question and answer is a typical way of **overt evasion** in the form of **questioning the question** by asking for further information about the question. Here, the spokesperson requests for the clarification of 2005 financial sanction against North Korea, and then he implies that the U.S. has made the position of the BDA (Banco Delta Asia) issue clear that should be discussed within the context of the six-party talks. The allowing of multi-turns of question and answer signifies that the American spokesperson dares not the direct confrontation. If the spokesperson should covertly evade the question, he would not provide a clarification question for the journalist to attack, but would make full use of the vague indication to give a rough idea or make rough political points.

Until now, the three research questions are addressed one by one. The first two research questions are supported by quantitative analysis to arrive at the exact percentage of each evasion strategies adopted by respective spokespersons

of China and the U.S. from respective coded data, and the third research question is addressed by combing theoretical insights with some sample units of analysis.

5. Conclusions

Summary

The present study is primarily an attempt at analyzing and interpreting the evasion strategy applied at Chinese and American press conferences from the cross-cultural pragmatic perspective with special reference to the North Korean nuclear issue.

To answer the three research questions, the Chinese and American coded data are both collected from respective official websites, and finally obtained through step-by-step data filtering. With the data, we penetrate into the application of evasion strategy in non-replies and intermediate replies according to the criteria proposed by Quirk *et al.* (1995) and Jucker (1986).

Assisted by the quantitative analysis and sample illustrations, we obtain the following main points. Firstly, given the adversarial character of contemporary journalism, the impetus to resist some questions is common phenomena. Some common evasion strategies are adopted by both Chinese and American spokespersons, such as overt evasion strategies including declining to answer, attacking the question or the journalist, questioning the question, stating or implying that the question has already been answered and apologizing, and covert evasion strategies including making political positions or points, giving incomplete replies and ignoring the question. Secondly, by investigating and comparing the percentages of each type and sub-type of evasion strategies among the total number obtained, some differences of evasion strategies employed by Chinese and American spokespersons are distinguished. For example, American spokespersons resort to overt evasion at most of the time while Chinese counterparts mostly rely on covert evasion to avoid direct confrontation. Thirdly, the differences of respective evasion strategies used by Chinese and American spokespersons largely lie in their different verbal styles in protecting different national interests. Hall's high-context and low-context cultural orientation can provide a rationale of China's implicit and indirect feature and America's explicit and direct characteristic of verbal communication at regular press conferences.

Implications

The present study has a number of important insights. First and foremost, this study conducts a trying theoretical probe that combines some points of the functional approach with those of the semantic-structural approach to construct an integrated typology of evasion strategy. This typology offers a comprehensive account of various evasion strategies adopted by Chinese and American spokespersons.

Besides a trying theoretical probe, the results are also beneficial for the audience to better capture key points of spokespersons' statements, and further understand intended motives of official political discourses. Not limited to the diplomatic field, the audience can better understand the essence of how evasion can be employed in daily communications to cultivate their communication skills. Moreover, as communicators of the official voice and general audience, journalists will find the analysis and comparison helpful for them to be more aware of different evasion answers at the press conference, and further to put forward more effective questions or follow up with more close-to-point questions thrown to spokespersons. Furthermore, the insights drawn from the comparison

would be relevant to interpreters, political analysts, and those involved in diplomatic analysis to better play their due roles in their professions

Limitations

Some limitations must be pointed out in this study. One of the main limitations of the study concerns its coded data and their collection process. The use of readily made transcripts from official websites is not enough, and if some audio or video versions of the materials can back up the written transcripts, the whole analysis process will be more solid. In addition, the use of English translation version of Chinese coded data needs to be thought twice. Regarding the collected data of four months, they are quite limited. More data can be collected to conduct more detailed and persuasive analyses. What's more, the process of data collection involves some subjective elements.

Though the evasion strategy is typically dealt with in the field of political language in this study, some other politically related elements such as ideological analysis are as well exerting great influences upon spokespersons' choice of political language. Political language goes beyond the simple verbal evasion, and the influence of other ideological consideration can't be ignored. Therefore, for further research, it would be interesting to incorporate theories of critical discourse analysis and ideological studies into the present cross-cultural pragmatic study. Studies of these kinds will shed some lights on a profound contrast in two starkly different countries and cultures of different ideologies, and illustrate how political language at press conferences functions as carriers of information and ideology.

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